

## Filling the Attitude-Behavior Gap in Sustainable Consumption: The Role of Consumer Involvement and Shopping Enjoyment

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Keywords: Involvement, enjoyment, word-of-mouth, sustainable products

### Rationale and Objectives

Consumers contribute to sustainability through demanding, choosing and purchasing sustainable products (Knight, 2004). Sustainable products provide both social and environmental benefits derived from production based on fair trade guidelines, ethical principles, and environmentally friendly methods (Fletcher, 2008). Since consumers play a key role in promoting sustainable products, it is critical to understand factors that influence consumers' decision making toward sustainable products. Extant literature examined consumers' attitude, value, beliefs, and awareness about pro-environmental and socially responsible consumption (e.g. Vermeir & Verbeke, 2008). However, it was suggested that consumers' concern about the environment and social responsibility does not necessarily affect their choice of sustainable products. This difference between consumer attitudes and behavior is called the "attitude-behavior" gap (e.g., Young et al., 2010). Further, despite the significance of word-of-mouth (WOM) communication in decision making for sustainable products, many studies applying the attitude-behavioral intention model to sustainable and ethical consumption are limited in exploration of "purchase" intentions (e.g., Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006).

In order to address the attitude-behavior gap in consumer decision making for sustainable products, this study examined consumer involvement (perceptions that sustainable products are important to them and closely relevant to their life) and shopping enjoyment (perceptions that shopping for sustainable products would provides them with joy, good feeling, and happiness) as significant determinants that affect consumers' behavioral intentions, and further their actual behavior. Additionally, this study aimed to consider the significance of WOM in sustainable product adoption and diffusion. Figure1 shows the research model which suggests sustainable product consumption, reflecting the role of sustainable consumer involvement (INV) and sustainable shopping enjoyment (ENJ), along with sustainable consumption attitude (ATT), in determining sustainable purchase intentions (PUR\_I) and sustainable WOM intentions (WOM\_I), and further influencing actual purchases (PUR) and WOM behavior (WOM).

### Methodology and Results

We used online survey data acquired from U.S. consumer panel sample (valid sample N = 202). The data was analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM). After ensuring the reliability and validity of the measurement model, the structural model was estimated.

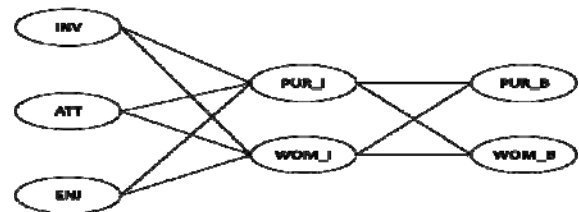


Figure1. Research Model

The structural model demonstrated a good model fit: ( $\chi^2_{(df=209)} = 285.07, p = .00$ ; GFI = .90; CFI = .99; NFI = .95; RMR = .04; RMSEA = .04). Given the successful fit of the model, individual paths were then examined. Results indicated that consumer involvement positively affected purchase intentions ( $\gamma = .44, p < .01$ ) and WOM intentions ( $\gamma = .65, p < .01$ ). Shopping enjoyment positively affected purchase intentions ( $\gamma = .42, p < .01$ ) as well as WOM intentions ( $\gamma = .25, p < .05$ ). Attitude had no significant effects on purchase intentions or WOM intentions. The results also demonstrated that purchase intentions positively affected both purchase behavior ( $\gamma = .35, p < .01$ ) and WOM behavior ( $\gamma = .46, p < .01$ ). WOM intentions had also significant effects on purchase behavior ( $\gamma = .43, p < .01$ ) as well as WOM behavior ( $\gamma = .51, p < .01$ ). A test of direct and indirect effects confirmed that consumer involvement and shopping enjoyment influence purchase behavior and WOM behavior mediated by purchase intentions and/or WOM intentions.

### Discussion and Implications

This study increases knowledge about the gaps between attitude, intentions and behavior regarding sustainable products. It is important to note that the direct effects of attitude on behavioral intentions and further indirect effects of attitude on actual behavior were not significant. The results support previous studies about the attitude-behavioral intention gap or attitude-behavior gap (Young, et al., 2010; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006) and suggest that attitude might not be the best predictor in ethical and sustainable consumption contexts. The model developed in this study is thus meaningful since it suggests more valid antecedents in predicting behavioral intentions and further actual behavior—cognitive involvement and affective enjoyment. This study is also valuable by simultaneously examining behavioral intentions and actual behavior in both purchase and WOM. Marketers promoting sustainable products can make use of the results of this study to improve strategic planning through increased consumer involvement in sustainable options and socially responsible shopping, creation of enjoyable shopping environments that positively boost consumers' emotional feeling, and effective use of social networking for enhancing WOM.

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**Acknowledgments:** This research was partially supported by a grant from Cotton Inc.