

SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

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Consumer behaviour and environmental sustainability

Ninh Nguyen^{1,2}  | Lester W. Johnson³

¹Department of Economics, Finance and Marketing, La Trobe Business School, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Australia

²Business Sustainability Research Group, Thuongmai University, Hanoi, Vietnam

³Department of Management and Marketing, Swinburne Business School, Swinburne University of Technology, Hawthorn, Australia

Correspondence

Ninh Nguyen, Department of Economics, Finance and Marketing, La Trobe Business School, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Victoria 3086, Australia.
Email: ninh.nguyen@latrobe.edu.au; ninhnguyen@tmu.edu.vn

Abstract

This special issue of the *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* aims to contribute to the knowledge of the drivers of environmentally sustainable behaviour and the characteristics of green consumers. It consists of eight papers that represent a range of topics related to consumer behaviour and environmental sustainability. The special issue has several implications. First, environmentally sustainable behaviour is influenced by multiple motives and determinants, which include internal, social, situational and demographic factors. Second, the impact of such factors tends to vary across national and consumer context. Third, integrative and comprehensive models including mediators and/or moderators could be used to better understand the mechanism through which the various factors affect pro-environmental behaviour. Fourth, green marketing initiatives (e.g., sustainable products, green advertising) could be used to promote consumer's pro-environmental beliefs and behaviours. Finally, interventions aimed at influencing habit and promoting environmentally sustainable behaviour should be tailored to different target groups such as those with different personality dispositions, environmental concerns and levels of engagement in environmental practices at home.

Environmental degradation is a pressing global problem. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, the risks and impact associated with climate change will increase significantly over the next decade (UNEP, 2016). The annual climate change adaptation costs are projected to reach US \$300 billion by 2050 (UNEP, 2015). There is growing awareness that many of the environmental problems and their adverse impact are driven by human activities. Essentially, consumer behaviour places a twofold environmental burden on the ecosystem via pollution and, also, via the destruction of non-renewable natural resources (Abeliotis, Koniari, & Sardianou, 2010). Hence, encouraging more pro-environmental behaviour is imperative for environmental sustainability. This is a challenge that governments, businesses and socio-environmental organisations have constantly sought to address.

Governments at supra, national and local levels have developed and implemented a wide range of environment-related legislations, regulations and public policy measures (McDonagh & Prothero, 2014). Environmental organisations and pressure groups have developed environmental programs and campaigns to raise the community's awareness and knowledge about environmental and sustainable issues

such as environmental degradation and unsustainable business practice (Barbarossa & De Pelsmacker, 2016). These are echoed by industries and firms that have been increasingly interested in environmental social responsibility and green marketing (Polonsky, 2011; Romani, Grappi, & Bagozzi, 2016). Despite the aforementioned efforts, consumers seem reluctant to frequently engage in pro-environmental behaviour and especially purchasing green products (Nguyen, Lobo, & Greenland, 2017; Olson, 2013; Prothero et al., 2011). Policymakers, marketers and researchers have called for a better understanding of factors that enhance or impede such behaviour (Nguyen, Lobo, & Greenland, 2016; Steg, Bolderdijk, Keizer, & Perlaviciute, 2014; White, Habib, & Hardisty, 2019).

We therefore called for papers that contribute to the knowledge of the drivers of environmentally sustainable behaviour and the characteristics of green consumers. We were overwhelmed by the response from authors from around the world. We received a total of 106 submissions and have accepted 19 papers. At the time of writing this introduction, there are still a few papers under review or being revised for resubmission. For this stand-alone special issue, volume 19(6), we have selected eight papers that represent a range of topics

related to consumer behaviour and environmental sustainability. The remaining accepted special issue papers will be interspersed in regular issues of the *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, mainly in 2021 although a few have already appeared in regular issues in 2020.

Turning to the eight papers in this issue, it begins with a paper written by Untaru, Ispas, and Han (2020) who explore the potential synergy between individuals' home-based and hotel-based water conservation behaviours. They identify three segments based on environmental concerns and water conservation behaviours at home, which consist of the *environmentally concerned and active*, the *environmentally concerned but inactive* and the *environmentally unconcerned and inactive* groups. These segments appear to have varied attitudes, moral obligation and intentions toward water conservation in the hotel context, hence representing effective target segments for hotel companies that seek to reduce water consumption and ecological footprint of tourists.

In the second paper, Thøgersen and Alfinito (2020) use the goal-framing theory to examine the impact of goal activation on sustainable consumer choices in Denmark and Brazil. They find that whilst the importance of overarching goals (normative, hedonic and gain) for such consumer choices depend on the national and consumer context, priming a normative goal (protecting the environment) increases consumers' likelihood to choose organic tomatoes in both countries. The study therefore suggests that activating a normative goal frame can be an effective way to encourage pro-environmental behaviours in different national contexts.

The next four papers, albeit using different research approaches, are related in some way to consumers' product disposal and reuse behaviours and their impact on the environment. Wang, Tian, Sarigöllü, and Xu (2020) conduct four experimental studies to examine the role of nostalgia (longing for the past) in explaining sustainable disposal behaviour. Their findings show that whilst evoking different types of nostalgia leads to different choices in product disposal (keep, reuse, donate and recycle), both personal and collective nostalgia reduce intention to throw products away. Minton and Geiger-Oneto (2020) perform another three experiments to look at the role of religiosity in the choice of disposal options for luxury goods. They find that consumers with high in intrinsic religiosity (internal connection to a god or divine) are generally more likely to choose sustainable methods of disposal compared to those high in extrinsic religiosity (social-based form of religion). Their findings also confirm the moderation role of emotions (guilt and shame) and the mediation role of identity fit in the relationship between intrinsic religiosity and environmentally sustainable behaviours.

Borg, Curtis, and Lindsay (2020) use a large representative survey and the theory of normative social behaviour to examine consumer behaviour in relation to four different single-use plastic items (bags, straws, coffee cups and take-away containers). They find that the use of social norm messaging can close the perception-action gap among consumers with respect to avoiding particularly plastic bags. Novorodovskaya, Mullan, and Hasking (2020) conduct a prospective study to examine possible predictors of the choice to use a reusable hot drink cup. The findings reveal that both demographic (age) and psychological (environmental values and behavioural intention) factors

are significantly predictive of using the reusable cup. It is also suggested that habit-based interventions should be tailored to individuals with different personality dispositions.

The last two papers investigate how consumers respond to firms' green marketing initiatives. Miotto and Seounmi (2020) find that fast fashion retailers' sustainable collections have a positive impact on organisational legitimacy, CSR perception, brand trust and purchase intention. They also uncover that such an impact is mediated by consumers' altruistic attributions of the firms' motives behind the sustainable collections (e.g., care about environmental protection and employee welfare). Finally, two studies conducted by Waites, Stevens, and Hancock (2020) reveal that green marketing has both direct and indirect effects on consumer purchase intention. Notably, they develop and validate a unique model that links green marketing with purchase intention through paths from perception of expertise and prosocial orientation to trust. In terms of demographic variables, age appears to be a moderator that younger consumers believe that firms highlighting sustainability in their advertisements display more expertise than those that do not.

We believe this special issue of the *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* has several implications. First, environmentally sustainable behaviour is influenced by multiple motives and determinants, which include internal, social, situational and demographic factors. Second, the impact of such factors tends to vary across national and consumer context. Third, integrative and comprehensive models including mediators and/or moderators could be used to better understand the mechanism through which the various factors affect pro-environmental behaviour. Fourth, green marketing initiatives (e.g., sustainable products, green advertising) could be used to promote consumer pro-environmental beliefs and behaviours. Finally, interventions aimed at influencing habit and promoting environmentally sustainable behaviour should be tailored to different target groups such as those with different personality dispositions, environmental concerns and levels of engagement in environmental practices at home.

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ORCID

Ninh Nguyen  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6050-2633>

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Ninh Nguyen is Lecturer of marketing in the La Trobe Business School at La Trobe University, Australia. He is also Advisory Board Member of the Business Sustainability Research Group at Thuongmai University, Vietnam. His research interests include green marketing, environmentally sustainable behaviour, business sustainability, CSR and scale development. He currently serves as an associate editor for the *Journal of Strategic Marketing* and on the advisory board of the *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*.

Lester W. Johnson is Professor of marketing at Swinburne University of Technology, Australia. He holds a PhD in econometrics from the University of Connecticut. He was elected as one of three inaugural Fellows of the Australia New Zealand Marketing Academy in 2004 and, in 2008, was also elected as a Fellow of the Australian Market and Social Research Society. His research interests lie broadly in the area of marketing modelling. Recent work includes models investigating sustainability, consumer brand equity, consumer brand engagement, celebrity endorsement and luxury consumption.

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