

Building the Ecological Behavior of Romanian Consumers: A Case Study of Social Organizations' Involvement in Society

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Abstract

The paper emphasizes the importance of social organizations in creating ecological awareness of consumers, highlighting issues related to consumer's role in protecting the environment, the responsible use of natural resources and the need to involve consumers in social activities with ecological character. Starting from this study, the paper aimed to provide social organizations both an overview on how the environment issue was perceived in the society as well as a means of assessing the ecological activities carried out so far among the population of Romania. Results showed that there is a strong relationship between consumers' willingness to adopt a responsible ecological behavior and social organizations who initiated campaigns to address this issue. Practical implications of the research have also discussed.

Key words: Ecological behavior, Social marketing, Non-profit organization, Consumers

Introduction

The global ecological crisis was based on a set of cultural and psychological factors such as values, beliefs and attitudes that have progressively generated personal and group behaviors strong enough to create serious environmental issues (Holban, 2010; Oskamp, 1995; Vlek, 2000).

The first studies concerning the environment studies took into account the ecological problems caused by pollution as a result of massive industrialization and overcrowding (Heberlein, 1972). Another type of studies in the field of environmental protection were those that emphasized the relationship between attitude and ecological behavior (Scott and Willits, 1994), aiming to influence consumers' beliefs and develop an ecological culture as complex as possible (Vining and Ebreo, 1992).

The third phase in the development of ecological awareness was the studies conducted by Berenguer et al. (2005), Gatersleben et al. (2002), Vlek and Steg

(2007) and Brito (2008), who revealed the influence of psychological factors in correcting or maintaining various environmental behaviors of consumers.

The social organizations have an important role in solving society issues. Whether we talk about philanthropic associations engaged in health behavior programs or nonprofit organizations involved in environmental protection activities, their aim is common one: to help improve people's life by promoting responsible behavior in the society (Serban, 2011; Serban et al., 2011).

As regards the environmental field, social organizations contribute to fulfilling complex tasks, by strengthening social cohesion and organizing specific campaigns to protect the environment.

Materials and Methods

In describing the impact of social organizations on the environmental performance of Romanian consumers, a quantitative research was conducted in order to describe the benefits of adopting an environmental-friendly behavior for both consumers and the society, as a whole.

The research model

The proposed research model included the following variables: "attitude towards the behavior", "subjective norms associated with the behavior", "perceived behavioral control" and, the variable "behavior", as a direct result of interaction between the first three variables (Figure 1). The variables were chosen based on a social behavior theory, defined by Ajzen (1991). Known as the theory of planned behavior, this social theory is very popular for social marketing practitioners and the variables are frequently used as a standard in changing consumer's behavior.

The research methodology

The survey was conducted online and comprised Romanian respondents of different ages and originating from several social environments. From the total of number of respondents who completed the questionnaire, approximately 60% were women and 40% men. The average age was 24-35 years. The questionnaire was tested in advance by 5 people, small changes being committed to improve its quality.

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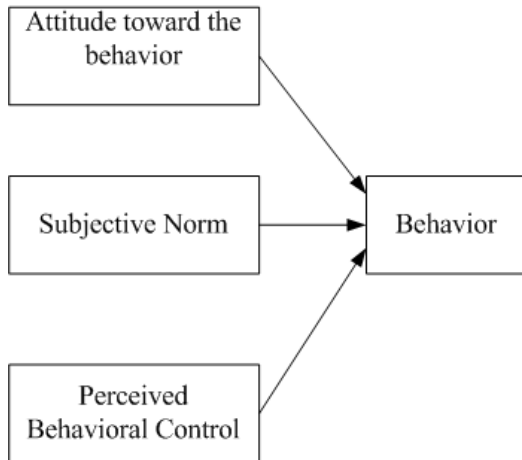


Fig. 1 Conceptual model of the ecological behavior of consumer

The 28 survey questions were grouped as follows: four introduction questions, seven questions about attitudes towards the ecological behavior, six questions about subjective norms associated with the behavior, seven questions about the ecological perceived behavioral control and four demographic questions.

In addressing questions about the ecological behavior of Romanian consumers, the author used the Likert's scale. Having values between 1 and 5, where 1 - strongly disagree, 5 - strongly agree, Likert's scale is successfully used for many years in researches of social marketing and social responsibility (Bobo, 1991).

In order to test the relationship between the variables, there were carried different analyses: a descriptive statistics analysis of the variables in question, correlation analyses between each variable and the sub-variables describing them, and regression analyses, where "behavior" was considered the dependent variable and "attitude towards the behavior", "subjective norms associated with the behavior" and "perceived behavioral control" were considered independent variables. In building the multiple regression model it was used QMS E-views software package. Two types of regression models were defined: linear regression models between each independent variable and the dependent one and a multiple regression model between all independent variables and the dependent variable, "behavior".

Results and Discussion

The results of the descriptive statistics analysis showed that the variables have similar values for the selected indicators (Table 1). The maximum and minimum values were normal and expressed the consumer's agree or disagree with certain statements. Thus, consumers shared different opinions on the

topics presented in the questionnaire. Also, mean values were closed to 4, which mean that most respondents were agreeing with the considered questions. In terms of standard deviation, the results indicated that the data is scattered over a wide field of values (Singh, 2010).

The results of the study also described the correlations between the "attitude towards behavior" variable and the corresponding statements considered. Since the values obtained were greater than 0, we can say that the variables are positively correlated. Stronger correlations were identified between the attitude towards behavior and the statement "I agree with a tax on shopping bags" (0.82) and between attitude towards behavior and the statement "I have purchased, at least once, organic products" (0.76). Positive correlations were found between the variable "subjective norms associated with the behavior" and statements that define it, as well as between the variable "perceived behavioral control" and the corresponding statements, with values that ranged between 0.13 and 0.86 in both cases. Thus, strong correlations were found between the statements "My friends participate with me in different ecological activities" and "Subjective norms associated with behavior" (0.64) and "I find myself an example for those younger than me" and "Perceived behavioral control" (0.89). The results are in agreement with Ajzen (1991), who defined the theory of planned behavior based on the following types of beliefs: behavioral beliefs, normative beliefs and control beliefs, and similar types of variables affecting consumers' behavior.

As regards the relationship between the dependent variable "behavior" and the independent variables considered, the proposed model showed that there were similar values of the determination coefficient (R^2). Therefore, there were defined three linear regression models: Model 1, which expresses the relationship between ecological behavior and attitude towards behavior, Model 2, which expressed the relationship between subjective norms and ecological behavior and Model 3, which expressed the relationship between ecological behavior and perceived behavioral control. Results showed that "attitude towards the behavior" expresses 73.7% of total variation of ecological behavior, while "subjective norm associated with the behavior" and "perceived behavioral control" express 69.7% and 72% of the total variation of the ecological behavior (Table 2).

In analyzing the relationship between ecological behavior and all variables considered, it was found that the variables express 69.3% of the total variation of the ecological behavior, while the value of F-statistic test is high (38.933) and the significance level is 0.000 (Table 3). Therefore, we can say the

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of the considered variables

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Attitude towards the behavior	127	2.14	4.86	3.9946	0.74529
Subjective norms	127	1.00	4.80	3.0358	0.82614
Perceived behavioral control	127	1.80	5.00	3.9679	0.88421
Ecological behavior	127	1.90	4.54	3.6661	0.69330

Table 2 Characteristics of the linear regression models, where ecological behavior is the dependent variable and attitude towards behavior, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control are the independent variables

Model	R	R Squared	Adjusted R Squared	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	0.859	0.737	0.735	0.35708	291.819	0.000
2	0.835	0.697	0.694	0.38354	239.082	0.000
3	0.849	0.720	0.717	0.36858	267.505	0.000

Table 3 The relationship between ecological behavior and attitude towards behavior, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Probability
Constant variable	2.618235	0.367412	7.126164	0.0000
Attitude towards the behavior	-0.319810	0.053748	-5.950143	0.0000
Subjective norms	0.171570	0.056898	3.015412	0.0036
Perceived behavioral control	0.773178	0.074510	10.37680	0.0000
Ecological behavior	-0.627676	0.070829	-8.861805	0.0000
R-squared	0.692970	Mean dependent variable		3.6661
Adjusted R-squared	0.675171	Standard deviation dependent variable		0.69330
Standard error of regression	0.455074	Akaike info criterion		1.328462
Sum squared resid	14.28936	Schwarz criterion		1.484142
Log likelihood	-44.15309	F-statistic		38.93338
Durbin-Watson statistics	2.265414	Prob(F-statistic)		0.000000

model is valid and the variables considered influence very strongly the overall ecological behavior of Romanian consumer. The results were in accordance with Berenguer et al. (2005) and Vlek and Steg (2007), who considered psychological factors to be of great importance when changing the attitude of consumers towards the environment. For the non-profit organization, the benefits of the campaign were: raising funds for the cause and enhancing visibility for the social problem (Wymer and Samu, 2003).

Thus, just like stated by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), changing behavior is a step-by-step process which followed accordingly can prove beneficial in any social domain. In ecological activities, the influence of "attitude towards the behavior", "subjective norm associated with the behavior" and "perceived behavioral control" can determine positive responses for consumers, aiming to change consumers' beliefs and culture (Vining and Ebreo, 1992). Future analysis and research can emphasize the new approaches in ecological behavior, focusing on the values of consumer and inner perceptions of social responsibility and ecological awareness (Gatersleben et al., 2002; Brito, 2008).

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