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## GREEN PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR AMONG YOUNG CONSUMERS

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### ABSTRACT

As countries are working towards the achievement of sustainable development goals, university education is seen as a key ingredient in preparing our future generations for this challenge. However, past studies have shown that there are disparities in the understanding and behavioural practices of male and female consumers, suggesting that female consumers exhibit healthy environment related behaviour than their male counterparts. The present study, aiming at examining this claim, administered questionnaires to 137 students. The data indicates that female consumers possessed slightly better knowledge about environmental issues while male consumers had slightly better attitudes. However the knowledge, attitudes, intentions of both male and female consumers in J&K is superficial and their green purchase practices are poor.

**KEY WORDS:** Green marketing, Green purchase, Green intentions, Gender Differences.

## **INTRODUCTION**

There is increasing responsibility for corporations to take a greater participation in addressing global societal issues such as eradicating poverty and environmental protection in developing countries (London and Hart, 2004). This technology has created pollution and jeopardized our future generations due to continuous air, water and land pollution (Hall and Khan, 2003). As a result of increasing concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere due to anthropogenic emissions was predicted to lead to significant changes in climate (Houghton et al., 1995) and the predictions have come more than true as in 2017, the oceans were by far the hottest ever recorded (Guardian, 2017). Since 1970, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions have increased by about 90%, with emissions from fossil fuel combustion and industrial processes contributing about 78% of the total greenhouse gas emissions increase from 1970 to 2011 (IPCC, 2014). Over the past three years, non-CO<sub>2</sub> greenhouse gas emissions have continued to grow somewhat faster than CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, namely by 1.5% (2014), 1.2% (2015) and 1.0% (2016), whereas over the same period CO<sub>2</sub> increased by a respective 0.8%, -0.2% and 0.3% (Olivier et al, 2017). As the population of the world is estimated to reach 9.6 billion by 2050 (UN 2013), at present 1 in eight people goes to bed hungry each night (Mercy Corps, 2015). Of the 842 million malnourished people in the world, 300 million are children; 553 million are from Asia Pacific Countries, while 227 million are from sub-Saharan Africa. These figures are astonishing, as Africa and Asia alone account for roughly around 95 per cent of the world's agricultural population (World Watch Institute 2011). While providing basic healthcare has been a challenge in these countries, India is doing worse with only 0.7 physicians, for every thousand people (World Bank, 2012). As these problems are not particular to a region or specific country only, it requires all the nations to join hands to confront these issues and to come out with solutions.

Around the world it is estimated that 93 per cent of CEO's consider embedding sustainability into their businesses as important (UN Global Compact Report, 2010). As green consumption is on the rise (Lee, 2008; Tewari and Dave, 2012; Punyatoya, 2014), increasing number of consumers are making a conscious choice of shifting to sustainable products (Jain and Kaur, 2004; Lee, 2011; Singh and Bansal, 2012; Punyatoya, 2014). The ecologically conscious consumers have emerged in response to the appearance of worrying signs (e.g. land degradation, animal extinction, atmospheric pollution) concerning the systematic maltreatment of the environment (Fisk, 1973; Kinnear, Taylor, & Ahmed 1974). As environment has taken centre stage, marketers have turned it into an opportunity by focusing on greening their businesses to gain a competitive edge by accessing new markets to maximise profits (Polonsky, 1994). The consumers have also become aware about their demand power and they are avoiding products with negative environmental effects (Laroche, Molson, Bergeron & Barbaro-Forleo, 2001; Siringi, 2012). Researchers expect changes in the

consumers' buying behaviour to play a crucial role in societal response to sustainability issues (Defra, 2008; Defra and Collier, 2010).

Research on Green marketing, green products, green consumption and related concepts has increased manifolds but the gap between the attitudes and behaviours with relation to green consumption is well documented (Alwitt and Pitts, 1996; Hughner et al., 2007; Gupta and Ogden, 2009; Papaoikonomou et al., 2011; Kalamas et al., 2013; Moser, 2015). While many researchers have made significant contributions to the sustainability literature outside the country (Gupta and Ogden, 2009; Young et al., 2009; Borin et al., 2013; Slevitch et al., 2013), studies on the green buying behaviour of Indian populace are very few (Gill, 2012; Khan et al., 2013; Punyatoya, 2014).

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL KNOWLEDGE**

As studies on consumer behaviour state that consumers base their purchase decision after evaluation of many forms of knowledge (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012; Ottman, 2011), researches argue that for consumers to adopt environmentally sustainable attitudes and practices, environmental knowledge is a must (Polonsky et al., 2012; Cheah & Phau, 2011). While some refer to environmental knowledge as an individual's awareness about environmental issues, D'Souza et al., (2007) sees it as an individual's knowledge and their impact on the environment. As environmental knowledge has been found to be positively correlated with green purchasing behaviour (Mostafa, 2007; Tanner, Kaiser, & Kast, 2004; Tanner & Kast, 2003; Tilikidou & Delistavrou, 2008), it plays a significant role in the adoption of green products (Gam, 2011), it may be viewed as an important predictor of green purchase attitudes and behaviour of individuals.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL ATTITUDES**

Kotler and Armstrong (2012) define an individual's attitude as consistent "favourable or unfavourable evaluations, feelings and tendencies toward an object or idea". When attitudes are based on specific issues or personal experiences, prior knowledge of the issue or experience is a necessity (Gupta & Ogden, 2009). Polonsky et al. (2012) found that consumers incorporate new knowledge concerning the environment into their general attitudes and that once they become more knowledgeable about environmental issues they modify their attitudes and behaviours accordingly. These results were confirmed by many other researchers like Fryxell and Lo (2003), and Mostafa (2007), Cheah and Phau (2011), Levine and Strube (2012), Zsoka et al. (2013).

#### **PURCHASE INTENTIONS**

Niaura (2013) defines purchase intentions as the extent of a consumer's willingness or readiness to perform a specific behaviour. As it is the intention of an individual to act or behave in a certain manner, it serves as a presupposition of favourable environmental activities and encompasses the likelihood of purchasing a particular product as a result of environmental needs (Chen & Chang,

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2012; Abdul-Muhmin, 2007). While literary evidences contend several factors to be responsible for pro environmental behaviours, most of the researchers on green consumption believe that ecological purchase intentions are highly related to ecological behaviour (Mostafa, 2007)

#### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to understand the differences in environmental knowledge, attitudes towards green products and the purchasing behaviour of young male and female consumers with respect to green products.

#### **RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

From the literature review, it is clear that there are gaps in the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours with respect to green consumerism (Alwitt and Pitts, 1996; Defra, 2008; Gupta and Ogden, 2009). As the impact of education is positively associated with students developing healthy behavioural practices, there are still differences between male and female students. Connell et al., (1998) found that girl students are environmentally more conscious than their male counterparts and have a stronger feeling and verbal commitment to the environment (Chawla, 1988). Similarly, Mostafa (2007) contends that women are more concerned about environmental issues. As per Socialization theory women tend to be more independent, nurturing, cooperative and having a stronger ethic of care for other, including the environment in comparison to men (Zelezny and Bailey, 2006). Therefore, we will try to examine whether differences in the environmental knowledge, attitudes and behaviours could be found in the consumers of J&K state.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

The study was undertaken at the University of Kashmir (UoK). A questionnaire was administered to assess the environmental awareness and attitudes of students and their current day-to-day behavioural practices with respect to green purchasing. We received a total of 127 completed questionnaires which comprises of 73 male and 54 female students. Only freshmen were selected for the survey as a course on environmental studies is taught in the later year of graduate course, which might influence the responses of the students. Perceived environmental knowledge was assessed using a five items scale adopted from perceived knowledge of environmental issue scale (Mohr et al., 1998). The attitudes towards green purchasing were measured using six items adopted from Lee (2008). The green purchase intentions were measured using 3 item scale adopted from (Chan, 2001) while, green purchasing behaviour was measured using a four item scale adopted from Lee (2010).

#### **SURVEY RESULTS**

The first part of the questionnaire assessed the knowledge of young consumers pertaining to environment. While examining the differences between the two genders (table 1), there were minor

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differences, but overall the female students scored higher than their male counterparts on this dimension. On first item “I know I buy products and packages that are environmentally safe” the mean differences were minimal with almost same percentage of consumers from both genders agreeing or strongly agreeing. On second item “I know more about recycling than the average person” female consumers scored better as more male consumers disagreed with the statement. On third and the fifth item also “I know how to select products and packages that reduce the amount of waste ending up in landfills”, “I am very knowledgeable about environmental issues” more female consumers agreed with the statements. While more male consumers strongly agreed with the fourth item “I understand the environmental phrases and symbols on the product package”. From these results we get an understanding that female consumers’ knowledge about environmental issues is slightly better than male consumers but the mean scores show that this knowledge is superficial.

The second portion of the questionnaire assessed the attitudes of young consumers regarding green purchasing practices. The first two questions “I think environmental protection works are simply a waste of money and resources”, “I think environmental protection is meaningless” were kept reverse worded to engage the consumers into thinking. The mean scores on both these items have minor differences with more female consumers disagreeing with the statements. On the third item “It is meaningful to invest resources to educate citizens to protect and sustain the environment” more female consumers were in favour. Likewise more female consumers strongly agreed with the item “I think more environmental protection works are needed in J&K”. However on items “It is very important to raise environmental awareness among the people of J&K”, “Environmental protection should be one of the most important agenda for the government” more male students showed strong approval than the female consumers. On this dimension we decipher that male consumers had slightly better pro-green attitudes than the female consumers but the mean scores of both genders prove that these attitudes are not firm.

The third section of the questionnaire ascertained the intentions of consumers regarding green products. On all the three items “I intend to buy green product because of environmental concern”, “I expect to purchase green product in the future because of its environmental benefits”, “Overall, I’m glad to purchase green product because it is environmental friendly” based on the mean scores, male consumers showed strong intentions than female consumers to buy green products in future.

The last portion of the instrument measured the behavioural practices of the two genders regarding green purchases. On all the four items “When shopping, I deliberately check products for environmentally harmful ingredients”, “When shopping, I deliberately choose products with environmentally friendly packaging”, “I will choose to buy environment-friendly products, even if they are more expensive than other products”, “When shopping, when I consider buying a product, I

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will look for a certified environmental label”, based on the mean scores, consumers of the both genders scored poorly.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

A lot of Research on green purchasing and its antecedents is going on around the world but this concept has not received much attention in India. While gender differences in knowledge, attitudes, intentions and behaviours are well documented in the literature, this study tries to understand the gender differences in knowledge pertaining to environmental concepts as well as the green attitudes, intentions and behavioural practices of young consumers in J&K. The study concludes that the overall environmental knowledge of consumers of both the genders is superficial and their attitudes, intentions and purchasing behaviour is poor. Therefore, we would recommend that environmental studies course taught at the graduate level be updated by including more sustainability aspects into the curriculum. Similarly workshops, seminars and conferences on sustainability practices and green consumerism should be organised at the school, college and university level to inculcate such practices into the value system of our young consumers.

**Table 1: Gender based mean scores of young consumers.**

			Strongly disagree/ disagree (%)		Strongly agree/ agree (%)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
	Mean	Mean				
I know I buy products and packages that are environmentally safe	3.40	3.39	28.8	31.5	60.3	59.3
I know more about recycling than the average person	3.85	4.02	13.7	5.6	74.0	79.6
I know how to select products and packages that reduce the amount of waste ending up in landfills	3.22	3.52	26.0	14.8	47.9	61.1
I understand the environmental phrases and symbols on the product package	3.48	3.37	19.2	27.8	58.9	51.9
I am very knowledgeable about environmental issues	3.64	3.85	16.4	14.8	67.1	70.4
I think environmental protection works are simply a waste of money and resources	3.74	3.80	17.8	20.4	74.0	75.9
I think environmental protection is meaningless	3.53	3.33	21.9	27.8	61.6	55.6
It is meaningful to invest resources to educate citizens to protect and sustain the environment	3.25	3.43	32.9	27.8	46.6	61.1
I think more environmental protection works are needed in J&K	3.86	3.96	19.2	9.3	75.3	85.2
It is very important to raise environmental awareness among the people of J&K	3.78	3.54	19.2	29.6	75.3	64.8
Environmental protection should be one of the most important agenda for the government	3.52	3.28	26.0	25.9	63.0	53.7
I intend to buy green product because of environmental concern	3.23	3.13	31.5	35.2	49.3	51.9
I expect to purchase green product in the future because of its environmental benefits	3.51	3.41	16.4	20.4	57.5	50.0
Overall, I'm glad to purchase green product because it is environmental friendly	3.56	3.37	17.8	25.9	58.9	51.9
When shopping, I deliberately check products for environmentally harmful ingredients	2.95	2.78	28.8	51.9	42.5	40.7
When shopping, I deliberately choose products with environmentally friendly packaging	2.49	2.33	54.8	59.3	19.2	13.0
I will choose to buy environment-friendly products, even if they are more expensive than other products	2.01	2.26	78.1	63.0	13.7	18.5
When shopping, when I consider buying a product, I will look for a certified environmental label	2.73	2.83	49.3	35.2	37.0	37.0

Source: Authors' own findings

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