

Generation Y's sustainability attitude-behaviour gap

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ABSTRACT: This paper intends to study the gap between the attitude Millennial consumers (or Generation Y) have towards sustainability and sustainable purchasing habits and what they actually do in terms of their green purchasing behaviour. In order to understand this gap, some internal and external influencing factors were obtained from the literature review which can positively or negatively influence the green purchasing behaviour of the Millennial consumers. They are: Awareness, Financial availability, Personal benefits, Subjective norm and Trust, and were analyzed in the form of a questionnaire that was applied to Millennials across Portugal. To further this research, some of the influencing factors were selected in order to obtain a better understanding of the attitude-behaviour gap regarding the purchase of sustainable footwear. With this paper it is possible to conclude that although Gen Y's attitude towards sustainability is very positive, they still don't have a green purchasing behaviour.

1 INTRODUCTION

These days, the survival of the human being is not so much a matter of how many we are, but how much space that each of us takes up on planet Earth, how does it become necessary to produce to satisfy the individual consumption, the amount that each one of us consumes energy, or, the waste produced by each person in a certain space of time. All the factors mentioned above form the ecological footprint (Kiperstok A., 2005).

According to Canciglieri JR. et al. (2011) it is necessary to use the natural resources of our planet with enough awareness, so that future generations are not affected by the current lack of sustainable planning.

The fashion industry is evolving at a fast pace manner and witnessing situations of contradictions: On one hand, consumers are becoming more conscious of the impact of their purchasing behaviour, and willing to support a more sustainable fashion industry but on the other hand are complying with unsustainable business models where production is achieved to the lowest price in the shortest time possible (Morgan L. & Birtwistle G., 2009).

Consumers are an important part of the fashion system and can create a valuable influence in the pursuit of sustainability in the fashion industry. There are several aspects to consider when analyzing fashion consumers and sustainability: The consumer knowledge about sustainability, consumer behaviour and consumption habits and feelings associated with sustainable consumption. In fact, the attitude and the behaviour of consumers are in line with the rapid production. Encouraged by low prices and heavily influenced by marketing campaigns and constant changes of trends, consumers tend to speed up their fashion consumption (Birtwistle G. & Moore C. M., 2006).

According to Zemke R. (2001), the new consumers, or the generation Y (Millennials) are defined as a group of people born more or less between 1980 and 2000 and their core values include confidence, loyalty to civic duty, sociability, morality, intelligence and diversity.

Millennials maintain a positive attitude in relation to sustainability in general. Young consumers are very aware of the opportunities that companies have to help the environment and reduce the ecological footprint. Also, this is a generation that thinks that it is the companies' duty to invest in a better environment and society by producing products in a sustainable way. However, there is a clear contradiction between how the Millennial generation thinks about sustainability and what they effectively do when it comes to a sustainable consumption (Schweitzer L. & Lyons S. T., 2010).

That way, for young consumers, green attitudes are not in any case predictions of behaviour (McDougle L. et al., 2011 and Paladino & Serena, 2012). Hume M. (2010) stresses that there is a clear pattern of contradiction between what Generation Y knows and thinks with what they actually do in regards of purchasing 'green'.

In sum, the main goal of this paper is to understand the gap between what Portuguese Millennials think about sustainability and what they actually do in their life to promote a more sustainable lifestyle.

2 STATE OF ART

2.1 *Sustainable design*

Based on the desire of preserving the environment without sacrificing economic growth and social development, emerges the concept of sustainable development. This concept has evolved to a sustainability perspective that brings together three vital aspects: environmental, economic and social. Nowadays design should incorporate the principles of sustainability in order to work with the natural world and not impoverish the remaining resources on the planet. A sustainable design has several names, such as "Eco-Design", "Green", "Eco-conscious", and its meaning depends on the context, the situation and the social, cultural, financial, and of course, environmental impacts (Brundtland G.H., 1991). A sustainable design aims to create value by finding the triple bottom line: economic, environmental and social benefits. (Charter M. & Tischner U., 2001). As stated by the Brundtland report, Our Common Future (WCED 1987, p. 41), sustainability is defined as the development that meets the needs of the present with yourself compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

When added to the design, Vezzoli C. & Manzini E. (2008) agree that the environmental requirements must be considered from the first phase of the design process, as well as cost, performance, legal, cultural and aesthetic requirements. Niinimäki K. (2011) stresses that the fashion industry has focused more on technical and financial aspects, and not so much on sustainable issues.

A successful and sustainable design follows and complies with strict criteria and considers in response to customers, users, participants, people, marketing, company, brand, channel, culture and environment. A sustainable design is created for and about customers as people and not just as consumers. So, the design has a healthy result for the ecosystem (Shedroff N. & Lovins L. H., 2009).

It is imperative that designers first understand the overall situation, before beginning the creative process. So, the sustainable design becomes a process that addresses a problem and a specific need, combining different fronts, not only through research, but also focusing on detailed issues. Designers have a responsibility to be involved in the entire process of creating product, through the adoption of life-cycle solutions, which reduces the environmental impact. Informed decisions about where, how, when and who will produce the product comply with the principles of sustainable design. The real challenge is not creating just another green and eco-friendly product, but to create something that adds real value for the consumer (Shedroff N. & Lovins L. H., 2009).

2.2 *Millennials as 'green' consumers*

A report from the University of Borås (2012) has shown that there is a gap between the concern for the environment of consumers and their daily actions. This is seen as an indication

that consumers don't need more information about the negative environmental aspects of consumption, but argue that consumers need multiple measures to enable them to act more environmentally friendly.

Isenhour C. (2010) states that no matter how aware, reflective, concerned with sustainability and committed to do less environmental impact individuals are, but we're influenced by the societies in which we live. It also states that people are social creatures whose attitudes, behaviours and actions not only reflect their own personal values but who are also formed and highly influenced by a consumer culture complex.

Isenhour C. (2010) adds that corporate leadership should complement the responsibility of the consumer and public policies and programmes should be implemented to encourage the process and that mutual cooperation is the only way to carry out a significant change in the long run on the planet. Simply providing information to consumers about the nature of ethical purchases, or even appeal to their moral values to try to invoke a change of behaviour, probably will not create a anti-consumerism movement of unethical or irresponsible environmentally brands (Eckhardt M. et al., 2010).

3 RESEARCH METHODS

Since only studying the green attitudes will not produce conclusive results on the behaviour of young consumers to buy green products, it is interesting to know what factors influence the attitude-behaviour relationship. Several studies suggest that there is a difference of attitude of green purchasing behaviour due to the complex nature of personal and situational influences (Csutora M., 2012; Kolkailah S.K., et al., 2012).

Personal factors are internal influences. The attitude is a personal factor important in the purchase of sustainable products but doesn't explain why the young consumers don't buy this type of products. Other examples of personal factors are awareness, trust, priorities, emotion and control (to the extent that a consumer believes to have control over the events that affect) (Csutora M., 2012).

Situational influences are the external influences that a person cannot control, but which affect the relation attitude-behaviour. Examples of situational factors: time, opportunity, money or the ability to perform the desired behaviour (Ajzen I., 1991).

Csutora M. (2012) also states that to strengthen the relationship between sustainable attitudes and buying sustainable products, is of great importance that the influence factors serve as support. Even consumers with a sustainable negative attitude tend to buy green when the factors of influence are highly favorable, while consumers with a sustainable positive attitude may be discouraged from buying green products when the factors of influence are highly restrictive.

The following aspects present the possible factors influencing the attitude-behaviour relationship, identified in the literature review and will be explained in the results and discussion of this paper. These factors can positively or negatively influence the green purchasing behaviour of the Millennial consumers, and are: Awareness, Financial availability, Personal benefits, Subjective norm and Trust. That way, each of the influencing factors stated above will now be analyzed allowing a better understanding of the Generation Y's sustainability perceptions and consumption habits in Portugal. A questionnaire was built in order to obtain answers to these particular factors and was shared with Millennials from all across Portugal. In total, 635 answers were obtained. All statements regarding the analysis of the factors were constructed using a Likert scale (1 – Strongly disagree; 2 – Disagree; 3 – Neither agree nor disagree; 4 – Agree; 5 – Strongly agree). After a more general approach regarding Millennial's consumption habits, some of the influencing factors were selected in order to obtain a better understanding of the attitude-behaviour gap regarding the purchase of sustainable fashion, in this case, footwear.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, each of the influencing factors is going to be analyzed according to the results of the questionnaire that was applied to Portuguese Millennials. From the 635 responses,

67,7% were female and 32,3% male. Regarding their age, 48,2% are between 17 and 20, 31,2% between 21 and 25, 11,8% for the 26 to 30 years and 8,8% for the Millennials with ages between 31 and 37.

4.1 *Awareness*

Consumer awareness is defined as the amount of time that was spent in the processing of information about green and sustainable products (Baker W. et al., 1986). It is important that consumers are aware of the fact that buying green can be a criterion of purchase (Jones S. & Eden C., 1981).

Regarding the questionnaire, to the statement "I'm aware that I should consume green", 471 Millennials answered positively, (34,2% for "Agree" and 40% for "Strongly agree"), however when they were asked "For me it is important to consume green" their responses, although positive, weren't as positive as the previous statement, having 258 answers for the "Agree" (174) and "Strongly agree" (84). Out of the 635, 141 answers were negative, with 94 Millennials answering "Disagree" and 47 "Strongly disagree". Also, it is interesting to note that, when asked "I believe that by buying green, I can contribute positively to the environment", a smashing majority (75,5%) answered "Agree" (38%) and "Strongly agree" (37,5%).

4.2 *Financial availability*

The financial availability to purchase green products has a strong negative influence on the behaviour of buying. According to Kollmuss A. & Agyeman J. (2006) a necessary condition to buy products of this type is that the price and quality of these products must be comparable to the regular products that a consumer would normally buy. However, the sustainable products are often more expensive than the regular and consumers are unwilling to incur any additional cost (Kolkailah S.K. et al., 2012).

However, the results from the questionnaire are not totally in line with these conclusions. To the statement "I don't buy green because it is expensive", only 5,2% answered "Strongly agree" and 17,8% "Agree". This way, 47,6% (302) of Millennials seem to believe that the higher price for green products isn't a barrier for a possible purchase. But what is interesting in these results, is that, even though the majority feel that the higher price isn't a barrier, 199 Millennials are not willing to pay extra, and 174 are. So opinions are divided and the some more barriers are still to identify.

4.3 *Personal benefits*

Personal benefits, personal concern or personal interest, all refer to the efforts that a person has to do to satisfy their needs and desires. Consumers will assess whether the expected behaviour (for example, what to do) corresponds with their own personal concerns (Davis I., 2012). There is the tendency to decide in favor of their own interests, which is thus related to the fact that consumers often fail to estimate the actual impact of buying green in their lives (Rokka J. & Uusitalo J., 2008). A consumer will buy a green product, when in addition to the environmental benefit, they realize some benefit individual direct in acquiring the product (Nottage A., 2008).

To the statement "I find personal benefits in consuming green", "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" obtained 123 and 225 responses, respectively. This way, 54,8% of all the Millennials believe that consuming green is something that will add value to their life and that is beneficial. However, despite these results, the gap between attitude and behaviour is becoming more noticeable. To the statement "I buy green products", only 3,8% answered "Strongly agree" and 12,8% "Agree". On the negative spectrum of the answers, 17% answered "Strongly Disagree" and 27,4% "Disagree". Even though the majority of Millennials agree that there are personal benefits in consuming green, only a small part actually does buy and consume green.

4.4 *Subjective norm*

The subjective norm is the assessment of feelings in relation to the perception of what the people most important to them think (friends, family, influencers, teachers), when a decision to purchase green is being considered. The normative influences strongly the intention that an individual has to act when it comes to the purchase of green products (Ajzen I., 2012). Still, the social pressure from their friends and family becomes an explanatory variable to their purchase intentions, states Vermeir I. & Verbeke W. (2006).

In order to understand if other opinions have an important role in the green purchasing decision moment, Millennials answered to the following statement: "I value my friends and family's opinion regarding the products I buy and consume" and also to "If my friends and family buy green it is most likely that I do the same". To the first statement Millennials seem not to care about what their loved ones have to say about what they consume, having "Strongly Disagree" a total of 178 answers and "Disagree" 180 answers, both representing a majority with 56,3% combined. The answers to the second statement shows a balance between the negative answers ("Strongly Disagree" with 16,4% and "Disagree" with 22,4%) and the positive ones ("Strongly Agree" with 7,7% and "Agree" with 23,8%). This shows that the majority of Millennials don't care about what other think about their consumption habits, however they can be influenced in to consuming green if their major influencers do it.

4.5 *Trust*

The trust factor or skepticism is concerning the motivation of an organization to engage in green products and is often mentioned in the literature as a being a factor of negative influence on attitude-behaviour relationship. Research suggests that the perceptions that consumers have regarding the companies' green attitude results in a conclusion on the company's efforts (Drumwright M.E., 1996).

Regarding the questionnaire, in order to understand if Millennials trust companies' efforts in being green they were asked to answer, "I trust companies that claim to be green". Only 9,4% answered "Strongly Agree" and 26,8% "Agree". "Neither Agree nor Disagree" had an impressive 40% and the remaining answers were negative (6,1% to "Strongly Disagree" and 17,5% to "Disagree"). Low levels of confidence concerning the motivation of an organization to engage in green products would impact particularly Generation Y, since this generation is known for being more skeptical regarding commercial messages than the generations previous (Schmeltz L., 2012).

But how do Millennials think about buying 'green fashion'? Some of the influencing factors "Awareness", "Financial Availability" and "Trust" were now selected in order to obtain a better understanding of the attitude-behaviour gap regarding the purchase of footwear:

Regarding the "Awareness" factor, Millennials were asked "Are you aware of any sustainable footwear brand?", 93,1% said "No", which means that out of 635 only 44 knew about a sustainable footwear brand. Also, to the statement "I search about the footwear materials before buying them" only 23,4% answered positively ("Agree" and "Strongly Agree").

The "Financial availability" was also applied to understand the purchasing behaviour of sustainable footwear, and therefore Millennials had to answer to que statement "I'm willing to pay extra for sustainable footwear". As a result, "Neither Agree nor Disagree" was the answer with the higher percentage, with 40,3%. "Strongly Agree" was chosen by 8,3% and "Strongly Disagree" by 6,6%.

In order to understand the "Trust" Millennials had in sustainable footwear brands, they had to answer the following statement: "I believe that sustainable footwear has higher quality". Only 42 answered "Strongly Agree", and 159 "Agree". In the negative spectrum of the answers, 22 answered "Strongly Disagree" and 40 "Disagree". Both positive and negatives answers were not chosen by the majority of Millennials as "Neither Agree nor Disagree" was selected by a smashing 342 people (53,9%).

5 CONCLUSIONS

After selecting and analysing the influencing factors that can have a positive or negatively impact the gap between Millennials' attitude and behaviour concerning sustainability and sustainable fashion, some interesting conclusions are now possible to obtain.

Millennials are a generation that are fully aware of their role in society and therefore know that they should consume green and that by doing so they are contributing positively to the environment and improving their lives as well. This generation believes that being green adds value to their life and that is extremely beneficial. In what comes to fashion, in particular, footwear, only a very small percentage knew about a sustainable footwear brand, and only a quarter of the sample claimed to search on the internet about footwear materials before they buy.

When the price aspect is considered their beliefs seem to not be as important. It is a known fact that sustainable products have a higher price and Portuguese Millennials don't seem to see be willing to incur in extra costs to consume green, including buying sustainable footwear.

Also, their decisions about what to consume can be influenced by their close ones (family, friends) but in the end they will only choose to consume green if they really see a benefit for themselves.

Trust wise, it is also possible to note that low levels of trust negatively influence the attitude-behaviour in purchasing green. The majority of Millennials don't seem to trust companies that claim to be sustainable and therefore their decisions about what to consume don't seem to take the companies statements in consideration. They need to see to believe. Also, this generation still thinks that sustainable footwear doesn't have the same quality as 'regular' ones. This may be due to their lack of research and interest in these types of products.

In sum, it is possible to conclude that even though Portuguese Millennials have a very positive attitude towards sustainability and green products, this attitude is not reflected in actual behaviour. They are aware that they should consume green, but the price is still a very big barrier and it overweighs their personal benefits in living a more sustainable lifestyle. Also, Millennials don't spend too much time researching sustainable alternatives and have very little knowledge in the matter.

The main limitation of this study is that the results from the analyzed sample are 100% Portuguese, therefore it is not possible to extrapolate these results to other countries. Even though it is the same generation worldwide, each culture has its own impacts on the Millennials education, and therefore, consumption habits.

As future research it would be very interesting to add 'Marketing Efforts' as an influencing factor by analyzing the marketing strategies done by sustainable footwear brands and how they engage with the Millennial generation. Also, it would be interesting to study different ways to increase consumer awareness in what comes to buying green, having the 'Marketing Efforts' factor as the starting point.

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