

Running head: Understanding behavioural-intention gap in green consumption.

MASTER THESIS EXPOSÉ

Understanding behavioural-intention gap in green consumption: a
comparison between French and German Millennials



Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

Title: Understanding behavioural-intention gap in green consumption: a comparison between French and German Millennials

Keywords: environmental awareness, behavioural-intention gap, green consumption, green consumer behaviour, millennials, eco-friendly products, ethical behaviour

Background: At a time of increasing environmental concerns, the reconsideration of our current patterns of consumption is evident. Companies are forced to change their supply of goods and services in order to meet these new requirements in terms of respect for the environment and the protection of natural resources. Therefore, eco-design is part of these practices put in place by companies concerned about their impact on the environment and aware of the challenges of sustainable development. Taking environmental aspects into account during the design phase of a product represents a path for the future for companies. But what about consumers' behaviours regarding these practices? Despite growing consumer awareness of sustainable development issues and the need for more responsible and reasonable consumption, there is still a gap between their will and their actions.

Purpose: The research outcome of this investigation is to get a better understanding of the behavioural-intention gap in the consumption of green products. This study explores the environmental consciousness of Millennials as well as their patterns and habits in purchasing eco-friendly products. Furthermore, this paper aims to examine green consumer behaviour by comparing French and German Millennials.

Method: To do so, a defined research will be used. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted among French and German Millennials (i.e. people aged between 18 and 25 years old) in order to carry out a qualitative inductive approach. Data collected will be analysed and interpreted in order to assess the general involvement of Millennials in green consumption and to perform a comparison between the two countries.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental protection and reference to ecology have long been regarded as strong and lasting sociocultural trends in developed countries. The study of the ecological environment has developed considerably in recent years. The results of ecological damage caused by the misdeeds of mass industrialization and environmental disasters have upset the balance of the earth and are increasingly posing a threat to our planet (Tanner & Kast, 2003). This degradation of the planetary state has had, as a consequence, an awareness of both the scientific, political and popular classes (Schlegelmilch & Bohlen, Diamantopoulos, 1995). In addition, policy makers, governments and, lately, firms are all aware of the risks and implications concerning the excessive exploitation of environmental resources and are implementing actions and programmes that aim to overcome these problems (Mineiro, Codini, Bonera, Corvi, & Bertoli, 2014). Therefore, this interest in ecology has been accompanied by rigorous national and international legislative actions, the application of ecological standards, the emergence of pressure groups, an increasingly abundant communication targeting the protection of the environment and a growing sensitivity on the part of all stakeholders. Thus, these actions have had a significant effect on the modes of production of companies and on the behaviors of consumers.

Since the decade of the environment (McDougall, 1993), consumers have become aware of the fragility of the environment and the limits to the use of natural resources (Krause, 1993). This awareness enabled producers and distributors to exploit a new strategic axis, the one of ecology. Nowadays, many organizations incorporate appropriate environmental strategies into their long-term planning system (Straughan & Roberts, 1999). This was reflected in the launch of environmentally friendly products called "eco-friendly" products or "green" products (Hunt & Dorfman, 2009). A green product is defined as a product that generates a low impact on the environment throughout its life cycle, from the extraction of raw materials, to its manufacture, its transport, its use and finally its end of life (Dangelico & Pontrandolfo, 2010). However, these products have not yet reached the expected level of success in the market. Compared to conventional products, ecological products have an additional cost that generally affects the consumer's purchase price. Since "green" products tend to be more expensive, price resistance is a major constraint on market demand (Roarty, 1997). As a result, the consumer must be persuaded by better information on the product or encouraged by more competitive prices (Martin & Simintiras, 1995).

Work on the protection of the environment has mainly concerned the study of the consideration of ecology at the strategic management level of the firm and its effects on its organization, considering the environmental policy as a preponderant component of the performance of the company. On the other hand, research on the attitude and ecological behavior of individuals has received less interest from researchers. Indeed, the study of the ecological behavior of consumers is linked to several psychological, sociological and cultural factors which constitute an ambitious and sensitive task (Lloyd, 1980). The whole question of the success of green products depends largely on the consumer's sensitivity and concern about the ecological environment in general (Kaiser, Wölfling & Fuhrer, 1999). Therefore, the improvement of the ecological movement emphasizes with an examination of the consumer's sensitivity to ecological issues and the study of the impact of this sensitivity on the consumer's ecological behavior. This is typically referred to as the "intention-behaviour gap," reflecting the nature of the underlying psychological process that leads from intention to action (Sniehotta, Scholz & Schwarzer, 2004). When it comes to buying green or organic products, household consumption is sometimes constrained by their standard of living (Straughan & Roberts, 1999). However, consumers' choices remain primarily dependent on whether or not they concern the environment. Attached to the quality of the goods it consumes, a large part of the population seems willing to consume less, but better. However, the price and the weight of habits continue to hamper this desire for change.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

This thesis aspires to get a better insight into the green consumption and the influence of several factors on the intention and attitude regarding purchasing environmentally friendly products. As previously mentioned, consumption of green products is an arising phenomenon by the virtue of the rise of environmental awareness and the evident benefits of this kind of product. Moreover, it is fundamental to study the implication and the involvement of Millennials towards green products to shed some light on their sustainable consumption patterns and on the individual characteristics that could explain such behaviours. Indeed, this segment of the population represents a major actor in the protection of the environment and their choices in terms of consumption have direct repercussions on the capabilities of future generations (Bucic, Harris & Arli, 2012). Finally, the aim of this study is to make a comparison between French and German Millennials to discern if their different values, perceptions and cultures, have a significant impact on their behavioural-intention gap.

In the field of consumer behaviour, several researchers focus on the general explanation of these attitudes and motivations. Despite some studies on behavioural intention gap, it has been found that there is a lack of empirical studies in the literature regarding to this concept applied to Millennials related to specific products. As a result, this investigation will provide the literature with a greater understanding of consumer behaviour within a precise and given context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Author(s)	Year	Title	Publication	Contribution
Articles, Journals and books on environmental awareness				
Diamantopoulos, A., Schlegelmilch B.B., Sinkovics, R.R., & Bohlen, G.M.	2003	Can socio-demographics still play a role in profiling green consumers? A review of the evidence and an empirical investigation	Article <i>Journal of Business Research</i> , 56(6), pp. 465-480	This paper investigates whether socio-demographics still have a role to play in profiling green consumers. Specifically, hypotheses are developed concerning the relationship between six key socio-demographic variables and five valid and reliable measures of environmental consciousness.
Heiskanen, E.	2005	The Performative Nature of Consumer Research: Consumers' Environmental Awareness as an Example	Article <i>Journal of Consumer Policy</i> , 28(2), pp.179-201	This article considers the way 'green consumers' are constructed – or performed – in studies on consumer environmentalism aiming to inform policy makers.
H'Mida, S.	2009	Factors contributing in the formation of consumers' environmental consciousness and shaping green purchasing decisions	Article <i>International Conference on Computers & Industrial Engineering</i> , pp. 957-962	Environmental consciousness plays an important role in the consumers' green purchasing decision. This paper develops a conceptual model where environmental consciousness, willingness to pay extra money, and perceived environmental performance of the product and the company impact directly and indirectly green purchasing decisions.
Krause, D.	1993	Environmental Consciousness: an Empirical Study	Article <i>Environment and Behavior</i> , 25(1), pp. 126-142	The results show a high level of concern for environmental issues and a high proportion of the sample describing themselves as environmentalists. The pattern is fairly consistent by sex, age, and ethnic grouping.
Schlegelmilch, B.B., Bohlen, G.M., & Diamantopoulos, A.	1996	The link between green purchasing decisions and measures of environmental consciousness	Article <i>European Journal of Marketing</i> , 30(5), pp. 35-55	This book explores the extent to which variables, specific to environmental consciousness, are better able to explain consumers' pro-environmental purchasing behaviour. Two conceptualizations of the purchasing domain are addressed, namely general green purchasing behaviour and specific purchasing habits relating to five green product categories.

Ying-Ching, L., & Chiu-Chi, A.C.	2012	Double Standard: The Role of Environmental Consciousness in Green Product Usage.	Article <i>Journal of Marketing</i> , 76(5), pp.125-134	Results from three studies suggest that consumers' perceptions of product effectiveness are critical in determining the amount of a product they choose to use in a given instance. In general, consumers consider green, or environmentally friendly, products to be less effective than regular products; therefore, consumers increase the amount of the green product they use to make up for the perceived inferiority
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Articles, Journals and books on ethical behaviour

Astous, A., & Legendre, A.	2008	Understanding Consumers' Ethical Justifications: A Scale for Appraising Consumers' Reasons for Not Behaving Ethically	Article <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i> , 87(2), pp. 597-602	Implications for consumption ethics researchers and policy makers are proposed.
Bray, J., & Johns, N.	2010	An Exploratory Study into the Factors Impeding Ethical Consumption	Article <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i> , 98(4), pp. 597-602	This article contributes to an understanding of the ethical purchasing gap. These findings enhance the understanding of ethical consumption decisions and provide a platform for future research in this area.
Carrigan, M., & Attalla, A.	2001	The myth of the ethical consumer – do ethics matter in purchase behaviour?	Article <i>Journal of Consumer Marketing</i> , 18(7), pp. 560-578	This article examines whether or not consumers care about ethical behaviour, and investigates the effect of good and bad ethical conduct on consumer purchase behaviour.
Engel, J.R., & Engel, J.G.	1990	Ethics of environment and development	Book University of Arizona Press	In this paper, the authors seek to clarify the ethical principles surrounding the concept of sustainable development. The book develops the concept of sustainability as the ethical approach to reconciling the needs of environmental conservation with economic development.

Articles, Journals and books on green consumer behaviour				
Aagerup, U., & Nilsson, J.	2016	Green consumer behavior: being good or seeming good?	Article <i>Journal of Product and Brand Management</i> , 25(3), pp. 274-284	This paper aims to expand the emerging field of symbolic green consumer behavior by investigating the impact of anticipated conspicuousness of the consumption situation on consumers' choice of organic products.
Wang, H.J.	2017	Determinants of green consumers' purchase behaviour towards green brands.	Article <i>Service Industries Journal</i> , 37(13/14), pp. 896-918	This study applies perceived risk theory to explore the factors that influence consumers' purchase behaviour towards green brands, including green perceived quality, green perceived value, and green perceived risk, information costs saved, and purchase intentions towards green brands.
Peattie, K.	2010	Green Consumption: Behavior and Norms	Article <i>Annual Review of Environment and Resources</i> , 35, pp. 195-228	Research efforts have sought to identify, analyse and understand the "green consumer". The emerging picture of green consumption is of a process that is strongly influenced by consumer values, norms, and habits, yet is highly complex, diverse, and context dependent.
Pedersen, L.H.	2000	The dynamics of green consumption: a matter of visibility?	Article <i>Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning</i> , 2(3), pp. 193-210	This study investigates the extent to which the increase in green consumption practices within the realm of food consumption is associated with green practices within areas such as recycling, transport and energy consumption.
Pei-Chun, L., & Yi-Hsuan, H.	2012	The influence factors on choice behavior regarding green products based on the theory of consumption values	Article <i>Journal of Cleaner Production</i> , 22(1), pp. 11-18	This study applies the theory of consumption values to determine the influence factors on consumer choice behavior regarding green products, and examines whether there are significant differences in consumption values and choice behavior between consumers with different outlooks on environmental concerns.
Vermeir, I., & Verbeke, W.	2006	Sustainable Food Consumption: Exploring the Consumer "Attitude – Behavioral Intention" Gap	Article <i>Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics</i> , 19(2), pp. 169-194	This study investigates the presumed gap between favourable attitude towards sustainable behavior and behavioural intention to purchase sustainable food products.

Articles, Journals and books on behavioural intention gap				
Godin, G., Conner, M., & Sheeran, P.	2005	Bridging the intention–behaviour gap: The role of moral norm	Article <i>British Journal of Social Psychology</i> , 44(4), pp. 497-512	This research examines whether intentions aligned with moral norms better predict behaviour compared with intentions aligned with attitudes.
Hassan, L., Shiu, E., & Shaw, D.	2016	Assessing the empirical evidence of an intention-behaviour gap in Ethical Consumption	Article <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i> , 136(2), pp. 219-236	Researchers have suggested and discussed the existence of an intention-behaviour gap in ethical consumption. The findings of this case study suggest that there is indeed a large gap between intention and behaviour.
Sheeran, P.	2002	Intention—Behavior Relations: A Conceptual and Empirical Review	Article <i>European Review of Social Psychology</i> , 12(1)	This article addresses two questions; how big is the “gap” between intentions and behavior, and what psychological variables might be able to “bridge” the intention–behavior gap? A meta-analysis of meta-analyses is used to quantify the gap and a conceptual analysis of intention–behavior discrepancies is presented.

Articles, Journals and books on Millennials in green consumption				
Bucic, T., Harris, J., & Arli, D.	2012	Ethical Consumers Among the Millennials: A Cross-National Study	Article <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i> , 110(1), pp.113-131	This study explores the levers that promote their ethical consumption and the potential impact of country of residence on cause-related purchase decisions
Lu, L., Bock, D., & Joseph, M.	2013	Green marketing: what the Millennials buy	Article <i>Journal of Business Strategy</i> , 34(6), pp. 3-10	This paper develops an understanding of the Millennial Generation's consumption of green products. The results indicate that the primary reason Millennials do not purchase green products is the belief that green products are too expensive.
Straughan, R.D., & Roberts, J.A.	1999	Environmental segmentation alternatives: a look at green consumer behaviour in the new millennium	Article <i>Journal of Consumer Marketing</i> , 16(6), pp. 558-575	The study provides a method of profiling and segmenting college students college students based upon ecologically conscious consumer behaviour. The study indicates that perceived consumer effectiveness provides the greatest insight into conscious consumer behaviour.

METHODOLOGY

Research method chosen

In order to conduct this study, a qualitative inductive approach has been privileged because it fits entirely with the objectives and intended outcomes. Qualitative research is a set of investigative techniques whose use is widespread. This method gives insights into people's behavior and perceptions, and allows to study their opinions on a particular subject, in a more in-depth manner than with a quantitative method (Liamputtong, 2013). In addition, qualitative researches generate ideas and hypotheses that can help to understand how an issue is perceived by the target population and help to define or identify options related to this issue. Therefore, it requires a holistic knowledge of the social context in which the research is conducted (Jablin & Putnam, 2004). Qualitative research is based on a flexible and interactive research strategy. Moreover, this technique is very useful for pretesting concepts (Creswell, 2008).

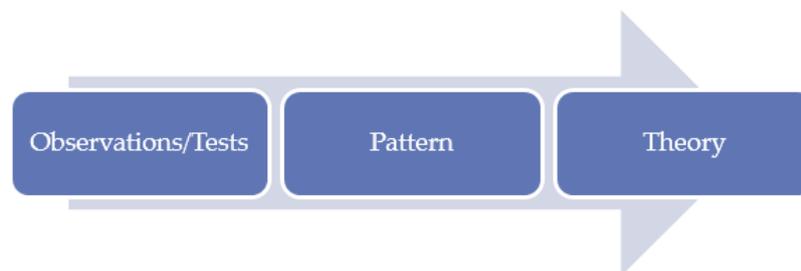


Figure 1: The inductive approach¹

Research design

The qualitative research will be carried out through semi-structured interviews. This data collection technique is based on an interactive exchange with the respondents through open-ended questions on specific topics (Marshall & Rossman, 1998). The interview will last approximately between 30 and 45 minutes to gather as many valuable information as possible. Ten semi-structured interviews will be conducted (five in France as well as in Germany) among Millennials (i.e. people aged between 18 and 25 years old). In addition, the parity of gender will be respected in order to make the sample more representative. The participants of those interviews will be selected from personal contacts and all of them have the status of students or workers. Plus, the interviews will be performed in French or in English, either via face-to-

¹ Source: <https://research-methodology.net/research-methodology/research-approach/inductive-approach-2/>

face or Skype. Finally, every interviews will be voice recorded and the transcriptions available in appendix.

Data analysis

Since most of the data will be textual, they will be analysed in a descriptive and observational way. In fact, all the data will be linked and interpreted altogether in order to understand the phenomenon of behavioural-intention gap. Even though the research is based on qualitative techniques, the analysis will imply quantitative input, such as statistics and figures – used as secondary data.

Social desirability bias

As this research refers to social responsibility and ethical behavior, it is essential to take into account the social desirability bias. Social desirability is the psychological process, conscious or not, by which the individual tries to control his image in order to present himself in a favourable light to his interlocutors (Nederhof, 1985). Of course, such behavior is likely to have a significant impact on search results as individuals are more likely to want to return a socially acceptable image (Klassen, Hornstra & Anderson, 1976; Philips & Clancy, 1970). Thus, the fact that respondents are personal contacts, it will establish a climate of trust in which respondents will not feel judged. This method will reduce this bias.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Background
- 1.2. Problem Statement
- 1.3. Research objectives

2. Theoretical framework

- 2.1. Environmental consciousness
 - 2.1.1. Environmentalism
 - 2.1.2. Factors involved
- 2.2. Behavioural-intention gap
- 2.3. Millennials consumption patterns
 - 2.3.1. Background
 - 2.3.2. France
 - 2.3.3. Germany
- 2.4. Green consumption
 - 2.4.1. Definition
 - 2.4.2. Green products
 - 2.4.3. Green consumer behaviour

3. Methodology

- 3.1. Research method chosen
- 3.2. Research design
- 3.3. Data analysis
- 3.4. Social desirability bias

4. Findings and results

- 4.1. Description of variables
- 4.2. Cross data analysis

5. Conclusion

- 5.1. Discussion
- 5.2. Limitations
- 5.3. Recommendation for future research

6. Appendices

- 6.1. Questionnaire
- 6.2. Interviews transcriptions

7. References & Bibliography

PLAN OF WORK

Period	Activity	Description
1.09.17 – 23.10.17	<i>Exposé</i>	Selection of the topic, literature review, define the research gap, readings, handing in the exposé.
23.10.17 – 6.11.17	<i>Theoretical background</i>	Write the literature review
6.11.17 – 20.11.17	<i>Research Design</i>	Design of the questionnaire and other research methods, select and contact the participants.
20.11.17 – 4.12.17	<i>Field Research</i>	Conduct the interviews.
4.12.17 – 25.12.17	<i>Data analysis</i>	Analysis of the questionnaire.
25.12.17 - Deadline	<i>Final Thesis</i>	Writing results and conclusion, transcript the interviews, re-reading.

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