

Chapter 4

Understanding Green Attitudes

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ABSTRACT

Many environmental researches are interested in attitudes. Particularly in consumer behavior studies, attitudes are frequently used to identify the determinants of behavior. This chapter provides a framework for green attitude, first by focusing on its components and formation. The attitude-behavior gap is also discussed by categorizing a number of variables that are found to affect this relationship in the environmental literature. Following sections provide well-established scales of green attitudes and how they are measured. Finally, insights for green attitude change are discussed, along with future research directions, which underline the importance of new methods for attitude measurement.

INTRODUCTION

To date, there has been considerable discussion about the results and origins of human behaviors that are detrimental to environmental sustainability. The ability of the earth to support human consumption is being questioned increasingly (Assadourian, 2010; Kotler, 2011). Some researchers have suggested that if the entire population of the world were to consume at the same rate as the average Western consumer, more than two Earths' worth of resources would be required to support this demand (Global Footprint Network, <http://www.footprintnetwork.org/>). Policy makers and marketers have recognized the need for consumers to change the ways in which they meet their needs (Polonsky, 2011).

Environmental pressures have produced extensive research examining approaches to marketing more responsible (i.e. less harmful) consumption behaviors (Leonidou & Leonidou, 2011; McDonagh & Prothero, 2014). Attempting to understand green consumer behavior, many theoretical frameworks emphasize personal factors such as values, norms, beliefs and attitudes. In Ajzen's (1985) Theory of Planned Behavior, the most well-known theoretical model for explaining people's intentions and behaviors, attitudes are assumed to directly affect the intentions that turn into behavior; along with attitudes, intentions are also influenced by social pressures.

The relationship between attitude and behavior has been structured in several theoretical models. Fazio's (1990) MODE (motivation and opportunity as determinants of behavior) model proposes that attitudes

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are linked to behavior either automatically (spontaneously), or deliberately (reasoned). The possession of strong motivation and opportunity is a guide to the probability of an individual's enacting a behavior.

As a social psychology and consumer behavior concept, attitudes are widely used in predictions of behavior. Additionally, for more than half a century, scientists have been interested in the major themes of attitudinal change. There is, currently, a growing body of literature recognizing the significance of green attitudes as a predictor of green consumer behavior. Therefore, it is important to understand what underlies green attitudes, since, if individuals hold positive attitudes towards the environment, they are more likely to engage in environmentally-friendly behavior (McIntyre & Milfont, 2016).

The possession of a positive attitude, however, neither necessarily nor automatically corresponds with the desirable behavioral outcome. Several situational and individual factors interfere in the behavior formation process. Since consumer behavior plays a major role in environmental outcomes, it is important to understand why consumers might fail to engage in environmentally-friendly behaviors. Individuals are expected to regulate their consumption (Connolly & Prothero, 2008), while companies are under pressure to meet the needs of multiple stakeholders: consumers, who are demanding environmental responsibility; shareholders seeking dividends; and governments imposing stricter environmental legislation to regulate their activities. From another quarter, environmental activism continues to raise awareness on local and global fronts, encouraging and enabling community action, and often compelling governments to intervene on the side of the environment.

The objective of this chapter is to examine the green attitude within a comprehensive analysis of attitude formation and change. After defining green attitude, three salient issues are then addressed: the imperfect relationship between green attitude and behavior; the measurement of green attitude; and how change towards a green attitude, as a precursor of green behavior, might proceed. The sections which elaborate these three issues also provide the sequential structure of the chapter. Prior to the conclusion, the implications for marketers and policy makers are outlined, and recommendations for future research are made.

Defining Green Attitude

Attitudes are based on the evaluative feelings of what is favorable or unfavorable, with regard to particular objects, things, actions, or abstract concepts (Wicker, 1969), as well as an individual's life experience (Newhouse, 1990). As a result, attitudes can be observed in people's beliefs, feelings, and behaviors (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

The research on green attitudes uses various, interchangeable terms such as environmental attitudes, ecological attitudes, environmentally-friendly attitudes, and environmentally sustainable attitudes, all of which conceptualize individuals' evaluative judgments about the environment. In this chapter, the terms "green" and "environmental" are used interchangeably, and green attitude is explained in two contexts: (1) attitudes towards the environment, and (2) attitudes towards pro-environmental behavior. Therefore, definitions will vary accordingly. For instance, Schultz et al. (2004) defines green attitudes as the collection of beliefs, affect, and intentions about environmental activities. Heyl et al. (2013) describes green attitudes as the predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner regarding environmental issues. On the other hand, McIntyre and Milfont (2016) defines environmental attitudes as the evaluation of natural and built environments and factors affecting their quality. To gain a fuller understanding of green attitude, its components and formation must first be clarified.

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