

Understanding the Green Purchasing Behaviour of Millennials Living in Bucharest

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Abstract

In recent times, green purchasing behaviour has received considerable attention from researchers, consumers and companies. According to specialists, buying products that are sustainable and environmentally friendly is critical to reducing environmental degradation. Thus, the main objective of this paper is to investigate the impact of various factors on the green purchasing behaviour of Romanian consumers. The factors investigated are attitude, level of knowledge and subjective norm. The current study is part of a larger quantitative research. An online survey was used to collect data, relying on convenience sampling. Data was collected from 213 green consumers living in Bucharest. Millennials represent the demographic cohort chosen for analysis. This group is considered to be the most concerned and informed about environmental problems and sustainability. The data sets obtained were analysed with the help of SPSS software package. The main statistical techniques implemented were correlation analysis, independent t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Data analysis revealed that attitude, level of knowledge and subjective norm influence in a positive manner the green purchasing behaviour of millennials living in Bucharest. The strongest correlation was found between green buying behaviour and level of knowledge. Among the demographic characteristics explored, it was found that gender, education level and income can stimulate green purchasing behaviour. The findings presented in this study offer relevant and valuable insights regarding the green purchasing behaviour of millennials living in Bucharest. Based on these results, companies can develop tailored promotional activities that will increase the sales of organic products. We hope this research theme will receive more attention at local level, considering that the organic market is rapidly expanding in Romania.

Keywords: Sustainability, green purchasing behaviour, organic market, green marketing.

JEL classification: M31, Q56.

1. Introduction

Maintaining the natural resources of Earth for as long as possible represents one of the key objectives of the current century. Therefore, curbing environmental degradation has become a global effort. According to researchers and environmental specialists, buying products that are sustainable and environmentally friendly can help to reduce environmental degradation and protect the ecosystem (Krystallis and Chryssohoidis, 2005).

In recent times, especially the last decade, green purchasing behavior has received considerable attention from researchers, consumers and businesses. As a result, the issue of ecological consumerism has moved „from being an issue on the periphery of society to the mainstream” (Dowd and Burke, 2013, p. 137).

The connection between environmental protection and consumer behavior is high on the agenda of marketing, consumer and social psychology studies. Considering the popularity of this topic, the main purpose of the current paper is to investigate the driving forces behind the green purchasing behavior of Romanian consumers. The factors investigated are attitude, level

of knowledge and subjective norm. These factors are studied with regard to millennials living in Bucharest.

It is well-known that consumer behavior is very heterogeneous, therefore different types of behavior are motivated by different influencing factors (Gatersleben, Steg and Vlek, 2002). At the same time, because “environmental consciousness evolves over time, the findings of studies from previous years will not necessarily be valid in the future” (Chamorro, Rubio and Miranda, 2009, p. 233). To add more, studies concerning green consumption in countries where environmental awareness is less developed, specifically in Central and Eastern Europe, are limited. Therefore, the topic under investigation requires on-going attention and validation.

The present paper has the following structure. The study starts with a discussion on the current literature regarding green products and the variables that affect buying and consuming such products. The methodology section discusses the research hypotheses and relevant information about the sample investigated. Next, key results are presented and compared with findings from previous local and international studies. Finally, in the conclusion section, the major findings of the research are summarized, also highlighting study limitations.

2. Literature review

Most of the literature surrounding consumer behavior and environmental protection focuses on analyzing the green purchasing behavior of individuals. Green purchase behavior is one of the most common types of behavior that can help protect the environment and “refers to the purchase of environmentally friendly products and avoiding products that harm the environment” (Joshi and Rahman, 2015, p. 129). Green products, also named organic or bio products, are products that have a low environmental impact during every phase of their life-cycle. They contain recyclable and recycled materials and fewer toxic chemical ingredients (Mohd Suki, 2015).

The food industry represents the most developed market of environmentally friendly products, mostly driven by the high consumer demand. In some European countries, the share of organic food, especially vegetables and fruits, has increased substantially and its development is considered remarkable (Pieniak, Aertsens and Verbeke, 2010). For example, Denmark has the world’s highest organic share, around 13%, and is thought to be the most well-developed organic market globally (Kaad-Hansen, 2022). The food sector is also the fastest growing organic market in Romania. According to the latest official data, the total market for organic products in Romania was worth 41 million euros in 2016 (Willer, Travnicek, Meier and Schlatter, 2021). But, although the sales of green products are increasing, the share of these products remains modest in Romania.

Regarding the factors that determine buying green products, these have been studied extensively, especially in the Western countries where people are considered to be more aware and interested in nature and the environment. When it comes to organic food consumption, studies have highlighted that there are both altruistic motives, related to eco-consciousness, as well as egocentric values, such as pleasure and health, that motivate consumers (Didier and Lucie, 2008). In general, individuals perceive organic food „to be better with respect to taste, quality, safety and impact on health and on the environment” (Vermeir and Verbeke, 2008, p. 543). It is believed that people’s heightened interest in food safety and ingredients will increase even more because of the pandemic.

Previous studies in the green marketing literature have confirmed that some of the most powerful factors that determine green purchase behavior are attitude, level of knowledge and subjective norm. These three factors are detailed below.

Many authors consider attitude to be the strongest predictor of green purchasing behavior (Vermeir and Verbeke, 2008) and the consumption of organic food (Pieniak et al., 2010). In

this context, attitude refers to how people evaluate buying and consuming green products (Sun and Wang, 2020). On the other hand, there are some researchers who believe that attitude is not related to green buying (Moser, 2015). Often, these authors report a gap or inconsistency between persons declared positive opinions and their real buying habits.

Regarding the link between ecological attitudes and age, scientists affirmed that younger consumers tend to have more favorable attitudes towards buying green products compared to older respondents (Akehurst, Afonso and Goncalves, 2012). At the same time, other studies highlighted that age does not influence green behavior. For example, according to Krystallis and Chryssohoidis (2005), „although younger consumers have greater environmental consciousness, their willingness to buy green products does not translate into demand due to their lower purchasing power” (p. 322).

Next, level of knowledge is another factor that requires investigation in the context of Romanian consumers. This variable refers to the information that a person has about green products or environmental protection. According to researchers, there are three types of knowledge: objective knowledge, subjective knowledge and previous experience. Objective knowledge is about “the accurate information about the product stored in consumer’s long-term memory”, while subjective knowledge refers to “people’s subjective perceptions of what or how much they know about a product” (Pieniak et al., 2010, p. 582). In the current study, the level of subjective knowledge is investigated because it was found that this type of knowledge holds the biggest influence on pro-environmental purchasing behavior (Sun and Wang, 2020).

And finally, subjective norm refers to the social influence on consumer behavior and is defined as “the social pressure of complying with a certain behavior” (Moser, 2015, p. 169). This social pressure can come from significant others, such as family members, close friends or work colleagues. Multiple studies have confirmed that this is a significant variable that influences purchasing behavior (Dean, Raats and Shepherd, 2012).

When it comes to Romania, despite the fact that the green market has tremendous potential, it is not explored sufficiently at local level. Therefore, there is a huge need to identify the factors that can influence the development of green buying behavior. Moreover, Romanian papers that thoroughly reflect on the topic of consumer behavior and green products are missing. At the same time, the fast industrialization of the country has brought serious environmental issues, related to natural resource depletion, toxic waste and pollution. Therefore, more needs to be done to limit the negative impact on the environment.

3. Methodology

The research method chosen for this study is a quantitative one, in the form of an online survey. The tool used for collecting primary data from Romanian consumers is a questionnaire developed on Lime Survey platform. The survey link was distributed on social media channels as well as through email. Data was collected during November 2021 and January 2022. The data sets obtained were analyzed with the help of SPSS software package. The main statistical techniques implemented were correlation analysis, independent t-test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Relying on a non-probabilistic convenience sampling technique, a total of 213 responses were collected. The current study is part of a larger quantitative research administered at national level. But in order to achieve the objectives of the current paper, only specific questions were selected for analysis. At the same time, the demographic cohort investigated are millennials, people aged between 18 and 35 years old, living in Bucharest, the capital of Romania and the biggest city in the country.

The decision to develop a research study that focuses on this age group was guided by various motivations. First of all, millennials tend to be more open to new ideas compared to older generations. Second of all, when it comes to green purchasing behavior, younger generations are more interested in green products and more willing to buy them in the store (Sun and Wang, 2020). Another reason for deliberately choosing to study millennials is that they have more knowledge about environmental protection and their purchasing power and influence in the household are on the rise. This argument is further supported by other researchers in the field. According to Witek and Kuzniar (2021), younger generations “constitute a significant group of customers that deserve special attention” (p. 13), while Vermeir and Verbeke (2008) argued that „young adults are the consumers of the future, capable of making a difference in the next decades” (p. 545).

As mentioned earlier, the variables investigated in relation to green purchasing behavior are attitude, level of knowledge and subjective norm. Following the literature review process, the next hypotheses are proposed:

H1. There is a positive and significant relationship between attitude towards green products and environmental protection and purchasing green products.

H2. There is a positive and significant relationship between level of subjective knowledge regarding green products and environmental protection and purchasing green products.

H3. There is a positive and significant relationship between subjective norm and purchasing green products.

The questionnaire consisted of 16 items measured on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 equal “Strongly disagree” and 7 means “Strongly agree”. The statements developed for each construct are presented in Table 1 below. As the original study was in Romanian language, the wording of statements was slightly changed to match the study background.

Table 1. Items developed for each construct

Construct	Item
Attitude	It is important for me that the products I use are not harming the environment.
Attitude	I pay a lot of attention to my environmental impact.
Attitude	I consider myself to be ecologically responsible.
Attitude	Environmental protection is very important for me.
Attitude	I enjoy buying green products.
Attitude	I have a favorable attitude towards buying green products.
Knowledge	I believe I have a lot of knowledge about green products.
Knowledge	Compared to other people, I know a lot about green products.
Knowledge	I know how to appreciate the quality of green products.
Knowledge	People who know me think I am an expert in green products.
Subjective norm	Most people who are important to me buy green products.
Subjective norm	My family and close friends influence me to buy green products.
Subjective norm	Most people who are important to me want me to buy green products.
Green purchasing behavior	I buy green products regularly.
Green purchasing behavior	I buy green products even when conventional ones are on sale.
Green purchasing behavior	I do not mind paying a higher price for green products.

Source: Adapted from Singh and Verma (2017) and Aertsens, Mondelaers, Verbeke, Buysse and Huylenbroeck, (2011)

4. Results

4.1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

The first section of the Results part is dedicated to presenting the demographic characteristics of respondents. This information is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percent
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	139	65.3
Female	74	34.7
<i>Level of income</i>		
High	27	12.7
Middle	93	43.7
Low	93	43.7
<i>Level of education</i>		
Completed higher education	153	71.8
Did not complete higher education	60	28.2
<i>Current occupation</i>		
Student	71	33.3
Employed	130	61.0
Entrepreneur	7	3.3
Unemployed	5	2.3

Source: Analysis run by author in SPSS

As it can be observed above, most respondents are women (65.3%), while the remaining 34.7% are men. Regarding income level, the number of respondents with middle income (between 3.000 RON and 7.500 RON) is equal to the number of those with low income (below 3.000 RON), resulting in a percentage of 43.7% for each category. Less than 13% of the total sample declared they earn more than 7.500 RON each month. With reference to education level, around one in seven respondents completed higher education (71.8%), either bachelor's degree or postgraduate studies. The rest of 28.2% did not complete higher education. This result came as no surprise, considering that the sample analyzed is composed of young adults. This finding is confirmed by the results regarding current occupation. Data analysis revealed that more than a third of the sample is still studying (33.3%), while around 65% are working, either as employees (61.0%) or managing their own company (3.3%). Only five respondents mentioned that they are unemployed. In the present paper, the main role of demographic data is to describe and analyze the sample structure.

4.2. The outcomes of univariate data analysis

Next, in order to ease the process of data interpretation, all individual items were grouped together based on the construct they measured. The mean and standard deviation for each construct are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for the constructs measured

Construct	Mean	σ
Attitude	4.62	1.16
Knowledge	3.25	1.40
Subjective norm	2.77	1.40
Green purchasing behavior	3.65	1.55

Source: Analysis run by author in SPSS

It can be seen from the data in Table 3 above that attitude received that highest mean score (4.62) from all constructs. Therefore, most respondents tend to somewhat agree with the statements about attitude. Based on this result, it can be argued that, on average, respondents have a positive attitude towards buying green products.

Green purchasing behavior (3.65) and level of knowledge (3.25) recorded mean values below 4.00, the neutral midpoint of 7-point Likert scales. This means that most respondents are between somewhat disagree and a neutral opinion regarding these statements. Therefore,

on average, they did not necessarily perceive themselves as heavy green buyers or very knowledgeable about the topic investigated. It could be argued that the level of knowledge of the respondents is not very high and could be improved. In addition, compared to the mean score for attitude, the values for level of knowledge and green purchasing behaviour are lower. According to Pieniak et al. (2010), “improving the knowledge about organic foods is beneficial for both non-users, as well as existing consumers, because it increases consumption” (p. 582).

And finally, subjective norm obtained the lowest mean score (2.77) from all constructs, a value below 3.00. This result indicates that most responses are grouped between disagree and somewhat disagree. Thus, the majority of the sample tends to not agree that family and close friends influence them to buy green products.

4.3. Demographic characteristics and green purchasing behavior

Following that, independent-samples t-test and ANOVA analyses were run to compare the mean scores of two or more different groups of respondents for green purchasing behavior (Pallant, 2011). With the help of these tools, it was investigated whether there are statistically significant differences between males and females, those who completed higher education and those who did not, as well as the three levels of income (high, middle, low).

Regarding gender, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the green purchasing behavior scores for women and men. There was a significant difference in scores for women ($M = 4.22$, $\sigma = 1.48$) and men ($M = 2.58$, $\sigma = 1.03$), $t(194) = 9.44$, $p < 0.001$. Therefore, it could be argued that millennials women are more likely to be green buyers compared to millennials men. Most studies on green consumer behavior have confirmed that women tend to buy green products more often and more frequently than men (Krystallis and Chrysosoidis, 2005).

When it comes to education, data analysis revealed that there is a significant difference in mean scores for those who completed higher education ($M = 4.11$, $\sigma = 1.36$) and those who did not ($M = 2.51$, $\sigma = 1.42$), $t(210) = 7.57$, $p < 0.001$. Some authors have highlighted that people who are more educated pay more attention to green products (Feng and Reisner, 2011), while other studies did not point out major differences in green behavior with regards to education level (Krystallis and Chrysosoidis, 2005).

In order to compare the mean scores of three different categories, one-way analysis of variance was conducted. As a result, the impact of income level (high, middle, low) on green purchasing behavior was explored.

A statistically significant difference was recorded in green purchasing behavior scores for the three income levels: $F(2, 209) = 39.37$, $p < 0.001$. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for the high-income group ($M = 5.31$, $\sigma = 1.24$) was significantly different from the middle-income group ($M = 3.95$, $\sigma = 1.29$) and the low-income group ($M = 2.87$, $\sigma = 1.39$). To add more, middle income group ($M = 3.95$, $\sigma = 1.29$) did differ significantly from low-income group ($M = 2.87$, $\sigma = 1.39$). Many studies on green consumer behavior have highlighted that people who have more money to spend are more likely to buy green products (Akehurst et al., 2012).

The findings presented above further support the idea that green purchase behaviour is stronger for female millennials who are more educated and have a higher income.

4.4. Hypotheses testing

The next section is dedicated to testing the hypotheses of the study. As a result, correlation analysis was performed to evaluate the strength and direction of the relationship between variables. In order to run superior statistical analyses, it was decided to transform Likert scale variables, generally considered ordinal data, into metric, interval variables. Thus,

each point on the scale received an interval score. This procedure of rescaling is considered by some specialists to be “the most attractive and practical method for handling ordinal data that can resolve the dilemma of coupling measurement scales with statistical analyses” (Harwell and Gatti, 2001, p. 113).

Because the variables were considered interval type, Pearson correlation coefficient (r) was calculated. Table 4 below illustrates the correlation matrix resulted for the variables examined.

Table 4. Correlation matrix for the constructs measured

Construct	1	2	3	4
1. Attitude	1	0.80**	0.60**	0.79**
2. Knowledge		1	0.71**	0.80**
3. Subjective norm			1	0.69**
4. Green purchasing behavior				1

Note: ** $p < 0.01$

Source: Analysis run by author in SPSS

It is apparent from this table that all correlations between the variables investigated are significant. At the same time, it can be observed that the analyzed variables do not exceed a correlation coefficient higher than 0.90, therefore the principle of collinearity is respected (Pallant, 2011).

Regarding attitude, a strong, positive correlation was recorded with green purchasing behavior ($r = 0.79$, $p < 0.001$). This means that high levels of attitude are associated with high levels of green purchasing behavior. Therefore, H1 is supported. This finding is in line with previous studies (Akehurst et al., 2012).

Next, the strongest correlation was found between level of knowledge and green purchasing behavior ($r = 0.80$, $p < 0.001$). There is a positive link between the two variables, which means that they move in the same direction, if one increases, so does the other one, and vice versa. Based on this result, H2 is confirmed. Regarding the link between knowledge and green consumer behavior, specialists explained that “when consumers have more knowledge and information about green products, they more easily understand that green products, compared with products of the same quality, can save resources and energy” (Sun and Wang, 2020, p. 5).

And finally, data analysis revealed that there is a strong, positive correlation between subjective norm and green purchasing behavior ($r = 0.69$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, as the scores for subjective norm increase, so do the scores for green purchasing behavior. Thus, H3 is supported. Some studies have found that subjective norms are positively correlated with the intention to buy and purchase organic products (Dowd and Burke, 2013), while other papers highlighted a negative correlation between social influence and green buying behavior (Connell, 2010).

The strong correlations observed between the three analyzed factors and green purchasing behavior imply that individuals with more positive green attitudes, and higher levels of subjective knowledge and perceived social influence, are more likely to buy green products.

Conclusion

There are many motivations and values behind buying products that are good for the environment. In the present paper, it was found that the variables analyzed (attitude, level of knowledge and subjective norm) are significantly and positively related to green purchasing behavior. The correlations identified are of high strength, consistent with other similar studies in the field (Ellen, 1994; Sun and Wang, 2020).

Therefore, it can be summarized that people who have more knowledge and higher positive attitudes towards purchasing green products, and perceive higher social influence from significant others (family members, close friends or work colleagues) to engage in such behavior, are more likely to buy green products. Data analysis also highlighted that this type of green behavior can be fostered by demographic characteristics, such as gender, education or income level.

The information presented in this paper could help enhance the understanding of green purchasing behavior in Romania, as well as increase the number of green consumers in the country. Marketing professionals and policy makers can use these insights to develop effective marketing strategies. The main suggestion is to offer citizens more relevant information about the health and environmental benefits of green products, in order for the public to have more knowledge about this topic and stimulate engagement among consumers.

At the same time, the findings in this report are subject to at least three limitations. First, this study focused on factors that determine green behavior, without taking into account the barriers that can hinder this type of behavior. Thus, future studies could also investigate and consider the internal and external barriers to green buying. Second of all, due to the sample method, the results are not representative of the entire population. And last, but not least, this research only investigated consumers in Bucharest aged between 18 and 35 years old. As a consequence, future research could use different methodology options or aim to reach representative consumer samples at national level in order to corroborate the findings discussed in this article.

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