

The Dilemma of Repeated Purchase of Environmentally Friendly Products and Its Solution Mechanism

Xiaoming Xiong ^a, Tongsong Liu ^b

School of Business, Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang 330022, China

^a604397059@qq.com, ^b1092398843@qq.com

Abstract. Current research on green consumption focused on improving the short-term performance of the first purchase, lack of research on the repurchase of environmentally friendly products. This research is from the perspective of psychological connectedness, to explore the relationship between the motivation and the long-term performance of environmentally friendly products, to uncover a clearer black box mechanism of consumer repurchase of environmentally friendly products.

Keywords: Dilemma; repeated purchase; environmentally friendly product.

1. Introduction

In marketing practice, the actual performance of environmentally friendly products is not satisfactory (Luchs et al., 2010), the best seller can only reach 6% of the market share of common products, most of the environmental products cannot be sold (Barbarossa & Pelsmacker, 2014). The gap between consumer attitudes and behaviors about environmentally friendly products has plunged companies into marketing dilemmas (Olson, 2013). In order to help environmental products, get out of the "low repeat purchase" dilemma, it is becoming a hot topic in academic circles to explore the causes of dilemmas and their coping strategies (Barbarossa & Pelsmacker, 2014). The existing researches mainly discuss the marketing strategies that promote the performance of environmentally friendly products from the perspective of emotional pressure and impression management theory. For example, the advertising appeals that stimulate self-responsibility will positively influence consumers' attitudes toward environmentally friendly products and purchasing those things. Emphasizing social norms will increase green consumer willingness (Goldstein et al., 2008). The willing to gain a good impression or positive evaluation of others in society will promote green consumption behavior (Griskevicius et al., 2010). The psychological distance between self and others affects consumers' willingness to purchase green products (Yang et al., 2015). Because the psychological connectedness between themselves and others affects their concern for the interests of others, the stronger the psychological connectedness with others, the more willing to share their resources (Aron et al., 1991).

However, previous literature has focused on improving the short-term performance of first-time purchases, but few studies have focused on the long-term performance of repeated purchases of environmentally friendly products. The problem of repeated purchase of environmentally friendly products is fundamentally different from that of ordinary products. The cost-effectiveness of environmentally friendly products is lower (Lin & Chang, 2012), and the perceived effectiveness of green consumer behavior is not obvious (Gupta & Ogden, 2009). The perceived value of environmentally friendly products is not high, and the social motivation to promote identity, status, reputation, etc. to promote green consumption needs to be effective only in specific situations (such as public or others) (Griskevicius et al., 2010), and consumers usually make green consumption once. It can be seen that the existing research can only improve the performance of environmentally friendly products in the short term by improving the willingness to purchase for the first time. As for the impact on the long-term performance of environmentally friendly products, it is still unknown. In view of this, this study intends to systematically explore the relationship between purchase motives and long-term performance of environmental protection products from the perspective of psychological connectedness theory, starting from the purchase motive, and more clearly reveal the "black box" of impact on consumers' repeated purchase of environmentally friendly products and

explore its boundary conditions, which in turn helps enterprises to quickly get out of the dilemma of environmentally friendly products.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Green Consumption

Environmentally friendly products are products that have at least one environmentally beneficial attribute, and environmental attributes are attributes that reflect the environmental impact of the product (Hwas et al., 2014). Since environmentally friendly products can contribute to environmental improvements, the purchase of environmentally friendly products is also known as green consumption (Gao & Mattila, 2015). At present, the research on green consumption mainly focuses on the pre-factors affecting green consumption and its mechanism of action and the antecedents and mechanisms of affecting the gap between green consumption attitudes and behaviors. Descriptive normative information claims stimulate the self-interested motivation of social belonging needs/social norms, prompting consumers to choose environmentally friendly products (Goldstein et al., 2008). Negative environmental information motivates altruistic motivations that focus on social interests, and encourages environmentally conscious consumers to participate more actively in green consumption behavior (Leonidou et al., 2010). In addition, consumers' motivation to purchase green products is a hot topic in academic circles, and reputation and status motivations promote consumers' green consumption behavior (Griskevicius et al., 2010). Individuals can be affirmed by others through green consumption, and they are also a kind of reveal of self-affirmation, but this influence is affected by the three-party interaction of social exclusion and information framework (mass selection or unique choice) affecting the individual's green consumption behavior (Gao & Mattila, 2015).

2.2 Psychological Connectedness

Psychological connectedness refers to the connectedness between two individuals, which can be established by individual characteristics, beliefs, memories, past experiences, preferences or values (Aron et al., 1991). From a cognitive perspective, psychological connectedness can be conceptualized and manipulated as the degree to which an individual's self-concept overlaps with another person or group. This degree of overlap can be measured by the intimacy between self and others (Li & Zhang, 2014). As scholars' understanding of the meaning of psychological connectedness continues to expand, psychological connectedness can be used to illustrate the social relevance of self and others, and can also be used to illustrate the temporal relevance of the same individual at different ages, for example, a person may feel that the connectedness between the self after 40 years and the self is weaker than the self after one year (Parfit, 1971). In extreme cases, when a person is completely lacking in psychological connectedness with the future self, the future self may be a person who is completely different from the present self (Hershfield et al., 2011).

The existing literature on psychological connectedness mainly studies from the spatial dimension and the time dimension. The spatial dimension mainly revolves around the relationship between self and others. The time dimension mainly revolves around the relationship between the present self and the future self (past self). Jiang et al. (2010) pointed out that accidental similarity plays a very important role in the establishment of social connectedness in the initial stage, and also finds that the customer's psychological connectedness with the salesperson will affect the customer's attitude towards the product and their purchase motivation. The influence can be moderated by salesperson behavior and service types. Nostalgic emotions promote the social connectedness of consumers and also help individuals moderate their loneliness (Wildschut et al., 2010). Bartels & Rips (2010) reveal that the sense of connectedness between the individual and the future self affects its intertemporal choice. Generally speaking, compared with the more long-term interests, consumers are more willing to choose less recent benefits, that is, when facing the problem of intertemporal choices, short-sighted behavior is the public's first choice, and the impatience of the psychological state promotes its short-sighted behavior choice (Read, 2004), the lack of psychological connectedness to the future self promote individuals to choose short-sighted behavior (Bartels & Urminsky, 2011). Zhang &

Aggarwal (2015) found that by influencing the relationship between the future self and the present self, it will affect consumers' attitudes towards the current product or brand and the sense of connectedness with the future self, it will cause consumers to associate with the future interests of the product and thus influence their purchase behavior. Information intervention strategies are often used to influence consumers' intertemporal choice behaviors, short-sighted behavior is not entirely due to lack of information on future outcomes, but underestimate future outcomes.

3. Research Framework

Based on psychological connectedness theory, the main contents of this research include the following three aspects:

3.1 Building Model of Consumers' Motives for Repeatedly Purchasing

Because their special attributes that the price of environmentally friendly products is high while the quality of those things is low and beneficial to the natural environment, scholars recognize the behavior of purchasing environmentally friendly products as prosocial behavior or green consumption behavior, and find that by stimulating motivation of status can promote consumers to buy more environmentally friendly products. It can be seen that the understanding of the motivations for purchasing environmentally friendly products has been quite clear from the perspective of social connectedness, but the understanding of the motives for purchasing environmentally friendly products from the perspective of time linkage is ambiguous, mainly because the purchase of environmentally friendly products will affect the long-term interests of the public (future natural environment), not the short-term benefits. Considering the continued deterioration of the ecological environment, consumers are gradually aware of the importance of environmental issues to the future living environment, and future security issues have awakened consumers' motives to purchase environmentally friendly products. Maslow's hierarchy of needs states that physiological and safety needs are lower-level requirements than social needs of love and self-esteem. Only when low-level needs are met will high-level needs be considered. Because the time-linked perspective will awaken the safety needs of consumers, but most of the existing researches explore the motives for purchasing environmentally friendly products from the level of social demand, and rarely discuss the motives of purchase from the level of safety needs. Specifically, this part of the study will focus on the following questions: What are the motivations for consumers to repeatedly purchase environmentally friendly products? What are the attribute characteristics?

3.2 Study on the Mechanism of the Influence of Purchasing Motivation on the Long-Term Performance of Environmental Protection Products

The psychological connectedness between the future self and the present self will influence consumers' evaluation and decision-making on current prosocial behavior. Strengthening the physiological needs of consumers will reduce the psychological connectedness between consumers and others, and even reduce the psychological connectedness between the future self and the present self. It can be seen that the basic needs of life as a behavioral motive affect the individual's psychological connectedness. From the perspective of social connectedness, the understanding of the motives for purchasing environmentally friendly products has been quite clear, but the research on the impact of purchasing motivation on the long-term performance of environmental protection products from the perspective of time linkage is basically lacking. The stronger the connectedness between consumer's future self and the present self, the stronger the emotional reaction of the consumer will be. Compared to the motivation of purchasing based on social needs, purchasing motivation based on safety needs as a low-level basic need, it is more likely to trigger consumers' association with future self-interest and make more far-sighted decisions. As a kind of prosocial behavior, green consumption can not only affect the long-term interests of the society, but also affect the living environment of the future self. Therefore, the purchasing opportunities based on security needs cause consumers to pay attention to the interests of the future self, and thus promote consumers

to repeatedly purchase environmentally friendly products. Based on the above analysis, this part of the study proposes the following propositions:

Proposition 1: Under other equal conditions, psychological connectedness play an important intermediary role between consumers' purchasing motives and the long-term performance of environmentally friendly products.

3.3 Study on the Boundary Conditions of the Influence of Purchasing Motivation on the Long-Term Performance of Environmental Protection Products

Based on the attribute centrality theory, they pointed out that product greenness will affect consumers' evaluation of the environmental benefits of green products. Product design is also an important way for enterprises to cultivate competitive advantage, aesthetic design, functional design and symbolic design are important ways to effectively enhance the willingness to purchase products. Consumers will choose products that are consistent with their self-image, and consumers will rely on choosing the products with greater aesthetic design to represent the self-affirmation. This project speculates that consumers who are motivated to purchase based on social needs are more inclined to choose environmentally friendly products with strong aesthetic design, and the willingness to repeat purchase may be higher. Consumers who are motivated to purchase based on safety needs are more concerned with the impact of the product itself on society and on personal health. Based on this, this part of the study proposes the following propositions:

Proposition 2: For environmentally friendly products with strong aesthetic design, there is no significant difference in the impact of consumers' purchase motives based on social needs and purchase motives based on security needs on consumers' willingness to repeatedly purchase eco-friendly products.

Proposition 3: For eco-friendly products with weak aesthetic design, the purchase motive based on security needs has a more positive impact on consumers' repeated purchase of environmental protection than the social motive-based purchase motive.

4. Conclusion Summary

The social connectedness between self and others will affect consumers' willingness to purchase environmentally friendly products, but ignore the impact of time connectedness between future self and present self to green consumption behavior. There is a big difference between the horizontal perspective of social connectedness and the vertical perspective of time linkages on consumers. The effects of vertical time linkages on green consumer behavior and their boundary conditions are unclear.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the financial support of the National Natural Science Foundation of China(71862020), Humanities and Social Sciences Foundation of the Ministry of Education of China(16YJC630146).

References

- [1]. Barbarossa C, Pelsmacker P D. Positive and Negative Antecedents of Purchasing Eco-friendly Products: A Comparison Between Green and Non-green Consumers[J]. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 2014, P.1-19.
- [2]. Bartels D M, Urminsky O. On Intertemporal Selfishness: How the Perceived Instability of Identity Underlies Impatient Consumption[J]. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 2011, 38, P.182-182.

- [3]. Bartels D M, Urminsky O. To Know and To Care: How Awareness and Valuation of the Future Jointly Shape Consumer Spending[J]. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 2015, 41(6), P. 1469-1485.
- [4]. Baumeister R F, Leary M R. The need to belong: desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation.[J]. *Psychological Bulletin*, 1995, 117(3), P.497-529.
- [5]. Gao Y L, Mattila A S. The Impact of Option Popularity, Social Inclusion/Exclusion, and Self-affirmation on Consumers' Propensity to Choose Green Hotels[J]. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 2015, P.1-11.
- [6]. Gershoff A D, Frels J K. What Makes It Green? The Role of Centrality of Green Attributes in Evaluations of the Greenness of Products[J]. *Journal of Marketing*, 2015, 79(1), P.97-110.
- [7]. Goldstein N J, Cialdini R B, Griskevicius V. A Room with a Viewpoint: Using Social Norms to Motivate Environmental Conservation in Hotels[J]. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 2008, 35(3), P.472-482.
- [8]. Griskevicius, Tybur J M, Bram V D B. Going green to be seen: status, reputation, and conspicuous conservation.[J]. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 2010, 98(3), P.392-404.