



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.

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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 & Ölander, 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 &

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Schwartz, 1997), they did not include individual and culture specific items in the values scale. The comprehensive HVS scale enabled us to show how culture specific values impact sustainable consumption behaviour differently from universal values.

1.1. Contributions of the current research

This research makes multiple notable contributions to the literature. In the past two decades many researchers who had examined the impact of cross-cultural values on consumption behaviour had mostly used the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS) (1994) and the Portrait Value Questionnaire (PVQ) to measure values. There is, however, a need to incorporate culture specific aspects of values for accurate results. We have used the more relevant Holistic Values Scale (HVS) which adds Indian culture specific values, extending the Schwartz Values Scale and thus stretches the applicability of the values scale. We found that in addition to the biospheric values (identified by Stern & Dietz, 1994), many non-biospheric values such as compassion, acceptance, universalism, and tradition, are also instrumental in guiding people's sustainable consumption behaviour. Importantly, we have demonstrated that the strength of the values – sustainable consumption behaviour relationship varies depending on the level of sustainable consumption behaviour. There are three levels of sustainable consumption behaviour identified in the study, 'high', 'medium' and 'low', which represent the amount of effort involved in the adoption of corresponding sustainable consumption behaviours.

Second, this study examined the moderating role of a theoretically relevant construct, 'environmental attitude', in the values – sustainable consumption behaviour relationship. We found that attitude is likely to moderate the relationship more for a certain set of values than for others. More specifically, in the sustainable consumption context, we found the moderating impact of an environmental attitude minimal when values that impact sustainable consumption behaviour are oriented towards others, while it was maximum when values were oriented towards the self.

Finally, we assessed the moderating impact of Perceived Consumer Effectiveness (PCE) on the environmental attitude – sustainable consumption behaviour relationship. Literature establishes the moderating variable of PCE (Berger & Corbin, 1992); but we have demonstrated that the moderation effect of PCE is behaviour specific. We have clearly shown that PCE moderates the attitude-behaviour relationship only in the case of higher level sustainable consumption behaviour and not otherwise.

The next section explains sustainable consumption behaviour and briefly reviews the current understanding of the values-sustainable consumption behaviour relationship in literature. We then propose our hypotheses and explain the methodology used to conduct this empirical study and present the study results. Finally, we discuss our findings and present the scope for further research.

2. Theoretical development and hypotheses

What do we mean by sustainable consumption behaviour? What do people gain by such behaviour? The Oslo Symposium on Sustainable Consumption (1994) defined it as '*the use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations.*' Sustainable consumption involves a satisfaction of basic needs without compromising the earth's carrying capacity and putting the life of future generations at risk. Current consumption patterns across the world are unsustainable causing adverse social, environmental and economic side effects (Kilbourne, McDonagh, & Prothero, 1997; Burroughs, 2010). Sustainable consumption, change in people's perceptions, peer impact on adoption of sustainable practices, promotion, impact of lifestyle, etc. are issues that have been explored in depth within

the sustainable consumption research agenda (Tanner and Wölfling Kast, 2003; Hobson, 2002).

Research scholars have increasingly focused their attention on sustainable practices with an emphasis on individual level characteristics and marketing activities through which the attitude of people towards sustainable consumption can be influenced. As the interest in understanding sustainable consumption behaviour and practices has gained momentum the field has seen contributions from the disciplines of psychology, economics and sociology. These contributions have opened new perspectives on marketing processes and initiatives. Scholars interested in the psychological foundations of sustainable consumption behaviour have begun to explore certain key psychological variables like attitude (Stern & Dietz, 1994), values (Thøgersen and Ölander, 2002) and personality (McDonald, Oates, Young, & Hwang, 2006).

Since the initial the environmental objectives are comparatively unfamiliar to individuals, the role of values and beliefs in the formation of environmental attitudes becomes important (Stern & Dietz, 1994). Values have a major influence on people's behaviour and need-fulfilling consumption decisions (Wang & Lin, 2009; Lages and Fernandes, 2005). The role of values in understanding the challenging field of consumer behaviour is powerful to the extent that even back in 1978 Clawson and Vinson stated that '*Values may prove to be one of the more powerful explanations of and influences on consumer behaviour. They can perhaps equal or surpass the contributions of other major constructs including attitudes, product attributes, and degree of deliberation, product classifications, and life styles.*' People pursue specific values by engaging in activities that express or promote the attainment of those values (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001), where they adjust their values to fit into the context of consumption. The context is characterised by both culture as well as the consumption. Value systems of people in different cultures are influenced by society, religion and belief systems, which determine the reasons for which people engage in sustainable consumption behaviour. Minton, Kahle, and Kim (2015) examined the link between religion and sustainable behavioural patterns and found that Buddhists are more likely to participate in sustainable behaviours than others.

2.1. Conceptualization of values

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*' (Bhajananda, 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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