

GENDER DIFFERENCES AND SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT: *This research paper is an attempt to investigate the role of gender influencing sustainable consumption behavior among UAE consumers. This study is significant considering the fact that UAE ranks at the top in global retail consumption index. The existing literature on role of gender in sustainable consumption behavior yields mixed results. Data was gathered from 115 respondents with the help of self-administered questionnaire using Sustainable Consumption Behavior scale (SCB). The findings of the study are evident of the fact that gender differences do exist when it comes to efficient use of resources, green initiatives, minimizing wastage and optimizing the scarce resources. The purchase decisions of women were significantly influenced by sustainable consumption patterns in comparison to men in UAE. Hence, the findings of this study hold significant strategic relevance for the consumers, marketers and policy makers.*

KEYWORDS: Sustainable Consumption Behavior, gender role differences, green initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

With the increasing importance of sustainability and need to behave in socially responsible manner, the scope of research in this area has gained significant importance. The behavior that may lead an individual to think of the betterment of others and concern for others is empirically been proven to be related to the values and attitudes and other individual and social factors. A number of empirical evidences have suggested the role of gender and other demographic variables e.g. age, educational qualification ,income levels in being concerned of the environment and society, but most of these studies were conducted in Western set ups. As such evidences from Asian countries are very limited. Asia as a continent has maximum population and is one of the most densely populated continents. With the increase in population the ever growing demand for resources has been experienced. It is understandable that the world is facing crunch of resources, hence the need for utilizing existing resources wisely and finding ways to consume them thinking of the future is also critical.

According to Bandura (2007), with increase in the population the consumption need for natural resources will be felt more strongly and thus in turn will lead to rapid depletion of natural resources. The conservation of natural resources will be done, by identifying alternative resources and by ensuring thoughtful consumption of the existing natural resources. This requires us to think of sustainability. So far the focus was on manufacturers and marketers to develop and implement upon sustainable strategies, but the even we as consumer need to be developing favorable values and attitudes towards sustainable consumption and should be reflecting sustainable consumption patterns in our purchases and utilities. The need for sustainability is ever increasing with the

awareness being spread using many platforms. The approach to sustainability is not just supposedly business centric but also stakeholder centric. According to their article published in Harvard Business Review, Lubin and Esty (2010) emphasized that the strategic importance of sustainability is critical for the overall survival of the organization. The research contributes towards understanding the underlying behavioral patterns that may help us all in encouraging knowledge sharing and decision making to promote SCB. Family influences play a critical role in purchasing decisions and in the socialization process, especially parents. Gender differences as such have not been firmly established when it comes to sustainable consumption behavior but further research in this area will help in developing literature that may be guiding the policy makers and marketers to develop strategies.

As per an article published in the daily Gulf news (July 13, 2014), GCC countries are amongst the top countries in the world in food wastage. As per the 2013-2014 report from the Environment Agency in Abu Dhabi, the GCC countries stand out as among the world's top food wasters. Particularly high quantities of food are wasted during Ramadan, which is the Holy month for the Muslims. At the same time according to the report published by Arab Monetary fund (2010), UAE has the region's highest individual spenders, with each of its 8.2 million people spending an average of \$21,577 (Dh79, 252) per annum and the world's highest apparel sales per capita at \$785 (Dh2, 865, A.T. Kearney's Global Retail Development Index, 2010). At \$71 (Dh260) a week, UAE teenagers also spend three times more than their global peers (AMRB). (Gulf News, April 5, 2012). This data is sound enough to make us understand that the level of consumption of buyers in UAE is comparatively higher than the rest of the world. Looking at the lifestyle demand in UAE we tend to question ourselves if at all such kind of expenses are genuinely required or it is just the over consumption attitude? Also this in turn makes us think if the consumers are thinking of the resources conservation, nature, and community? The need for sustainable consumption is strongly felt especially when the country is importing many of these resources.

LITERATURE/THEORETICAL UNDERPINING

Sustainable Consumption behaviors as defined by Williams and Dair, (2007), is the behavior of individuals or groups that essentially contributes to reducing resources consumption, waste and pollution. Peattie (2001) has defined SCB as —A sustainable approach to consumption and production involves enjoying a material standard of living today, which is not at the expense of the standard of living of future generations. It therefore involves using natural resources at a rate at which environmental systems or human activity can replenish them (or in the case of nonrenewable resources, at a rate at which renewable alternatives can be substituted in). Sustainable consumption has been considered to be a concept that focuses on issues related to fairness, quality of life, resources conservation, minimizing wastage, consumer health and safety, caring for nature and community etc. There has been varied approaches take towards sustainable consumption, some of the scholars focused on waste reduction, recycling, reusing the resources, where as some of them have given importance to the green initiatives, efficient use of resources etc. The sustainable consumption needs to be differentiated into household and business need based consumption. It has been noted that many organizations are implementing upon sustainability strategies and proactively and/ or due to the policy regulations are giving importance to the way they are using their resources. But at the same time there is a need to focus on consumers

who will actually be utilizing the products and services. As it has been observed that many times consumers have shown the intent to purchase and consumer products and services that are sustainable but the actual purchases may not essentially be what they intended to buy. (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). The gap that exists between the intended and actual behavior needs to be filled in order to develop positive SCB. Rather than the intent what is required is the action. The need to examine the SCB has been reiterated through many research findings. The requirement to associate SCB with other variables and analysis of the resulting relationship will help in developing better understanding of the concepts. SCB has been studied in relation to various demographic, personal, social factors in the past.

These empirical findings have helped in development of body of knowledge based upon which further research can be conducted. According to the research findings of Kelan (2008) and Heinzle & Känzig (2010) traditionally women have been closely associated with consumption and men with production. In the same research study Kelan (2008) has also stated that approximately 80% of the household consumption decisions are taken by women. Thus women have been mostly the focus when it comes to studying the consumption behavior patterns. Shiva (2002) studied the consumption behavior of both the genders in line with the Ecofeminism theory, wherein it was identified that men and women evidently show differences in their attitude towards environmentally friendly consumption. Heinzle and Känzig (2010) stated that women are more inclined towards making purchase decisions that are sustainable. Also women are shown to be more sensitive towards ecology and environment. When it comes to consumption men are more into technology and women are more into household purchases. The research findings by Zelezny et al., (2000), indicated men to have greater concern for the environment and thus more focused on sustainable consumption. Torgler et al., (2008), conducted an extensive research study in western and East European countries.

There study included demographic factors including gender and how their preferences affect the environmentally responsible behavior. The findings with regards to gender indicated that women showed greater preferences towards environmental responsibility and were more willing to contribute towards environmental protection. Empacher et al., (2000) investigated gender differences in motives and consumption patterns, concluded that men are oriented towards convenience while women more towards health and environment. Preisendörfer (1999) conducted an extensive research to analyze the role of gender and attitudes towards consumption, waste and energy usage. He found very little differences when it comes to ecological practices such as using energy saving lamps, electricity and water usage. As such most of the studies have been focused on investigating the attitudes and motives, but the actual behavior related studies mostly found in Western world but rarely been conducted in Middle East Asian set up. Stefanie Heinzle et al. (2010) conducted a research study on gender differences and sustainable consumption, studied not just the gender differences but also the gender relations and gender scripts. The findings of their study showed no gender differences in general preferences but found significant role of gender relations and gender scripts. As stated by the findings of Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, (2006); Seefeldt, (2008). women are supposedly more responsive, emphatic and considerate of others in comparison to men. It has been observed that very limited attention has been paid towards gender differences in analyzing sustainable behavior. As per the study by Lee et al. (2013), gender differences were identified in the residential consumers' environmental behaviors. They concluded

that women show more concern towards environment than men, but the actual buying behavior showed no significant difference.

Hypotheses:

H1: Gender differences exist in sustainable consumption behavior.

H2: Women have significantly higher levels of sustainable consumption behavior in comparison to men.

METHODOLOGY

The data was collected with the help of questionnaire developed based upon items taken from the scale developed by KiracÖ, H. and Karalar, R. (2010). Not all the items were taken from the scale looking at the study setting. The responses were collected on a 5-point Likert scale. The demographic information collected through the survey included gender being the independent variable. The data was collected from a sample size of 115 respondents. The data was collected through self administered questionnaire. Out of the total 115 respondents 60 (52%) were female and the rest 55 (48%) were male. The survey was personally administered. The SCB scale used included statements e.g., "I turn lights off in unused rooms at home." "I prefer to walk instead of driving the car or taking the bus to nearby places." etc. In order to test the hypotheses independent sample t test was used to establish the gender differences in sustainable consumption behavior. Levene's test was used to test the H2 i.e. significant differences exist in men and women and their sustainable consumption behavior. The data analysis and discussion is covered in the next segment. As a part of data preparation before independent sample t test was applied, in order to establish the normality of the data, both the skewness and kurtosis values for both the groups were measured. The skewness values were falling within the acceptable range i.e. -1 to +1. Kurtosis values were also within the acceptable range of -3 to +3. Thus it was evident that the data was normally distributed.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

The data was analyzed with the help of SPSS using the independent sample t test. In order to measure the homogeneity of variance, Levene's test was used. The table 1 represents group statistics for both the groups. From this it is evident that mean value for group 1 (female) is higher than for group 2 (male).

Table 1

	GENDER	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
SCB	1	60	4.03	.366	.051
	2	55	3.83	.580	.084

Group statistics

Table 2 represents independent sample test statistics. The highlighted sig 0.068 (>0.05) values for equal variances assumed helps in interpreting that the significant difference exists in the groups. Also sig (2 tailed) value in the first row is 0.033 (<0.05) indicating that the differences between the groups are statistically significant. Thus H1 is accepted. Based upon the mean value we accept

H2, as the women are shown higher levels of sustainable consumption in their behavior in comparison to men.

Table 2

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
SCB Equal variances assumed	3.412	.068	2.158	113	.033	.208	.096	.017	.399
Equal variances not assumed			2.120	78.108	.037	.208	.098	.013	.403

Independent samples test

DISCUSSION

The objective of this paper was to investigate if gender differences have any relationship with sustainable consumption behavior. Also in this research study the differences between men and women in their sustainable consumption behavior have been addressed. Similar studies conducted in the past have provided evidences suggesting that women show more intention of sustainable consumption purchases in comparison to men. (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006, Seefeldt, 2008). Analysis of the data collected from 115 respondents from both men and women showed significant differences in sustainable consumption behavior. In order to test the hypotheses data was analysed with the help of independent samples test. In order to establish the normality of distribution skewness and kurtosis values were measured. Post this the data was subjected to independent samples test. The output of this test was analyzed by interpreting the values of Levene's test and Sig. (2-tailed) value. The test statistics showed that gender differences exist between sustainable consumption behaviors. Also the test output helps in accepting the hypothesis that men and women differ in their sustainable consumption behavior. Based upon the descriptive statistics (mean values), it was interpreted that women show higher levels of sustainable consumption behavior in comparison to men.

IMPLICATION TO RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The findings are indicative that women are more focused on purchasing and consuming products that are environmentally friendly, more thoughtful of conservation of energy and other natural resources comparatively to men. The findings of the study are significant to the study setting considering the fact that we are battling the issues of over consumption and there is need to create awareness on sustainable consumption. The marketers and policy makers can use these findings

and further extend the investigations to study various other related aspects of the research topic. This research study was essentially an effort to add to further enhancing the understanding of sustainable consumption behaviour of consumers in UAE and the findings are evidently directing towards women being marginally more sustainable in their consumption behaviour.

CONCLUSION

Increasing attention need to be provided to promote the role of women in family and household decision making as this is one of the ways in which the sustainable consumption behaviour importance can be realized. As women are known to be on of the most influential individuals in the family especially for their children, this way more awareness can be created amongst children who are the future customers. Even though the study findings show women are more better in their sustainable consumption behaviour comparatively men also have evidently shown SCB inclination. Both men and women can play an equally important role from strategic perspective for the decision makers.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

The present research study is based upon a quantitative approach and necessarily considered as a step towards an extensive research on the sustainable consumption behavior related studies. This study is more of a pilot study as the data was collected from a limited sample size. In future the same research study can be extended by increasing the sample size and adding different variables to investigate the impact it may have on sustainable consumption behavior. The study setting was United Arab Emirates and the present study was one of its kinds in this country which hosts a multi cultural, multi religious population. Cross cultural studies can be conducted to develop further understanding of the topic. It has been identified based upon the global retail index figures that UAE is one of the top countries in the world wherein people spend a lot of money on unnecessary purchases and over consumption of food and clothes has been evident. Hence further research in this area will be guiding the policy makers and decision makers in developing strategies.

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