
**A STUDY ON PREFERENCE OF ECO-LABELED PRODUCT
PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR AND ITS GENDER PERSPECTIVES: A CASE
STUDY IN MAPALANA, GS DIVISION**

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ABSTRACT

In present situation, Green marketing activities are increasing worldwide. These activities have had an important influence on increasing consumer knowledge and shifting consumer into purchasing green products. Eco-Labels are potentially attractive instruments for informing consumers about the impact of their purchasing decisions on environmental sustainability using the words of “environment-friendly”, “ozone-friendly”, “organic”, “recyclable”, “degradable” on their packing. Lack of research investigations especially in the Asian context have motivated this research to explore the effect of gender on green consumer purchase intention. However, the actual behavior of consumers in developing countries is particularly questionable. The pre-tested questionnaire survey was conducted in Mapalana GS division, Matara, Sri Lanka with a valid sample of 145. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Based on independent samples t-test results indicated that gender significantly shapes the purchase intention of the eco-labels. females’ intention to purchase eco-labels is greater than the males’. Females consume more time compared to males for purchasing activities. It is highly significant, the environmentalists, researchers, policymakers, marketers, and academics, who are concerning the consumer purchasing behavior for enhancing the usage of Eco-Labels among the population. It may be beneficial for the environment and family health to keep it at a satisfactory economic level. Based on the results, the present study recommends that green marketers should implement their green marketing tools based on the gender of the consumer.

Keywords: *consumer, eco label, gender*

1. INTRODUCTION

The word “eco-labeling” has become a trendy expression in the present green business world. The utilization of eco-labeling in diverse structures has been expanding prominently for past numerous years (Taufique, 2014). Eco-labeling is a method of environmental performance certification and labeling around the world. An eco-label identifies services or products proven to be environmentally preferable within specific category. The consumers’ indications of a positive attitude for environmental issues do not necessarily lead to actual eco-friendly purchasing behavior (Laroche et al, 2002). The majority of consumers do not buy products based on environmental concerns and they will not trade-off other product attributes for a better environment (Yam-Tang & Chan, 1998). Consumers and businesses today confront one of the biggest challenges – to protect and preserve the environment and the earth’s resources. They have become more concerned with the natural environment and are realizing that their production and consumption buying behavior will have a direct impact on the environment (Laroche et al, 2001).

Individuals differ in their readiness to adopt a new eco-labeling scheme. For example, only a small lesser is usually willing to adopt a new idea, product, or service without knowing (or believing) that others have done so before. Most people need some kind of “social proof” (Cialdini, 2001) before adopting something new. Not have to confuse the adoption of an Eco label with the adoption of an eco-labeled product, which may be viewed as an innovation in its own right (Thøgersen, 2002). The adoption of an eco-label does not mean always choosing an eco-labeled product. When adapting to a new eco-label there are more reasons to expect that a high effort path is the most common. Many studies have identified many segments of consumers are highly involved in protecting the environment (Dunlap, 2002) or in more specific environmental or ethical issues related to consumption (de Ferran & Grunert, 2007; Vining & Ebreo, 1990). Based on this, it is usually assumed that consumers are highly involved in the purchase of eco-labeled products (Zanoli & Naspetti, 2002). The same reasoning seems valid concerning the process of adopting a new eco-label.

Studies show that consumers are frequently cheated by unscrupulous sellers when products are promoted with “green” claims (D’Souza, 2004; Ellison, 2008). The risk of being cheated when trusting eco-labels is another reason for expecting high effort adoption process for a new eco-label.

Eco-labeling/green labeling has grown and spread over many countries (e.g., United States, Germany, Singapore, India, and Japan) and it can be defined as an effective tool to mitigate environmental problems. Eco-labels are affixed to products that pass eco-friendly criteria laid by standards certification bodies, government, or association. Eco-labels differ from environmental claims and green symbols that the latter are unverified and created by the manufacturer or

service provider. Eco-labels focus on certain environmental aspects of the product, a source of timber, energy consumption, water use or they may encompass the more environmental aspects, e.g. BREEAM, Blue Angel, etc. Consumers also benefit from eco-labeling schemes through education, and to compare prices and environmental performance of products.

The eco-labeled product has been viewed as a part of a broader environmental agenda in most government regimes. Eco-labels promote sustainability by not compromising consumer freedom choice and they reduce consumers' cost of information search, which makes it more likely that information provided will be used. The consumers may be willing to buy eco-friendly products within certain constraints. However, large price differentials and inconveniences associated with eco-friendly products may deter consumers from buying them. The adoption of an eco-label does not mean always choosing an eco-labeled product.

In these years, environmental concerns have gained extensive attention from governments, researchers, consumers, as well as companies. Air pollution, excessive logging of forests, natural resource exploitation, and other causes of environmental degradation have been covered by media again and again. Over-consumption and rapid economic growth have also significantly contributed to the problems of the environment. Some of the previous empirical studies proved that consumers these days do more often decide to choose green products.

This research study is suggested that it is useful to think about new labeling schemes with innovation. At the individual level, research on the adoption of eco-label is very important. To achieve the full benefit of eco-labeling, for individual stakeholders and society there is an urgent need for research clarifying when and why consumers adopt eco labels.

The present study is to explore the effect of gender on consumer purchase intention of eco-labeled products and services. Meanwhile to identify the preference of consumers' awareness of purchasing eco-labeled product or service and identify the potential barriers regarding eco-labeled product or services purchasing behavior.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Environmentally Conscious Consumer

The environment has become a critical issue that is influencing how products are developed, marketed, and disposed of. Previous research has shown that 84% of consumers expressed concern on issues related to the environment and some consumers are changing their consumptive and purchasing behaviors because of their concern (Schlossberg, 1990). Previous studies also suggest that consumers who are willing to purchase green products are, in general, conscious about the environmental problem, concerned about the environment, and

believe that it is important to be environmentally friendly (Laroche et al., 2001). Previous studies found that people engage in environmental behavior as a result of their desire to solve an environmental problem, to become role models (Hallin, 1995), and a belief that they can help to preserve the environment (McCarty & Shrum, 2001).

To identify the environmentally-conscious consumer, past researches used demographic, socioeconomic, cultural and personality variables (Balderjahn, 1988; Antil, 1984). While the results are ambiguous, the environmentally-conscious consumer tends to be better educated, higher income, and higher socioeconomic status, and politically liberal people who are concerned about the environment (Balderjahn, 1988).

2.2. Eco-labeling

Eco-labeling can have implications for trade and can influence the design and manufacturer of products. Eco-labeling schemes provide consumers with information about the environment. Ecological marketing is an important tool for increasing environmental transparency and consumer confidence claims (Thøgersen, 2002). An eco-label is a voluntary claim that a product has fewer impacts on the environment with either production or consumption of that product (Blend & van Ravenswaay, 1999).

The ethical attributes of products may motivate consumers' attitudinal behavior, and tend to be an effective determinant for translating positive attitudes into actual purchasing actions (Tsakiridou et al, 2008; Aertsens et al, 2011; Young, et al, 2009) Some scholars have verified that the appearance of the word "green" appears to have a significant effect on people's purchase intention (Cerjak et al., 2010; Schuhwerk et al., 1995) In this context, the eco-label is regarded as one of the most recognizable attributes of green products to inform consumers' purchase decisions (Yau, 2012) improving transparency and confidence concerning environmental and social assertions (Thøgersen & Lander, 2002). Empirical studies propose that the awareness of integrating environmental concerns into product attributes is prevalent in companies' product development (Dangelico & Pujari, 2010). Eco-labels tend to be a crucial factor to influence consumers' purchase decision when a green product is relatively expensive or lower quality (Joshi & Rahman, 2015).

Several factors have been found that are affecting the attention and purchase of eco-labelled products. These factors can be found in Thøgersen's (2000) "Causal path model". For a person to be able to consciously buy an eco-labelled product he/she must have to: Form a personal goal of protecting the environment (A pro-environmental attitude). The influence of attitude is previously mentioned in the Fishbein model. Believing in a cautious buying is a strategy to achieve this goal. Have knowledge about the eco-labels: that they are available, how they look and also what they mean. Besides these factors the consumer also has to

trust the labels and the information provided is true (Thøgersen, 2000, p. 291-292).

A consumer may use an eco-labelling 10 as a decision making tool but they may still reject an eco-labelled product after going through the different advantages and disadvantages with the product (Thøgersen, Haugaard & Olesen, 2010, p. 1801). Eco-labeling has been seen as attractive and a good example of optimistic environmental activity in contrast to the negative environmental messages which was dominant during the late 1980's and 1990's. Eco-labeling alone cannot be expected to change consumer's behavior and to reduce environmental degradation. To be effective, it needs to be used in conjunction with other voluntary measures and environmental legislation as prescribed by both Agenda 21 and the European Commission's 5th Environmental Action Plan "5th EAP" (Erskine & Collins, 1997, p. 131-132).

2.3. Barriers to Purchase Eco-Labeled Products and Services

Green-labeled products also contain potential dangers and drawbacks, especially when producers over-claim ecological responsibility or performance (Cary et al., 2004). Some authors further suggest that consumers considered the information given on product labels inaccurate and confusing, thus they do not rely on these labels to make purchase decisions toward green products (D'Souza et al., 2006).

Although consumers are in general concerned about the environment, the previous literature found that consumers extremely price-sensitive towards green products and are unwilling to pay higher prices for green products (Ottman, 2000). D'Souza et al. (2006) further suggest that the purchase probability for a green product decreases as the price premium increases. Thomas (1989) showed half of those interviewed would be willing to pay at least 10% more for ozone-friendly aerosols and recyclable products.

2.4. Eco-labeled Purchase on Gender Perspective

Compared to men, women also participate more in pro-environmental behaviors, in both Sweden (Dunlap, 2002) and the United States. Kotler (2009) concluded that adolescent females rated significantly higher than adolescent males in green purchasing behavior in China. Some studies found that females have more environmental values as captured by the New Ecological Paradigm developed by Cialdini et al. (2001).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sample Selection

The sample was 150 respondents and the sampling technique was non-probability sampling. After screening, 145 questionnaires were selected for the

analysis from Mapalana GS Division. The sample size was decided based on the time and the cost factor required to complete the research.

3.2. Data Collection Method

The study conducted a pre-tested questionnaire survey to identify the effect of gender on eco brand purchasing behavior. The questionnaire opened with a few demographic items and a screening question about eco-labeled product and services consumption. The data accumulated from the primary source was subjected to various statistical tools for verification and interpretations. Data analysis was categorized as descriptive and inferential analysis. To present the understanding of data analysis, the results were represented using necessary graphs; tables and charts were derived using Microsoft Excel. SPSS package was used as the main analytical tool. Gender was measured as 1= male and 2= female. The questions were phrased in the form of statements scored on a 5-point Likert type scale, ranging from 1 “Highly disagree” to 5 “Highly agree”. The barriers were measured using total marks given by respondents.

4. DATA ANALYSIS & RESULTS

The sample of respondents comprised of 51.7% males and 48.3% females. The majority of the respondents were in 31-40 years (38.2%) and 41- 50 years (26.3%) groups, whilst the groups with the lowest percentage were above 61 years (5.1%) and 18-30 years (13.1%). The majority of the respondents were married (67.6%) and 28.3% of respondents were not married while 4.1% were divorced. The majority of the sample (37.3%) was employed and 33.4% of the sample was self-employed. 17.1% of the sample was a homemaker and 12.2% of the sample was students. About 64.5% of the respondents indicated that they consider eco-label in their purchasing behavior, while 35.5% of the respondents did not consider eco-label in their purchasing behavior.

The respondents were also asked to indicate their intention to purchase eco-labeled products and services in the future. A significant proportion (84.1%) of the respondents indicated that they agree or highly agree to purchase eco-labeled products and services in the future, while only 15.9% of them indicated that they disagree or highly disagree to purchase eco-labeled product and services in the future.

The majority of the sample (61.2 %) highly agree or agree to the statement of “price is a barrier to purchase Eco-labeled product” while 38.3% of respondents highly disagree or disagree with that statement. Only 32.5% of respondents highly agree or agree to the statement of “Low availability of Eco-labeled product is a barrier” while 56.7% of respondents agree or highly agree to the statement of “lack of knowledge and information about Eco-label is a barrier to purchase Eco-labeled products”.

Independent samples t-test revealed that there is a significant difference between males and females concerning their purchase intention of eco-labelled products (Female M 2.65 Male M3.37; $t = 3.66$ $P = 0.001$). Females agreed to purchase eco-labels than their male counterparts revealing the significance of gender in eco-label purchase intention.

5. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

From the consumer perspective, it can be mentioned that an eco-label is a tool for supporting decision-making about environmentally significant products. Due to the world trending for working against environmental pollution and degradation, the awareness regarding the customer contribution has been upgraded among the people. In this research, we have analyzed the eco-label purchase behavior on a gender perspective, with suggestions to increase the purchase intention of consumers.

The majority of the respondents were in 31-50 years. Here, most of the respondents were going to shops again and again for their household needs daily. Then they have more chances to choose or reject the eco concept. Most of the respondents were married and employed, then they can purchase eco-labeled products and send eco concept and increase information about purchasing Eco among many people in the society other than unmarried.

Here, the majority of respondents said that they consider the eco concept while they purchasing products. According to Kotler and Roberto (1989), it may be not the actual behavior. Because most people were very busy and have no time to read and choose different solutions. Only a very a smaller number of customers spend more time on reading eco-label and choose the eco concept among different types of products. But experienced eco label users go through a low-effort process, jumping directly from awareness of the label to trial, perhaps because experience reduces their perceived risk. Also experienced eco label users go through the process of adoption more quickly, without necessarily cutting corners, perhaps because they have developed a mental script for how to act when learning about a new eco-label.

However, the majority of respondents said that they are willing to purchase eco-labeled products in the future. But this result maybe only for a statement of a questionnaire. However, it is very good about peoples' positive ideas to purchase eco in the future.

Gender significantly shapes the purchase intention of the eco-labels. Female's intention to purchase eco-labeled products or services is greater than the males'. Females usually spend more time on purchasing and they like to read labels, identify the difference of labels, compare price, information, the appearance of similar products or services than males. Males always try to utilize very little time to purchase and then they don't attend to identify the importance of the Eco

concept, compare similar products, and choosing the best one (Thøgersen, 2000). It is very important to identify and overcome the barriers of eco-labelled product purchasing behavior. Since it promotes more contribution for environmental sustainability in customer and production sector in Sri Lanka.

6. CONCLUSION & CONTRIBUTIONS

Gender significantly shapes the purchase intention of the eco-labels. Female's intention to purchase eco-labeled products or services is greater than the males'. The findings revealed that green marketers could be benefited from increasing the level of environmental concern and attitude among both males and females. It is recommended that marketers, educators, and policymakers to understand the uniqueness of each market to promote green behavior. Future studies should examine the new social role of females and how it affects green behavior.

Green marketers should implement their green marketing tools based on the gender of the consumer. It is usually recommended that campaigners should focus on the innovations of eco-labeled products. Higher price harms the consumers' purchasing eco-labeled products. Consumers are less likely to purchase green products if the products are more expensive. It is a barrier to spread eco-label among the population. Several demographic variables can be interrelated with gender, such as marital status and education that could also affect the relationships among gender perspectives. The majority of respondents examined in our sample were more than twenty years. Research should focus on studying the eco-label purchasing behavior of teenagers and children as well. Future studies can also study the effect of parents' purchasing behavior on that of their youngsters.

According to this information, it can be suggested to make the presence of eco – labeled products in a store more obvious and to make some advertising campaigns or to give out some brochures in order to inform consumers. For example, company can do promotion of eco- labeled products, so that consumers could identify and they could be shown where to find it. We recommend to producers and retailers to provide proper shelf space to eco-labelled products in the stores as our research shows positive correlation between shelf space and purchase behavior of eco-labelled products and they can increase the sale of these products as there is sufficient eco-motivation

For future researchers it can be suggested to try for getting a bigger sample, then the results can be more representative. It will also be beneficial if someone can conduct a study on the same topic with qualitative approach as it will be valuable to know the point of view of supermarket managers regarding the role of shelf space in the selection of eco-labelled products. Also, it can be recommended to ask very specific and simple questions and try to categorise respondents' answers for future product development and promotions.

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