Green Behaviour of the Romanian Consumers

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Abstract

This paper is a conceptual paper on green marketing, which is an emerging area of interest, having as focal point the green behavior of the Romanian consumers. The main areas of sustainable consumption are presented after a brief introduction and a brief review of the specialized literature. Then, there is discussed the issue of customer satisfaction in relation to environmental characteristics of products. The paper shows the types of Romanian consumers’ attitudes in relation to green behavior and the Romanian consumers’ favorite green products. The paper ends with conclusions and the exposure of future research directions.

Keywords: green consumption behavior, green attitude, eco-friendly products, green customer satisfaction

JEL Classification: M31, Q01, Q56

Introduction

The most effective and economic component of the environmental policy is represented by the set of measures and tools for changing the behavior of producers and consumers and society as a whole, in an environmentally friendly sense. The change of all users optics to environmental, the awareness of the multidimensional character of natural systems, the recognition of the role of collective effort to preserve the carrying capacity of the environment is essential for achieving sustainable development goals.\footnote{WBCSD, A Changing Future for Paper, 1996}

The unsustainable patterns of consumption and production are concerned particularly important of the environmental issues at all levels - from the local level and until the global one. Therefore, and Agenda 21, launched at the World Summit in Rio (1992), is intensively concerned about the topic of changing consumer habits. Sustainable consumption is an interdisciplinary concept. Changing consumer behavior is a process in which a large number of stakeholders are involved. The role of the authorities is to create the appropriate framework and the process itself primarily should assume, initiative and commitment of different consumers.

The adoption of environmental behavior requires changing consumer habits, meanings fundamental transformation of lifestyle and compliance with another system of values. But these changes can not be imposed by coercion by the authorities. Comprehensive campaigns are
needed to inform and consult. Consumers seek products whose qualities and benefits be expressed as clearly as possible. They need accurate and transparent information; thus, the price of ecological truth should be clearly expressed and also alternatives to protect the environment must be exposed as obviously as possible.

People want an ecological approach of the everyday life, but at the same time, they claim personal benefits or at least their translation into incentives and facilities. Beyond awareness, these issues must be assumed.

**Literature Review**

In literature there are papers on the identity and characteristics of the so-called “green consumer”, of which we can mention the works of Peattie (2001, 2010). It should be noted that for researchers environmental issue is very complex and difficult to address (McCarty and Shrum, 2001).

The sensitivity of attitudes, preferences and purchases of the consumers environment, show an increasing trend (Sarigöllü, 2009). The desire to buy green gifts led taking into account the environmental practices as part of the business strategy (Roberts, 1996, Kalafatis et. Al., 1999, Laroche et. Al., 2001). There is a need to identify attitudes, preferences and purchasing patterns of the consumers for green products and maximize profits through pricing strategies for green products further support the relevance of green marketing (Peattie and Crane, 2005).

The awareness and concern about environmental issues are not necessarily reflected in purchasing behavior (Dunlap et. Al., 2000). There are many researchers who have studied the differences between stated attitudes and real purchasing behavior. Their studies often used Ajzen's theory of “planned behavior” (Kalafatis et. Al., 1999), which show that intentions to a particular act are determined by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control. Intention, in turn, can lead to a real behavior (Ali et al., 2011). Researchers examined the values, beliefs, motivations and attitudes to understand mismatches in findings in consumer behavior towards the environment (Allen and Ferrand, 1999; Dunlap and Mertig, 1995 and Garvill Nordlund, 2002). There are many factors that may influence or impact on the implications of ecological attitudes on real purchasing behavior of green products. Identified by Ali et. the. (2011), these factors are: green purchasing attitude, knowledge of the environment (Mostafa, M. M, 2006), price and perceived quality of the product (D'Souza et. al., 2007), corporate reputation (Schwepker and Cornwell, 1991), environmental concerns (Phau and Ong, 2007), and advertising credibility (Thogersen, 2000).

Consumers who are aware and interested in environmental issues are called green consumers (Soonthonsmai, 2007). These green consumers usually organize submission of petitions and boycott manufacturers and retailers and actively promote conservation of planetary ecosystem (Fergus, 1991). Ottman (1992) stated that consumers accept ecological products when their main needs of performance, quality, convenience and accessibility are met and when they understand how a green product could help to solve environmental problems. The difference of knowledge about the uses and values of green products prevent consumers to engage in any purchasing decisions. According to Schultz and Zelezny (2000), “attitudes of environmental concern are rooted in a person’s concept of self and the degree to which an individual perceives him or herself to be an integral part of the natural environment”.

As previous research shows (Laroche et. Al., 2001, O'Brien et. Al., 2004; Kalafatelas 2008, Han et. Al., 2011), modern consumers are willing to pay more for green products. In an attempt to explain green consumption behavior, several factors have been proposed as determinants, such as changing consumption values (Peattie, 2001, Lien-Ti and Simpson, 1995), attitudes to the environment (Schlegelmilch et.'s., 1996), demographic factors like age, gender, education and income (Roberts, 1996; Diamantopoulos et. al. 2003) (Stern et. al., 1993) and psychographic factors, including altruism, knowledge of environmental issues and of the alternative products (Chan, 1999), the
perceived personal relevance (Mainieri et. al., 1997) and the individual's ability to make an effective contribution (Dembkowski and Hanmer-Lloyd, 1994). External influences on green consumer behavior were highlighted too, such as the role of price and quality (D'Souza et. Al., 2007), of the eco-labels (Gulbrandsen, 2006) and of the consumers' beliefs about the environmental performance of the producer company (Collins et. al., 2007). Many existing theoretical models were applied and extended, related to green consumer behavior (Peattie, 2010). Among these the following are worthy to mention: the theory of reasoned action, theory of planned behavior, the Attitude-Behavior-Context model, the Ability Opportunity Motivation model, the norm activation theory and the Value-belief-norm model.

The investigation conducted by Nielsen Global Online Environment and Sustainability in 2011 in 51 countries (more than 25,000 respondents) showed an increasing trend for the environmental issues concern (Nielsen Report, 2011). Besides climate change, about 75% of consumers indicated that environmental issues for which there are important concerns include air and water pollution; water scarcity; use of pesticides; and use of not environmentally-friendly packaging.

Areas of Manifestation for Sustainable Consumption

The question about concrete measures which can be implemented through sustainable behavior regarding consumption arises. Some areas of manifestation of sustainable consumption were found in literature. An important role has been assigned to them, namely:

- avoiding accumulation of waste;
- reducing of energy and water consumption;
- increasing people mobility;
- avoiding food waste;
- increasing reuse of objects.

In order to proceed to sustainable growth, material consumption must to be reduced in industrialized countries. For this there are opportunities because lately produced with low raw materials were placed on the market real progress in the automotive industry, equipment or packaging have been made, although it is important to note that the reason these technological developments is rather about reducing costs, not necessarily preserving the natural environment. There are a number of reasons why the reduction of material and energy consumption does not lead automatically to a decrease in overall consumption. Thus, the increase of the total quantity of consumed goods cancel savings achieved by the uneimplemented technology. Secondly, motivation of the producers to realize ecological products is primarily related to an economic interest which, if there is not, it will not put into practice new sustainable technologies. The classic case is the fridge with low energy consumption, but more expensive than conventional models. Another solution for sustainable consumption seems to be making products with a long period of operation. But, this is only a part of the new approach; This requires a new vision about products related to the needs of consumers.

Customer Satisfaction related to the Ecological Characteristics of the Products

"The green product is a product which has ecological attributes created deliberately by decisions relating to how products are produced what they are they made how they are distributed how they work, how long they can be used, how they are used and how they are removed when the consumption or use ends. These decisions operationalize strategies to prevent pollution and
resource recovery, leading, thus, to reduction of environmental cost.”

The Eco-Product can be considered “a product which meets consumer demand and at the same time, harmonizes their interests in the short term, medium and long term” or “that product or service whose environmental and societal performance generally are significantly better than a conventional product.”

From all the above results that the impact of the environmental attributes on the consumer is difficult to highlight, is rather subtle, indirect. Thus, their reflection in improving the quality of life is, in turn, difficult to understand and appreciate at the moment of purchase. The environmental attributes they are intangible, showing secondary importance to consumers, they do not represent the main benefit, which is the main reason for purchasing the product. These attributes reflect the needs of long-term environmental conservation generating improved quality of life for consumers. Simply, consumers do not know or are not interested in these ecological attributes, as they are not present in the the core product, they do not affect its functioning and do not determine the main benefits. Hence the role of environmental marketing result, namely to educate markets to guide consumers toward long-term benefits that are brought by the environmental attributes of the products.

The principle of sustainability designates the gear of three dimensions - ecology, economy and social sphere. In relation to consumer behavior, the environmental dimension becomes essential. Economic development and social welfare can not on long term coexist without a well established framework that takes into account the vital role of the natural environment. On the other hand, the economic and social issues are, also, important in efforts to make feasible the ecology: “ecological production and consumption are, also, items that can be realized only if the consumer can afford and if both consumption and production are performed under socially acceptable auspices. 30-40% of all environmental problems are directly or indirectly based on, certain prevalent patterns of consumption.”

A more thorough knowledge is required in terms of the premises consumption of goods and services structuring, given the extraordinary multitude of needs that various consumer categories express. For example, choosing to replace an old product with a new one can be based on a variety of reasons, for example, that the old one can not be repaired, the new one has superior properties, from the the habit of doing regular shopping etc. The emergence of consumerism era in Western countries was possible just because of the particular complexity of consumer behavior of modern man and his extraordinary appetite for news.

Generally in encouraging demand for goods and services, media industries and advertising play a decisive role. Particularly advertising industries heavily affect consumer motivations, thus having a decisive role in shaping consumption and modeling concepts relating to products and services. Some recent studies argue that the consumption patterns claim that the response of production to a range of consumption necessities can become more sustainable by encouraging initiation of services designed to increase the sustainability of goods already purchased, instead of encouraging the acquisition of new assets. Such a practice would lead to a decrease of the pressure of different extractive industries on the environment, which would implicitly lead to a new conceptualization of the improvement of the life quality. Some recent analyzes of business companies argue that consumer loyalty to a particular brand of products appears to be further

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4 Peattie, K. - Green Marketing, Logman Group UK Ltd., 1992, p. 175
5 Deutscher Bundestag (ed.) - Schlussbericht der Enquete-Kommission, Globalisierung der Wettwirtschaft, p. 381
encouraged through a range of services designed to extend the life of products in use and less by encouraging the purchase of new products.

Premises

Green buildings, green products, eco-friendly companies - all these words have become increasingly used in the recent years. Worldwide efforts are made to keep the Earth healthy: new technologies are developed (see cars with hybrid or electric engines), solar and wind energy is used, various products are recycled. In addition, at national and regional level (see the EU) specific regulations to support this lifestyle are, also, adopted.

Yale University has developed an environmental performance index (IPA). Based on this index the greening level of each country is established. The scientists of that university annually update the ranking of the world's most environmentally friendly countries, taking into account 25 criteria such as environmental impact on human health, habitat protection and water and air quality. Switzerland, Luxembourg, Australia, Singapore, Czech Republic, Germany, Spain, Austria, Sweden, Norway are placed in order, on the top ten. In 2014 Romania is ranked 86 out of 132 being classified as having “poor performance”, with an index of 50.52.

On a more careful analysis it appears that in Romania there are not many studies dedicated to green consumer behavior analysis. The results summarized in this paper come from several sources, both nationally and internationally.

Romanian Consumers’ Typology related to the Green Behavior

According to Green Barometer results conducted under the umbrella of the “Think Green Policies” project, developed by Foundation TERRA III and ALMA-RO association, in 2008, the urban population from Romania, can be categorized based on the behaviors of individuals in relation to the environment in four eco-types, as shown in Figure no.1.

![Fig.1. The green typology of urban population from Romania](image)

Source: Adapted after Stănculescu, Sofia Manuela and Marin, Monica, Green Barometer, The Research Institute for Quality of Life - Terra Mileniul III, 2008 p.4

On average, according to gender, men are the segment most interested in the environmental aspect of life, and, depending on age, women over 65 seem to be rather indifferent (Green Barometer, October 28, 2010).
So, briefly the four categories show the following main features:

1. **Eco-indifferents** - people who do not manifest any particular concern for the environment and, therefore, they have not changed any consumer behavior in this direction;

2. **Eco-neutral** - people who have changed consumer behavior in relation to the environment, not because they are preoccupied in this respect, but because of functional reasons (on average, they adopted four of the 16 considered behavior patterns because they were cheaper, more convenient, etc.);

3. **Eco-supporters** - people who have environmentally friendly behaviors. They have partially changed consumption behavior, with the stated aim to protect the environment (on average, they adopted five of the 16 considered behaviors);

4. **Eco-promoters** - people who significantly changed their behavior in the recent years. They adopted participative or specific consumption behaviors, explicitly dedicated to protecting the environment (on average, they adopted 10 of the 16 considered behaviors).

![Fig. 2. The consumption behaviors that protect the environment and eco-urban types from Romania, 2008](image)

Source: Adapted after Sofia Stâncea, Manuela şi Marin, Monica, Barometrul Verde, The Research Institute for Quality of Life -Terra Mileniul III, 2008, p.18

According to the aforementioned study, more than half of Romanians citizens realize the need for measures to protect the environment. According to the report, most of the people concerned about environmental issues live in Transylvania. The most active are the inhabitants of the cities of the Banat region, buying ecological products or engaging in such actions, while “the indifferents” are best represented in the Dobrogea region.

In a survey conducted in 2011 it was found that the health-related reasons represented important factors for responsible choice of food, and choice of healthy food with all the related social,
environmental and ethical issues were prevalent. On the other hand, reasons related to price were obstacles to responsible consumption.\textsuperscript{7}

Another study conducted in 2013 showed that the green purchase intention is influenced primarily by the quality and price and then by the producing company image\textsuperscript{8}.

**Romanian Consumers' favorite Green Products**

Sustainability and responsible consumption are increasingly present themes in the strategies of the companies which are concerned about their reputation, becoming key elements that affect consumer purchasing decision. As a result, these problems began to represent concern for the behavioral studies.

Such an example is the top “Global Metaconsumer Index”, resulting from “METACONSUMER - Sustainability in Global Consumer's View” study, conducted by Ebeltoft Group, in partnership with Architected Business Solutions in 17 countries (Germany, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Denmark, Spain, USA, France, Italy, Mexico, Portugal, UK, Romania and Turkey) on a sample of 8,500 people.

This classification, which took into account the consumers' concerns for sustainability, positioned Romania in fifth place with 120 points before some developed countries such as, for example, Spain (61 points), Germany (56 points) Denmark (54 points) and Britain (49 points). This result shows that Romanians can be considered some of the most concerned about sustainability consumers. It is said that Mexico (147 points), Brazil (142 points), Turkey (129 points) and China (123 points) are placed in order, on the first places. This result could be explained, on the one hand, by the lower level of knowledge of the subject - primarily related to additional costs that sustainable products induce - manifested in less developed countries and, on the other hand, through greater involvement of the authorities in the same country - which means more regulations, and specific fees, which, for the average citizen represent additional burdens.

Regarding the situation in Romania, attitude to sustainability is reflected in the purchasing decision. The study mentioned above has shown that, in terms of acceptance to pay more for a green product compared to a classical one, 26% of Romanian consumers sad they would be willing to pay more up to 10%. This result is above the global average, which is 24%. However, the concern for sustainability of the Romanians seem to manifest more at declarative level because they are bottom of the ranking when it comes to adopt sustainable daily practices, the main reason being the convenience (38% of Romanian consumers are not willing to give up their comfort level for the adoption of sustainable practices).

**Ecological Products**

Although a trend is observed among Romanians not to buy food that has been chemically treated or genetically modified, less than a quarter of Romanians are, however, willing to buy ecological products, mainly due to their higher price compared to conventional products. When they purchase organic food, Romanians do it primarily for their own health and less as being concerned about the health of the environment.

\textsuperscript{7}Stancu, C. - Meaning and practices regarding the concept of “responsible consumer” in the view of the Romanian consumers, Master Thesis, Aarhus School of Business, Aarhus University, 2011, p. 66

White Products

Regarding this product, Romanian consumers seem to be concerned, primarily those belonging to higher class energy efficiency and less to those that have low emissions. And this behavior suggests rather a selfish attitude aimed primarily personal financial resources saving and then possibly environmental concern.

In this area authorities play a key role because they can support the environment through additional regulations. Thus, we can mention Directive 2009/125 / EC of the European Parliament and of the European Council of 21 October 2009 which established a framework for the setting of the requirements for eco-design of the energy-using products.

Renewable Energy

Romanian consumer concern for green energy, is, also, directly linked to their ability to save. For ordinary consumers, solar panels are the most popular renewable energy solutions.

Worldwide, “the production of solar panels is insufficient given that demand could grow by 29% this year compared to 2013”9.

A study conducted in 2011 by Ariston Thermo Romania, following the launch of the latest study of the European Solar Thermal Industry Federation (ESTIF) regarding the evolution of the local market of solar panels, indicated a growing demand, favored by extend of the Green House program in 2012.

The same study showed that, in 2010, the number of dwellings equipped with solar panels was less than 26,000 in Romania, being situated just above Bulgaria. Ariston data also has shown that in Hungary, the number of dwellings equipped with such systems exceeded 37,500, in Czech Republic this number was over 77,000 and in Poland of approximately 164,000. Germany is on top, with over 2.75 million dwellings equipped with solar panels, followed by Greece with 1.36 million, and Austria, with 770,000.

However, solar panels housing market stagnated at 35,000 dwellings equipped, meanings approximately 4 % of total housing. The sales declined in the first half of 2012 even with 20% for cheaper systems, the main cause being the cessation of the program , which was precisely the factor that generated growth in 2010-2011.

Cleaner Cars

Hybrid Cars

Against the backdrop of higher fuel and eco fashion, shyly, Romanian consumers are beginning to express their interest for alternatives to gasoline or diesel engines. Thus in first nine months of 2013, nearly 400 hybrid cars were sold in Romania, surpassing total sales recorded in 2012, according to the latest data published by the Directorate for Driving Licenses and Vehicle Registration (DDLVR).10

Most of the sold units were recorded in Bucharest, the region with the highest incomes throughout the country, namely 139 units, representing 37% of the total. Ilfov, Iasi, Brasov and Constanta counties follow in order. On contrary, Botosani, Giurgiu and Caras-Severin Counties lie, where no any hybrid car was sold.

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9 http://www.wall-street.ro/tag/panouri-solare.html
In terms of brands, Toyota lies on the first place with over 200 sold units, representing more than 50% of the market. Lexus follow at a great distance, with 86 sold cars and Honda, with 48 sold units.

**Electric Cars**

While in other European countries, sales of electric cars continuously grow, in the Romanian market things are not the same. Thus, each of the three models available on the Romanian market, respectively, Citroen C-Zero, Mitsubishi i-MiEV and Renault Twizy have been preferred each by about 1,000 Romans customers, an insignificant number compared to the total one about 5 million cars registered according to the Automotive Manufacturers and Importers Association (AMIA).

The reduced interest of Romanian customers for such vehicles could be explained by their high cost and by the lack of necessary infrastructure. The Romanian government has expressed the intention to support purchases of electric cars by a grant of 5,000 euros, but the interest of the Romanian customers for this type of vehicle has not significantly increased.

**Other Eco-Friendly products**

**Energy Saving Bulbs**

Since the 1 September 2009, household bulbs produced for the European market must meet certain minimum requirements in terms of energy consumption. The incandescent and halogen bulbs that did not meet these requirements were gradually removed from the EU market. The decision at Community level was determined by the target of reducing CO2 emissions for the year 2020. For the Romanian people replacement of bulb has a large immediate impact on revenue. Consequently, from lack of alternative fluorescent light bulbs (CFL - Compact Fluorescent Lamp) and LED bulbs (LED - Light Emitting Diode) began to be increasingly required firstly, because they are more effective, leading to savings.

The Romanian consumers are still reticent in purchase these bulbs, and the market is flooded with low quality products from Asia. Also, the black market must be mentioned, which we illegally sell incandescent bulbs from non-EU countries. As major disadvantages of energy saving light bulbs, both CFL and LED, which still take on the Romanian consumers we have to mention firstly great price. One of the important aspect to be considered for the CFL light bulbs is that they contain mercury, a toxic substance if it is touched or inhaled.

**Eco-friendly Homes**

In this way, the Romanian consumers show great interest in thermal insulation systems or windows panes. Thus, on the Romanian market the innovative materials are popular because they regulate the indoor humidity, the outdoor temperature and provide good insulation.

**Eco-friendly Clothes**

The eco-friendly clothes are made primarily of two types of materials: the natural and renewable and the best known of which are bamboo, organic cotton and respectively recyclable materials, ie PET, polyester or cardboard. Although they are biodegradable, they are long lasting and the natural material quality being much better than any synthetic product. Bamboo fibers which have truly special qualities: antibacterial, atiperspirante and anti UV radiation are noteworthy in this regard.

The Earth Collection brand is worth mentioning on the Romanian market in . All brand collections are made of natural fibers, silk, hemp, wool and nettle. The most important and most used is cotton, 100% organic, which is known for its its refreshing qualities and because it's soft and delicate with the skin.

The most interested customers for this type of products are young people, women and especially those with higher incomes but also with a high level of education.
Eco Packaging

The biodegradable packaging is an important tool for solving the sustainability issues faced by major brands. Sugar cane and lactic acid extracted from corn, used in the manufacture of plastics, cellulose from eucalyptus wood, palm leaves, starch etc. should be mentioned among the raw materials which successfully replace existing solutions. They are already used in our country for the manufacture of packaging.

The use of this type of packaging offers several advantages among which we can mention the reduction of production costs, the reduction of energy consumption and carbon emissions and the product innovation opportunity.

Green bags represent perhaps the best known type of green packaging in Romania. The demand for promotional bags is increasingly higher and consumers are aware of the impact of plastic bags on the environment. It should be mentioned here the involvement of the large retail chains, which in order to discourage the use of plastic bags, no longer offer as a gift. Also, reusable bags are the top choice for the eco-friendly promotional products.

Another noteworthy example is the Coca-Cola Romanian, which launched on the local market a new packaging produced at a rate of up to 30% of plants. The packaging manufactured using PlantBottle technology is used for bottles for mineral and sparkling water Dorna and White Spring. By this action, Coca-Cola continues the strategy begun in 2012, when it launched the package that contains up to 25% less plastic.

According The Green Eurobarometer mentioned above, it appears that in terms of environmentally friendly packaging, the Romanians are not too interested. Thus, 56% of consumers do not take this into consideration when they buy a product.

Eco-Friendly Toys

A new trend that is beginning to manifest on the Romanian market, although still shyly, is the request for Eco-friendly toys. They are made of durable materials such as wood, natural rubber, organic cotton, being biodegradable and aiming to protect children who use them, and the environment, on long term.

Social Involvement of the Brand

The Romanians seem to be quite sensitive to the social mission of the brand. Thus, 68% of them take account of campaigns in which the manufacturers are involved but, on condition that the price and product quality to be the same, said the Eurobarometer' results in 2008.

Conclusions and Future Research Directions

From the above listed it results that in terms of the green consumption behavior of the Romanians there are still many problems: for example, it is unclear to what extent consumers are willing to accept the higher price of the eco products if they have available classical cheaper products. Also, legislation in this field exerts serious pressure on businesses, which are transmitted also on their customers generating effects to the consumer purchasing behaviour.

Another element that needs further investigation is the behavior with respect to the eco-friendly services. It is important to know the environmental impact of services, aiming, in this respect, providing the best results for consumers using a minimum of materials and energy.

In Romania, in order to successfully promote responsible consumption, messages should include the social, environmental and ethical benefits of the products.

In order to set new goals of increasing customer satisfaction strategy, new the green dimension should be taken into account. This requires collecting and analyzing information regarding: the
technical quality of products, the reputation quality, the quality of services, the quality personal relationships, the perception of price and the green dimension (Sima, V., Gheorghe, I., 2009).

In order to evaluate consumer satisfaction in this regard, the development of a specific set of green indicators could be important.

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