Values influencing sustainable consumption behaviour: Exploring the contextual relationship

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to develop and test a theoretical model that explains that the influence of personal values on sustainable consumption behaviour is moderated by the cultural and consumption context in which the relationship is studied. Data is collected using survey questionnaires, conducted both online and offline, with diverse set of population and total 526 responses are used for assessing validity and reliability by applying PLS based structural equation modelling. The paper identifies fresh set of value dimensions that drive sustainable consumption practices. It is further seen that attitude is more likely to moderate the relationship for internally oriented values than externally oriented values. Thus, the paper significantly extends the previous research on the relationship between values and sustainable consumption behaviour. The findings of this paper have significant contributions for practitioners who wish to sell sustainable products in different cultural contexts.

Keywords: Values Sustainable consumption behaviour Attitude Perceived Consumer Effectiveness Internally oriented values Externally oriented values

1. Introduction

Some researchers view sustainable consumption behaviour as an act of voluntary simplicity or anti-consumption (Shaw & Moraes, 2009; Black, 2010) whereas others define it as the adoption of green lifestyle practices (e.g., Gilg, Barr, & Ford, 2005). Diverse views and explanations make sustainable consumption behaviour a complex phenomenon to explain and predict. Some marketers and policy makers have stressed the need to understand social and institutional actions that may encourage the progress of environment-friendly behaviour among consumers (Vlek & Steg, 2007; Phipps, Ozanne, Weaver, et al., 2013). Others have proposed an exploration of the role of personal values in influencing sustainable behaviours (Thøgersen & Olander, 2002; Grunert & Juhl, 1995; Sener and Hazer, 2008). The important question, therefore, is whether consumers adopt sustainable consumption behaviour due to intrinsic motivation or because of social desirability or both? The extant literature is ambiguous in answering this question. This paper explores the variations in the influence of different kinds of values on different categories of sustainable consumption behaviour.

According to Zukin and Maguire (2004), consumption is a social, cultural and economic process of choosing goods. It enables individuals to form and express their identity. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) conducted a study to show that the experiential processes that focus on the symbolic, hedonic and aesthetic nature of buying behaviour are important components of consumption. Consumption decisions are therefore likely to be influenced by specific values and beliefs of individuals. Every culture has some unique beliefs, values and practices, resulting in varied consumption behaviours.

This study conducted in India is specifically of interest because traditional and religious beliefs in India have recognized the importance of the relationship between man and nature and have advocated people’s responsibility towards nature and society (Kala & Sharma, 2010). According to the Advaita philosophy the same ‘atman’ (soul) is present inside everyone, including nature (Ranganathananda, 1995, p. 83). A better understanding of Indian philosophy may lead to a solution for the current ecological problems of the world.

In this study, we have employed a framework called the Holistic Values Survey (HVS) (Sharma, 2015), an extension of Schwartz’s values. Although most researchers refer to the Schwartz Values Scale (SVS) (1994) in diverse contexts in cross-cultural value studies (Smith &
Values in different cultures differ to a large extent because of cultural dissimilarities, social systems, social class, gender, occupation, education, religion, and political orientation (Rokeach, 1973). ‘The variations in individuals’ personal, societal, and cultural experiences generate value differences, as well as the stability of values and value systems’ (Xiao & Kim, 2009). We selected India as the cultural context of this paper because we found Indian culture to be exceptionally rich spiritually. ‘India’s ancient culture, rich in spiritual culture is unmatched by any other culture in the world and its value system which is based on, and aims at, direct realization of the ultimate reality, holds great promise for the future welfare of the humanity’ (Bhajanandana, 1996, p. 30). Ranganathananda (1995, p. 160) also emphasized that the strong point of Indian tradition is its vision of the spiritual dimension of human values and personality. The exploration of Indian values that profess an enduring spiritual, intellectual and cultural foundation for an environment friendly value system and a balanced sustainable lifestyle (Kala & Sharma, 2010) may provide valuable insights in the domain of sustainable consumption behaviour.

The term ‘values’ has been developed upon in several disciplines including economics, psychology, sociology, philosophy and anthropology, long before its importance in understanding consumer behaviour was realized in marketing (Vinson, Scott, & Lamont, 1977). Schwartz summed up the conceptualization of the term ‘values’ in literature as ‘the concepts or beliefs about desirable end states or behaviours that transcend specific situations, guide selection or evaluation of behaviour and events and are ordered by relative importance’ (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987, Schwartz, 1994). This definition by Schwartz is the widely used definition of values in consumer behaviour literature. Values in different cultures differ to a large extent because of cultural dissimilarities, social systems, social class, gender, occupation, education, religion, and political orientation (Rokeach, 1973). ‘The variations in individuals’ personal, societal, and cultural experiences generate value differences, as well as the stability of values and value systems’ (Xiao & Kim, 2009). We selected India as the cultural context of this paper because we found Indian culture to be exceptionally rich spiritually. ‘India’s ancient culture, rich in spiritual culture is unmatched by any other culture in the world and its value system which is based on, and aims at, direct realization of the ultimate reality, holds great promise for the future welfare of the humanity’ (Bhajanandana, 1996, p. 30). Ranganathananda (1995, p. 160) also emphasized that the strong point of Indian tradition is its vision of the spiritual dimension of human values and personality. The exploration of Indian values that profess an enduring spiritual, intellectual and cultural foundation for an environment friendly value system and a balanced sustainable lifestyle (Kala & Sharma, 2010) may provide valuable insights in the domain of sustainable consumption behaviour.
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