

The Role of the Consumer's Demographic Factors in Social Consumption

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Abstract: Purpose: This communication aims at explaining a relation of causality between the demographic factors of the consumer and the intention of buying ecological products. This paper starts with a literature review aiming at constructing a model that can relate the personal factors to the intention of buying ecological products.

Methodology: A survey, equally distributed between males and females, was conducted on 400 persons in different Lebanese regions. The researchers used SPSS version 22 and the ANOVA method in order to analyze data.

Findings: The results show that some demographic factors significantly affect the intention of buying ecological products. For example, females showed more commitment towards the social consumption, where also the residents of Beirut and Mount Lebanon were more inclined to purchase ecological products than other provinces' residents.

Research limitations: One of the limitations of this paper is the non-incorporation of the consumers' personal factors such as their social awareness in the research model; further researches will solve this issue.

Practical Implication: The study is particularly useful for companies aiming at using the CSR as a strategy to attract consumers interested in and concerned with social issues and causes. The company can use the findings as a segmentation basis for its CSR initiatives.

Originality: This paper accumulated different demographic factors and explained their impact on the social consumption in the Lebanese territory which lacks such researches.

Index Terms: Keywords: CSR, Consumer, Demographic factors, social consumption.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of the rise of major environmental perils, the inconsiderate usage of resources and the context of globalization, the concept of the socially responsible consumer has advanced to combat bad behavior. Indeed, the act of consumption today has a decisive economic and social role. Moreover, the role of ethics and morality in consumer behavior is growing and becoming more and more important. Studies have revealed that social consumption is affected by different variables including the consumer's demographic variables such as age, gender, etc.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following work explains the concept of social consumption along with the construction of a model expressing the relationship between the different demographic factors and social consumption.

A. Social Consumption:

According to Webster, one of the first authors in this field, the socially responsible consumer is "a consumer who takes into account the public consequences of his private consumption and who tries to use his purchasing power to induce changes in society"[26]

The definition presented by Webster provides the same meaning as the one Robert stated in 1995, but it evokes it in a clearer and more precise way. Robert considers that a consumer is socially responsible when he "buys goods or services that he perceives to have a positive impact on his environment and uses his purchasing power to express his social concerns"[25]

In this same perspective, Moher, Web and Harris defined the socially responsible behavior of the consumer as "a consumer behavior that bases the acquisition, use and disposition of a product on a desire to minimize harmful and destructive effects and maximize long-term benefits for society" [22]

In 2009, the previous definition became more developed to allow a broader definition of the concept. Socially responsible behavior became: "a behavior of a consumer who bases his decisions on desires to minimize or eliminate harmful effects and to maximize the beneficial impacts on society in one or more stages of the consumption process. This process includes information retrieval, acquisition, use, disposition and post-disposition".[16]

Socially responsible consumption can still be defined by using a different conceptualization based on two opposing visions: utilitarian vision "personal interest" and "normative" ethical vision. In both cases, consumer behavior is motivated by personal interest and social interest.[2]

In addition, some researchers have attempted to use Carroll's (1979) business model to define CSR using four levels: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. The economic responsibility of the consumer results in the purchase of goods and services satisfying the needs of the consumer at minimum costs. The legal responsibility of the consumer manifests itself when the consumer adheres to the presented legal framework and does not buy the products of the companies which are not in conformity with the law. As a result, the ethical responsibility of the consumer appears while buying as the consumer considers the values and

standards of society and does what is fair, just and right. Finally, the philanthropic responsibility of the consumer is represented by his purchases and actions that help him become a good citizen (Canel-Depitre, 2008).

Socially responsible consumption also refers to the purchase of ecological, ethical, green products, etc. These terms refer to products, compared to products of the same type, as having lower environmental impacts. In fact, these products do not necessarily affect the environment in a way that is considered positive or negative [17]

Being a socially responsible consumer also means to purchase the products of companies engaged in corporate social responsibility "CSR". Carroll, one of the founders of this concept, defines the CSR as « what the society expects from organizations in economic, legal, ethical and voluntary matters at a given time ». [3] The European commission, in its Green Paper, defines the CSR as the voluntary commitment of companies in order to improve society and make a cleaner environment through their commercial activities and their relations with their stakeholders. [9] This definition reveals the three-dimensional aspect of the CSR "social, environmental and economic".

In 2006, the interdepartmental commission [10] on sustainable development gives its own version and defines the CSR as "a process of improvement, in the frame of which, companies integrate voluntarily, systematically and coherently, considerations of social order, environmental and economic in their management in coordination with their stakeholders". [7] Afterwards, the CSR is considered by the ICSD (Interdepartmental commission for sustainable development) as a long term improving process including responsible considerations in the management of companies. [7] In this regard, social consumption can be measured by the intention of buying ecological products.

B. Types of social consumption

The socially responsible behaviour of the consumer can take different forms according to the categorization criterion used by each author in this field. One can first classify consumers into four categories according to the classification of companies established by Carroll in 1979 (Canel-Depitre, 2008). The first level is that of reactive behaviour where the consumer denies any personal responsibility and does not change his buying and consuming habits. The second level is the defensive behavior of combating responsibility while admitting it. The level that follows is the accommodating behavior, in which the consumer accepts responsibility and tries to be responsible as much as possible in the light of his information. The last level concerns proactive behaviour, the highest level of responsibility, where the consumer searches for information before buying and anticipating liability.

Another author describes four types of consumers by differentiating them on the basis of their consciences and ethical purchasing intentions. The first type is the "occupier and ethical" consumer, it boycotts unethical companies and supports those that are ethical. He is willing to communicate about ethical behaviors of companies but he usually focuses on the ethical problems related to the environment. The second type is the "confused and uncertain" consumer who likes to make responsible purchasing decisions but is uncertain of which companies are ethical. This consumer is interested in knowing more information about the ethical

behaviors of companies. The third type is that of the "cynical and support" consumer who does not believe that companies are really ethical, does not change his buying behaviour, and usually evaluates the price and the quality of the product. Finally comes the "unconscious or forgetful" consumer who does not consider the ethical behaviors of companies in his purchasing decisions since he has no knowledge about CSR. By explaining the CSR concept, it is possible to push this "unconscious or forgetful" consumer to be responsible in his consumption. [4]

Mohr in 2001 proposed to decompose consumer behavior into 4 groups from the non-responsible to the very responsible (Mohr, 2001). Each of these groups is divided into 2 subgroups. The first group is that of pre-contemplation consumers. This type does not consider CSR in its purchasing decisions. The first sub-group does not believe that companies should be engaged in responsible behavior. The second sub-group believes that companies must behave responsibly, but does not consider that their purchasing decisions can affect businesses. The contemplating consumer who forms the second group has more efforts in the field of social responsibility. The first sub-group believes that companies can improve society, and consumers in the second sub-group believe that the level of their responsible purchases is not enough to have an effect on society. The action Group is the third effective group. People have more beliefs about CSR, but this is still a non-main factor to consider in the purchase decision. The first sub-group feels that there is not enough information on CSR and the second sub-group is highly cynical about CSR information. Finally, we have the group of maintainers who base their purchasing decisions on the basis of CSR. The first subgroup is mainly driven by environmental causes. The second sub-group believes that consumption is a key tool for controlling the actions of companies.

Another segmentation of consumers is carried out by [1] who breaks down the consumer into three segments. The first segment is that of ethical consumers who are willing to pay more to buy an ethical product. They give more importance to the good consequences they will have as a result of their green purchases than to other factors such as price and quality. The second segment is represented by semi-ethical consumers who consider the attributes of the products and the social consequences of their consumptions as having even importance. Finally, the selfish consumers base their decisions on purchasing products on the basis of the price-quality ratio, and on having a suspicious attitude regarding socially responsible behaviors.

Depending on the type of CSR, consumers' responses to business activities can take various forms. The latter can also manifest itself in the consumer by a leakage behavior translated by the refusal to buy non-ethical or non-ecological products "the boycott", or by a positive attitude towards the products considered ecological. [5] On one side comes boycotting. The best-known example of a boycott is Nike. This brand is boycotted by consumers following the discovery of the poor working conditions involved by the company, specifically with regard to child labor in the undeveloped countries. The purpose of this boycott is to influence the company's strategy towards more respect for its



responsibilities [15] Boycotting, thus, is a type of sanction on the part of consumers to return the company to its societal responsibilities. On the other hand, there is the consumer whose purchases are of a social nature. During his purchases, the consumer considers the societal concerns of companies and buys the products of companies with a satisfactory level of commitment to societal responsibility.

C. Drivers of social consumption

This section explains the individual factors affecting the level of the consumer's responsible commitment in purchasing decisions. These factors can be grouped into three general categories. Firstly, there are the individual benefits expected from social behavior. These benefits consist of comparing the incomes and costs, and admitting the behavior that gives it a positive profitability. This perspective is directed more towards the personal benefit of the consumer. Secondly, some individuals consider themselves to be responsible for individual social problems and try to change the situation through certain procurement actions. And, finally, there are the demographic factors of the consumer.

1) *The individual benefits expected from the behavior*

Several authors suggest that certain socially responsible purchasing behaviors are influenced by individual rather than social interests, and that the individual benefits expected from this behavior will have to be higher than the costs. Most consumers in this category consider that companies should adopt responsible commitments, but these consumers are not prepared to bear the consequences of this behavior, which can lead to high prices or Lower quality [1] Even if some consumers say they are willing to pay more to buy ethical products, the majority do so only if this purchase does not affect the various benefits [11] In this perspective, most consumers in this category are not prepared to obtain social attributes for the benefit of other "price, quality, etc." base functions. These explanations further indicate that CSR commitment is not a sufficient factor to influence the purchase of consumers in this category. Conversely, these consumers are more inclined to buy products from non-social enterprises provided they can withdraw profits from this purchase such as the minimum cost [12]

In the same horizon, some consumers believe that the achievement of socially responsible purchasing behavior requires additional efforts that they are not prepared to perform. Where appropriate, these efforts alter consumer purchasing decisions and move them away from responsible behavior [13] As a result, the consumer takes responsible behavior if his expected benefits are more important than the effort required. This analysis coincides with the idea that the decision to purchase an ecological product for some consumers is derived from an economic analysis based on the comparison between costs and the benefits of behavior.

In conclusion, for this category of consumers, costs affect behaviors in a negative way while rewards favor them.

2) *Individual social Responsibility*

Current consumption is turning more and more towards the field of social responsibility. Presumed consumers with individual social responsibility believe that their purchasing decisions contribute to the solution of society's problems; their personal norms affect their behavior. Among these same

consumers are people who are endowed with certain individual standards, and that is why they seek to reduce their sense of guilt during a non-ethical behavior or purchase. They use techniques to mitigate the negative effects of their behavior based on their self-concept. These techniques are grouped into five forms which allow consumers to deny their responsibility and project it on others. The first form is the denial of any responsibility through giving excuses to unethical behavior by referring to uncontrollable factors. The second is the denial of damage, which explains that his unethical behavior has no negative consequences on others. The denial of victim is the third denial where the consumer explains his behavior by stating the fact that the victim deserves the consequences. Fourth, the consumer considers that the main reason for his unethical behavior is being legitimate and loyal to a certain product. Finally, the consumer justifies his unethical behavior by condemning his accusers who still have unethical behaviors., [25]

In this analysis, there are consumers who are influenced by their individual standards during purchases, but their measures of what is responsible are limited to the legality. They consider ethical behavior when it is legal. For them, an activity is considered ethical or responsible when it is legal. So it has to do with the ethical behavior not the responsible one, and this usually discourages them to adopt socially responsible behaviors) [4].

3) *Sociodemographic factors*

Heterogeneity in consumer attitudes towards ecological products is a determining factor in responsible consumption. Studies have found that women for example are more inclined than men to responsible consumption as gender is an important determinant of behavior. Age also affects the attitude of consumers towards environmentally friendly products, so young people have more tendencies than old ones to buy these products. The level of income plays an essential role in socially responsible consumption where low-income consumers report fewer positive attitudes towards ecological products than others with high incomes. Moreover, the level of education affects consumer attitudes towards green products. Individuals with a high level of education have more positive attitudes towards ecological products than people with low levels. In addition, executives have tendencies to buy green products more than workers, thus, the profession or socio-Professional category is a determining factor in the socially responsible consumption. These factors and their impact on the social consumption will be developed in the following section.

D. Research Model:

The literature on this concept has revealed that the intention to purchase ecological products depends on several demographic factors of each individual. The following seven factors were estimated by our readings: the place of residence, the age, the gender, the profession, the level of income, the level of education and leisure.

1) *The place of residence:*

The place of residence is considered to be a determining factor in the socially responsible consumption [18]. This can be explained by the existence of different cultures in each

place. Research has found that residents of cities and capital are more prone to responsible consumption. We have broken up the housing in Lebanon according to the different provinces. This analysis brings us back to the following sub-hypothesis:

H1: The inhabitants of Beirut have more intention to buy the ecological products than the inhabitants of the other provinces.

2) *The Age:*

Individuals with more inclination towards the purchase of green products are the youngest [14] Age is considered to be a determining factor in responsible consumption. According to the Credoc Barometer, the interest in ecological products decreases steadily with age. As with those who have lower incomes in general, young people face financial constraints in their purchasing decisions. Similarly, the literature suggests that young people are more inclined to buy green products by considering that all things are equal, specifically with respect to the level of income. The following sub-hypothesis will be as follows:

H2: Young people are more willing to buy the green products than the older ones.

3) *The gender:*

Another demographic factor affecting responsible purchasing intent is the gender of the consumer; studies have found that women are more inclined towards the purchase of ecological products. Surveys conducted by the OECD have revealed that the consumer of ecological products has a female profile. An additional study performed in 2011 in France found that 48% of women versus 44% of men report the purchase of an ecological product per month Commissariat général au développement durable – Service de l'économie, de l'évaluation et de l'intégration du développement durable.[8] In this perspective, the sub-hypothesis will be as follows:

H3: Women are more inclined to buy ecological products than men.

4) *The profession:*

The profession still plays an important role in determining the responsible purchasing intention. The profession is a determining factor in the decision to purchase ecological products It seems interesting to ask about the Professional category that contains the most responsible consumers. For this, the sub-hypothesis that illustrates this point is:

H4: The consumer profession affects his intention to purchase ecological products.

5) *The level of income:*

In general, ecological products are considered more expensive than other products, which increases the purchase of green products based on income growth. When compared with consumers who have low incomes, those with high-income have been more into buying environmentally friendly products (Commissariat général au développement durable – Service de l'économie, de l'évaluation et de l'intégration du développement durable) Accordingly, a positive relationship exists between the high level of income

and the intention to buy the green products. Thus, we expose the sub-hypothesis that reflects this situation in the following way:

H5: Individuals with high-income are more inclined to buy ecological products than individuals with low-income.

6) *The education level:*

The level of education is an important factor for consumers to be concerned with socially responsible consumption; the most educated consumers are those who declare more intention to buy green products (Hans Ruediger Kaufmann, 2012). Consumers' views on ecological products and their environmental concerns are still related to their levels of education, and the higher the level of diploma, the more the consumer declares the intention to buy the green products (Commissariat général au développement durable – Service de l'économie, de l'évaluation et de l'intégration du développement durable, The sub-hypothesis that can prove these assumptions is as follows:

H6: Higher-level individuals are more likely to purchase ecological products than individuals with lower degrees.

7) *The hobbies:*

Interests and hobbies determine an important part of people's culture; those who like to read are different from those who like video games. The people who practice sports are different in terms of their environmental consciences and their intentions to buy ecological products from those who like to rest For all these considerations, it was interesting to wonder about the impact of different hobbies on the intentions of consumers. The sub-hypothesis in relation will be:

H7: Consumers' hobbies affect their intentions to purchase ecological products.

III. METHODOLOGY:

This document deals with a causality relation between consumers' demographic factors and their intentions of purchasing ecological products. The relation is termed 'social consumption' out of which we use the conclusive causal research. This is why we have adopted a positive research philosophy with a deductive approach. This research uses a quantitative methodology as it depends on using a survey as a strategy.

The survey is a questionnaire that is divided into two parts; the first part is constructed to record the following consumers' demographic factors: Place of residence, Age, Gender, Profession, Revenue, Education level and Hobbies. The second part is intended to measure the intentions to buy ecological products. Five items were used in this regard.

The scale used is the Likert scale in which interviewees are invited to indicate their degrees of agreement or disagreement on a scale from 1: Totally Disagree to 5: Totally Agree.

We made a test on the questionnaire, a Pilot test, before sending it to the general sample of the study .The pretest was performed on 50 interviewees in order to make sure of the clarity of questions and statements. In addition, the pretest helped to verify the interviewees understanding of the questionnaire in its totality. Besides, we made the analysis of the internal coherence of the scale on the pretest's sample. For that

purpose, we calculated the value of the indicator Chronbach Alpha as: $0.785 > 0.65$. This result allows the same conclusion: There is a good coherence between the

asked questions. So, we may declare the reliability of questionnaire in giving good results.

The sample's size concerns 400 interviewees spread over Lebanese provinces and is proportionally distributed among inhabitants of these provinces. Likewise, it was equally distributed between the two genders: 50% females and 50% males. We attributed the collection work to Statistics Lebanon Ltd., one of the most famous and widespread companies specialized in this field.

As for data analysis, we used the software SPSS version 22 in order to apply the ANOVA method.

IV. FINDINGS:

The model considers seven demographic factors that can moderate the impact of the CSR strategy on Behavior: "Place of residence, age, gender, occupation, income level, level of education and leisure".

The analysis of variance "analysis of Variance, ANOVA" applies when one or more discrete qualitative explanatory variables are measured "demographic factors" to study their influence on the distribution of a quantitative variable "Intention of buying ecological products". The interpretation of the ANOVA test is done by comparing the means of the factors with $\alpha = 5\%$ (the risk of error). If Sig is $< \alpha$, the qualitative variable has an effect on the quantitative variable. In other words they are dependent. As a result, if the factors present Sig < 0.05 , then we can compare the averages and test the assumptions as a result.

It should be noted that the intention to purchase ecological products is measured by five items scale as mentioned above. For this purpose the sum of the five items was used in the ANOVA test to represent the intention under a single category, and since each item was measured on a scale from 1 to 5, the intention in the ANOVA test is measured on a scale of 5 to 25 "The sum of the five Items".

A. The place of residence:

In order to ensure the representativeness of the data of all the Lebanese territory, the questionnaires were distributed in proportion to the numbers of the inhabitants in each province [6]. For this, provinces that were created in 2010 as Akkar and Baalbek were not considered among the choices. The results of the SPSS software and the province are as follows:

	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	182.019	5	36.404	5.202	.000
Within Groups	2,757.491	394	6.999		
Total	2,939.510	399			

Since Sig < 0.05 , the Province therefore significantly affects the intention to purchase ecological products. It is possible to compare the averages between the provinces and therefore to identify the provinces that are more inclined towards the purchase of the environmentally friendly products. The following table shows the different averages:

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Beirut	40	19.20	2.255	.357
Mount Lebanon	160	18.75	2.892	.229
North	80	18.23	2.397	.268
South	44	19.00	2.440	.368
Nabatiyeh	24	18.58	2.518	.514
Bekaa	52	16.88	2.706	.375
Total	400	18.47	2.714	.136

It can therefore be concluded that residents in Beirut are the most inclined to buy green products, the South arrives in second place, Mount Lebanon takes the third place, and finally the North residents are the least inclined to buy the ecological products.

B. The Age:

Respondents are represented under five age categories as already mentioned, and the results of the ANOVA test are presented in the following table:

	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	49.797	5	9.959	1.358	.239
Within Groups	2,889.713	394	7.334		
Total	2,939.510	399			

Since Sig = $0.23 > 0.05$, the difference between averages in different age categories is not significant. It can therefore be concluded that age does not affect the intention to purchase ecological products.

C. The gender:

The data collection is carried out in order to equally distribute the samples between the two genders. The results for the ANOVA analysis were as follows:

	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	102.010	1	102.010	14.308	.000
Within Groups	2,837.500	398	7.129		
Total	2,939.510	399			

Sig < 0.05 , the difference between the averages of both genders is then significant. The following table illustrates these averages:

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Females	200	18.97	2.502	.177
Males	200	17.96	2.828	.200
Total	400	18.47	2.714	.136

It can therefore be concluded that women are more inclined than men towards the purchase of ecological products.

D. The profession:

The distribution of the sample



according to the professions has considered the most common professions in Lebanon. The results of the ANOVA test were as follows:

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	118.981	6	19.830	2.763	.012
Within Groups	2,820.529	393	7.177		
Total	2,939.510	399			

Sig<0.05, the difference in averages between professions is significant; the different averages are represented as follows:

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Free Profession	136	17.96	3.052	.262
Student	62	18.84	2.587	.329
Employee	94	18.79	2.719	.280
Trader	12	16.50	3.451	.996
Daily worker	8	19.25	2.765	.977
Doesn't have a fixed work	28	18.64	1.569	.296
Doesn't work	60	18.93	1.912	.247
Total	400	18.47	2.714	.136

The results are shocking. Indeed, the daily employees are the most inclined towards the purchase of ecological products; however traders are the least inclined towards this behavior. In the second place is taken by people who do not work, students come after that, then employees, people who do not have fixed job, and finally those who have free professions. These results oppose our expectations.

E. The income level:

The results from the previous section allow us to estimate that people with the lowest incomes are those who are more inclined towards the purchase of ecological products. The results for the ANOVA analysis were as follows:

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	89.342	6	14.890	2.053	.058
Within Groups	2,850.168	393	7.252		
Total	2,939.510	399			

Sig>0.05, the difference between the averages of the different income categories is not significant. It is not necessary to see the different averages. But for the sake of investigation, the results obtained ensure our expectations; the people with the lowest incomes are more inclined towards the ecological products.

F. The education level:

The difference between the different levels of education was significant as the following table shows:

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	280.876	6	46.813	6.920	.000
Within Groups	2,658.634	393	6.765		
Total	2,939.510	399			

The following table shows the averages for each level of education:

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
PHD	58	18.89	2.232	.197
Master	98	18.87	2.582	.275
License	150	18.00	2.165	.198
Secondary	76	17.74	3.969	.585
Brevet	14	16.57	3.715	.993
Primary	2	14.40	0.000	0.000
Non educated	2	12.00	0.000	0.000
Total	400	18.19	2.714	.136

It can therefore be concluded that the higher the level of education, the more inclined the person is towards the purchase of ecological products.

G. Hobbies:

Finally, we asked each interviewee to present the most preferred hobby in order to know if it is related to the intention to buy the green products. Analysis by the ANOVA test indicates that Sig = 0.291 > 0.05 as shown in the table below. It can therefore be concluded that the type of leisure preferred does not affect the intention to purchase ecological products.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	62.584	7	8.941	1.218	.291
Within Groups	2,876.926	392	7.339		
Total	2,939.510	399			

V. CONCLUSION:

On one hand, It can be said that the place of residence, gender, occupation the level of education significantly affect the intentions to purchase green products. On the other hand, it has been concluded that age, income level and hobbies do not have a significant impact on the intention to purchase green products.

More specifically, residents in Beirut are most inclined to buy green products, the South arrives in second place, Mount Lebanon in third place and finally North residents are the least inclined to consume ecological products. In addition, women are more inclined to buy green products. In addition, the daily employees are most inclined towards the purchase of ecological products. On the other hand traders are the least inclined towards this behavior.

Finally, the higher the level of



education, the more inclined the person is towards the purchase of ecological products.

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