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Embodying #TatakIIT: Factors influencing green purchase intention of MSU-IIT students

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ABSTRACT

Human activities have led to environmental problems that resulted in changes in the climate and the environment. As such, firms are starting to incorporate environment-friendly food products to help solve this issue. Consequently, the Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology (MSU-IIT) addresses the call for action by incorporating in its program curriculums the institutional outcome (#TatakIIT attributes) that relates to being environmentally responsible. Anchored on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), this study investigates the influencing effects of MSU-IIT students' awareness of environment-friendly alternatives (EFA), environmental concern, functionality of EFA, and price sensitivity to their green purchase intention (GPI), with attitude towards EFA as a mediating variable. Further, the moderating effect of the socio-demographic factors were explored. Using Partial Least Square - Structural Equations Modeling, the findings of this study suggest that all the independent variables had a significant influence on the attitude towards EFA implying a greater GPI of said alternatives. This provides evidence that when students are aware about green alternatives and have higher environmental concerns, their attitude towards green products are also intensified. However, it must be noted that the functionality of the green alternative and price still play a role which may suggest that despite being aware of EFA and environmentally concerned, the green alternatives must still be reasonably priced and serve their purpose. Attitude towards EFA successfully mediated the four independent variables and GPI, which further confirms the TPB relationships. Thus, students who have positive attitudes towards EFA are the ones who are more likely to show an intent to purchase these alternatives. However, the socio-demographic factors are deemed to have no moderation effect in the relationships between the independent variables and the attitude towards EFA, except for age. Consequently, it moderately impacts the influence of price sensitivity on the attitude towards EFA.
Keywords: Environment-friendly Alternatives, Green Purchase Intention, Price and Functionality, Theory of Planned Behavior

INTRODUCTION

Climate change has been a prevailing problem for humanity and it has long been suspected that human activity can alter the local climate. While it is hard to pinpoint exactly who is responsible, studies have found that businesses are the top contributor of environmental pollution. According to Dean (2017), 71% of industrial greenhouse gas emissions in the entire world are accounted for by only a hundred companies. As such, companies and even small firms begin to take action in ways such as Corporate Social Responsibility. Firms across the world have committed to working in minimizing the harmful effects of their business activities for the environment.

Many organizations are committing to producing more environmentally friendly products, and as such, an increasing number of environmentally conscious consumers are willing

to get hold of such products (Joshi & Rahman, 2015). However, a study conducted by Lindh et al. (2016) has found that a lot of consumers find it hard to categorize whether a packaging is environmentally friendly or not. Only 8% of the 155 consumer respondents knew or were aware of the detrimental consequences of unsustainable packaging on the environment.

In addition, Lasuin and Ng (2014) states that there is a lack of effective marketing strategies regarding green products. The study focused on university students as they are deemed to compose the most lucrative segment. With prior researchers focusing more on the profile of the green consumers and their demographic statistics, marketers are challenged by the lack of information of green purchase intention, resulting in inadequate and less effective marketing strategies for green products (Aman et al., 2012; Lasuin & Ng, 2014).

Several studies have been done to solve and identify factors that further hinder the progress of lessening the usage of products and packaging that are not environment-friendly to make and/or use. A study by Orzan et al. (2018) has investigated Romanian consumer's attitudes toward eco-friendly packaging. It was found that the price of items coupled with limited consumer budgets and a lack of information are the key hurdles of buying ecological packaging. Dilotsotlhe (2020) explored the relationship of subjective norm, attitude, and perceived behavioral control to the green purchase behavior of millennials and found their substantial effect on the behavioral intention. Popovic (2019) on the other hand has studied the factors that influence consumers' decision to purchase food in eco-friendly packaging. The factors in that study are attributed to demographic factors, external factors such as cultural differences and societal behaviors, and internal factors such as the attitude and knowledge towards environmentally friendly packaging. Accordingly, there is a significant difference between consumer desires and actual behavior when it comes to minimizing the usage of plastic packaging and many consumers hold industry and government responsible for minimizing the usage of plastic.

The Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology (MSU-IIT) aims at producing students who embody the TatakIIT attributes: leader, innovator, excellence, peacebuilder, and cultural- and gender-sensitve, and environmentally responsible. Hence, this study reinvestigated known factors (i.e. anchored on the Theory of Planned Behavior) and the other factors (i.e. price and functionality) that affect green purchase intention in the context of MSU-IIT students. In addition, considering that the Philippines is a developing country where students are held back by economic factors like allowance or income, it is hypothesized that people may value efficiency and convenience of use over their environmental social duties and the harmful environmental effects of conventional packaging. Further, this research incorporates the socio-demographic profile of the respondents as a moderating variable.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Environment-friendly alternatives (EFA)

Environment-friendly alternatives (EFA) or green alternatives are those that do not contaminate the environment and have a lower environmental impact than their traditional counterparts (Mei et al., 2012). They are made to save energy or resources while also minimizing or eliminating harmful waste, pollution, and the use of toxic materials (Ottman et al., 2006). A study by Maichum et al. (2016) have shown that green alternatives which demonstrate sustainable development, are one of the most successful products globally. This is mainly due to the environmental benefits that they impart to consumers, such as superior quality and safety in terms of health of consumers.

A study conducted by Cammarelle et al. (2021) suggests that all variables concerning Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) have a significant and positive relationship with an individual's intention to purchase food products with an environment-friendly packaging. Pro-environmental attitudes, perceived control, social pressure, and consumers' awareness influences the personal intention with regards to purchasing food products with an environment-friendly alternative. Furthermore, perceived benefits such as protection of the environment and reduction of human health risks were significant indicators of pro-environmental behavior. Consumer's attitude towards environmentally packaged food and consumer's attitude towards the brand of the product with respect to the consumer's willingness to buy were tested by Popovic et al. (2020). Implicit and explicit attitudes were determined to have a positive and significant relationship with the willingness of consumers to choose and buy liquid food with an environment-friendly packaging. Results show that seventy-three percent (73%) of the respondents are willing to pay more for food with environment-friendly packaging.

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Green Purchase Intention (GPI)
A study conducted by Vantamay (2018) used data from one thousand (1000) Thai university students. Anchored on TPB, the study concluded that derived attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control as its three independent variables and tested each's relationship with sustainable consumption behavior. Further, Paul et al. (2016) using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), found that that attitude was influenced the most by the respondents' environmental concern and attitude influenced purchase intention the most out of the three variables of TPB.

Attitude Towards GPI
Chen and Deng (2016) had mentioned that green attitude is the individual's degree of positive or negative valuation to green purchase behavior. The attitude of consumers toward EFA is how consumers valueEFA and their consideration of what outcome it may have. Several studies have shown that a positive consumer attitude toward environmentally friendly packaging is important in the intention of the consumers to purchase food in environmentally friendly packaging (Popovic et al., 2019). Based on TPB, it was found that attitude is the strongest predictor of intention in purchasing green products while subjective norm was found to be the weakest (Paul et al., 2016).

Awareness about EFA
Prior research documented that the lack of knowledge about the negative environmental effects of conventional yet unsustainable packaging and its difference with environmentally friendly packaging (Popovic et al., 2019) makes it difficult for consumers to purchase EFA. In an explorative study conducted by Lindh et al. (2016), the findings concluded that only eight percent (8%) of the 155 consumer-respondents had knowledge or were aware of the negative effects of packaging on the environment. Consequently, it was found out that fifty-six percent (56%) had a difficult time judging the environmental impacts of packaging.

In another explorative study conducted by Scott and Vigar-Ellis (2014), it was found that all of its 323 South African consumers had exhibited limited knowledge of how to differentiate normal packaging with environmentally friendly packaging. Other key findings were that the respondents had limited knowledge of the effects of both environmentally friendly packaging and normal packaging.

Environmental Concern and GPI
Green alternatives appeal to most consumers because of the sustainability and environmental benefits they promise. Aside from that, business firms tend to consider environmental issues in their product development and design (Soyez & Gurtner, 2014).

The sense of being responsible for what happens to the environment should be acknowledged as a determining factor of green purchase intention since it plays an essential role in pro-environmental behavior. Thus, environmental concern is considered by most of the related literature and is considered as a variable for this research.

With consumer's familiarity with eco-products, consciousness of eco-products and perceived sense of responsibility as their mediating variables, environmental concern was found to have a positive effect on the purchase intention of eco-products among consumers on all the mediating variables (Hojnik et al., 2019). However, the results of the study conducted by Nguyen et al. (2019) in Hanoi, Vietnam suggest that environmental concern does not significantly affect a consumer's attitude towards organic food purchase, thus not significantly affecting purchase intention.The inconsistent results may stem from the economic condition in Hanoi wherein there is rapid growth of modern distribution outlets including organic food. Hence, it is ensured that the respondents have the necessary conditions for the occurrence of organic or eco-friendly food purchase (Nguyen et al., 2019).

Price Sensitivity and Functionality

Although the price of EFA are relatively higher at the present (Zhang & Dong, 2020), its sustainability and benefits to the environment could still compensate for the high price. Thus, price sensitivity should be considered in determining the factors that influence the purchase intention towards EFA. In a study by Liobikiene et al. (2017), the relationship of the importance of purchase price, green purchase behavior, and environmentally friendly behavior was investigated. Using the Goal Framing Theory, they theorized that the real motive for people to behave in a more environment-friendly mode, like consuming less water and electricity, is to save money. Results of the structural modeling showed that the importance of product price negatively affects the green purchase behavior but no effect on environmentally friendly behavior. In another study, Isaacs (2015) hypothesized that there is a significant correlation between eco-friendly product price and customer willingness to pay more for eco-friendly products. Results indicate that customers are willing to spend more for eco-friendly products because customers are willing to pay the premium that ensures the sustainability and environmental benefits of the product (Isaacs, 2015).

Beak et al. (2019) examined the relationship of a customer's willingness to pay for electric vehicles and the attributes of electric vehicles as the green alternative for a traditional vehicle. Their findings included that the purchase price of electric vehicles is the most sought out factor that consumers consider in purchasing electric vehicles.

RESEARCH METHOD

A causal research design, specifically explanatory research was used in this study. In this research, causal models were used to create links between extended TPB factors, socio-demographic factors, and green purchase intention, as well as to determine the influence of said factors.

The population for this study was composed of undergraduate students in all degree programs from Mindanao State University – Iligan Institute of Technology (MSU-IIT). A sample of 370 students were given survey questionnaires. An informed consent form was given explaining the purpose and title of the study, and how their responses would be recorded, used, and analyzed for the study. The first part of the questionnaire gathered the respondent's socio-demographic profile in terms of age, gender, religion/belief, college affiliation, academic program, year level, and weekly allowance. The second part of the survey questionnaire was composed of thirty-two (32), grouped into five constructs, close-ended items that were to be rated through a five-point Likert

scale. The third part of the research instrument also employed Likert scale through six close-ended items to measure the respondents' green purchase intention.

The proposed hypotheses were tested using Structural Equations Modeling (SEM) through SmartPLS software as this allows researchers to simultaneously test the multiple dependent and independent relationships of both latent or unobservable variables and observed variables (Hojnik et al., 2019).

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

The respondents are interpreted to be overall highly perceptive and conscious about the existence of environment-friendly alternatives (EFA). This means that the respondents do not have a hard time differentiating between EFAs and unsustainable traditional ones and are highly conscious about products that are known to cause pollution. In addition, respondents are deemed to be highly aware of the economic and environmental benefits of EFAs. The respondents, even though just substantially conscious of the ingredient of EFAs, strongly agree that they are still conscious about the economic benefits of green alternatives.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Latent Variables

Construct	Mean	SD	*Cronbach's α*	*Verbal Interpretation*
Awareness of EFA	4.20	0.848	*0.775*	*Highly perceptive*
Environmental Concern	4.55	0.895	*0.712*	*Highly Concerned*
Functionality	4.52	0.679	*0.800*	*High Consideration*
Price Sensitivity	4.14	0.925	*0.529*	*Quite Sensitive*
Attitude towards EFS	4.51	0.720	*0.802*	*Highly Positive*
Green Purchase Intention	4.48	0.707	*0.886*	*Highly Inclined*

Most of the respondents are also described to be highly concerned about the environment, both globally and in the Philippines. The respondents are strongly concerned about the effects of global warming and the worsening quality of the environment in the Philippines and are inclined to contribute to solving environmental problems; however, respondents only have a fairly low involvement and knowledge about local and global environment-related laws. The respondents are also highly considerate of the EFA's function as a substitute for unsustainable food products. Convenience, durability and effectiveness are considered by the respondents whenever they intend to buy EFAs. Finally, respondents are interpreted to only be quite sensitive to the prices of EFAs. Although the respondents strongly agree that the price of EFAs affects their decisions and that they look at the price of EFAs every time they intend to buy EFAs, they also believe that the cheaper EFAs are, the better.

Results in Table 1 also suggest that most of the respondents have a highly positive evaluation of environment-friendly alternatives. Respondents like the idea of purchasing EFAs and find it necessary to do so to mitigate global warming. However, although they believe that choosing EFAs would benefit the future generations, the respondents are not that strongly willing to stop buying products from companies guilty of polluting the environment. Most importantly, the respondents only quite agree with the statement in which it identifies the respondent as a person that is environmentally responsible.

Lastly, in connection with the interpretations mentioned, most of the respondents are highly inclined to buy environment-friendly alternatives and plan to purchase or switch to EFAs to lessen pollution.

Results of the PLS-SEM
Direct Relationship between Variables

Based on the results of the bootstrapping using PLS-SEM, the effect of the awareness of environment-friendly alternatives (EFA) is statistically significant on the respondents' attitude towards environment-friendly alternatives (EFA). The result is in line with the results of Hojnik et al. (2019) that awareness of EFA has an influence on the attitude towards EFA. Furthermore, the study finds the relationship between awareness of EFA and attitude towards EFA to be positive evident with the positive path coefficient (0.219). The result further suggests that environmental concern also significantly influences the respondents' attitude towards EFA. Respondents who identify themselves as environmentalists and believe they have a responsibility to protect the environment are more likely to evaluate green alternatives positively..

Table 2. PLS-SEM Bootstrapping Results showing Direct Relationships between variables

Construct/Path	*Path Coefficient*	*Sample Mean*	SD	P-value
Awareness of EFA → Attitude towards EFA	0.219	0.217	0.049	0.000013
Environmental Concern → Attitude towards EFA	0.249	0.300	0.056	6×10^{-8}
Price Sensitivity → Attitude towards EFA	0.221	0.228	0.05	0.000007
Functionality → Attitude towards EFA	0.224	0.223	0.054	0.000015
Attitude towards EFA → Green Purchase Intention	0.770	0.775	0.021	5.6×10^{-14}

The results show that price sensitivity has a significant influence on the attitude towards environment-friendly alternatives (EFA). This implies that price is considered by the respondents in their purchasing decision when it comes to EFA, consistent with the results of a study conducted by Liobikiene et al. (2017).

Furthermore, the relationship between functionality and attitude towards EFA is found to be positive. The implication for this is that the functionality of the EFAs positively impacts the attitude of the respondents towards environment-friendly alternatives.

Finally, attitude towards EFA is found to have significant influence on green purchase intention, i.e., as the respondents act in conformance with their personal responsibility to the environment, it impacts their purchase decisions. This is consistent with the results of a study conducted by Mamun et al. (2018). In addition, consistent with the results of the studies conducted by Paul et al. (2016), which also used SEM through SmartPLS, and Mamun et al. (2018) and Maichum et al. (2016), this study also finds out that attitude

is a strong predictor of intention in purchasing green products and that attitude has a positive influence on green purchase intention.

Indirect Relationships between Variables

It can be seen from Table 3 that the path coefficients for all variables are significant as indicated by the p value less than 0.05. Hence, attitude mediates the relationship between the independent variables (i.e. awareness, environmental concern, price sensitivity, and functionality) and the green purchase intention.

Table 3. PLS-SEM Bootstrapping Results showing Indirect Relationships between variables

Construct/Path	*Path Coefficient*	*Sample Mean*	SD	P-value
Awareness of EFA → Attitude towards EFA → Green Purchase Intention	0.169	0.168	0.038	0.00002
Environmental Concern → Attitude towards EFA → Green Purchase Intention	0.226	0.232	0.044	1.5×10^{-8}
Price Sensitivity → Attitude towards EFA → Green Purchase Intention	0.170	0.176	0.039	0.00001
Functionality → Attitude towards EFA → Green Purchase Intention	0.173	0.173	0.043	0.00004

Moderating Effect of the Sociodemographic Factors

Sociodemographic factors (i.e age, sex, religion, college affiliation, and weekly allowance) were tested as moderating variables in the relationship between the independent variables, and attitude. However, all variables, except age, showed statistical significance in the relationship between price sensitivity and attitude. Hence, results are no longer presented here.

With a p value of .016 and path coefficient of 0.114, results support that age positively impacts the influence of price sensitivity in relation with attitude towards EFA.

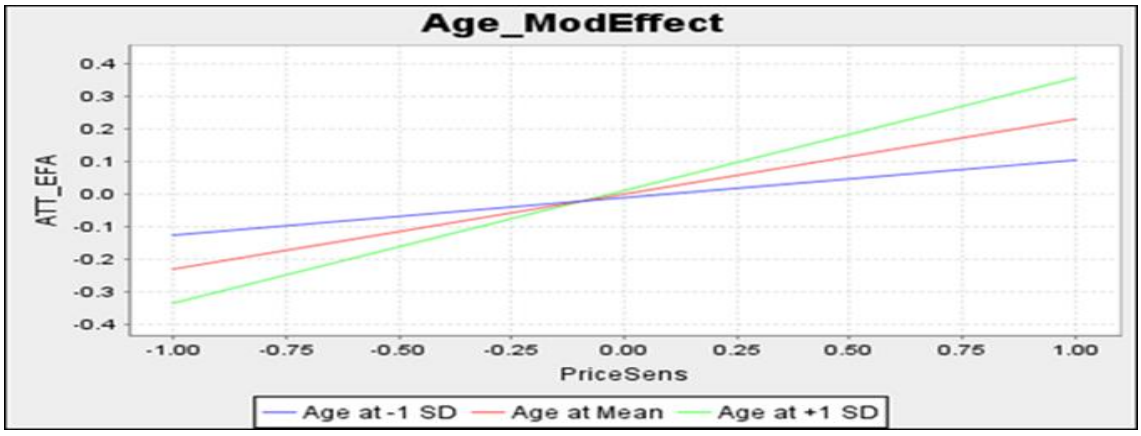

Figure 1. Simple Slope Analysis of the Moderating Effect of Age in Price Sensitivity and Attitude

Furthermore, Figure 1 also implies that the higher the age of the consumers, the stronger the influence of price sensitivity on attitude towards EFA. Following this analogy, older consumers' positive evaluation of environment-friendly alternatives is dictated by the levels of price more as compared to younger consumers.

DISCUSSION

Results of this research point out that knowledge and concern about the environment together with positive evaluation of environment-friendly alternatives help consumers to be more inclined in purchasing green products. These results are consistent with Indriani et al. (2019) Hojnik et al. (2019) where they found that the awareness of green alternatives and environment concerns directly positively affects their attitude and consequently, their purchase intention of green products.

The study also finds the relationship between price sensitivity and attitude towards EFA to be positive. It may thus be inferred that the price sensitivity of the respondents on environment-friendly alternatives positively influences the attitude of the respondents towards environment-friendly alternatives. Under this study, the price sensitivity construct questions the views and opinions of MSU-IIT students largely regarding the pricing of EFAs and whether a cheaper EFA would affect their decision. As such, for MSU-IIT students, this means that the cheaper the EFAs are, the better. As the price of environment-friendly alternatives lower, their attitude towards EFA becomes higher and thus, respondents will purchase more given a lower price.

When choosing environment-friendly alternatives, respondents consider the extent to which such alternatives fulfill their needs. Hence, the result of this specific variable addresses the research gup of this study. The aforementioned variable, functionality, and its influence on the respondents' attitude towards EFA, serves as the research gap of this study as one of the recommendations of a study conducted by Popovic et al. (2019).

Based on the result, attitude towards EFA plays an important role in linking awareness of EFA and green purchase intention. This implies that while university students are aware of the environment-friendly alternatives, their attitude towards it further helps to encourage them to be more inclined to green purchasing. Although on average, university students are already highly perceptive of the existence of environment-friendly alternatives, their positive evaluation of these environment-friendly alternatives is what drives them in their intention to purchase environment-friendly alternatives.

The same results were found in the relationship between environmental concern and green purchase intention. Similar to the findings of Indriani et al. (2019), this study found that attitude towards green products fully mediates the relationship between environmental knowledge and green purchase intention. Knowledge and concern about the environment together with a positive evaluation of environment-friendly alternatives helps consumers to be more inclined in purchasing green products. Given that the university, MSU-IIT, addresses environmental issues as one of its initiatives in promoting sustainability, it is expected that its students will have high concern for the environment.

For the mediating effect of attitude towards EFA on the relationship between price sensitivity and green purchase intention, results suggest that the mediating effect is statistically significant. Hence, attitude towards environment-friendly alternatives

explains why changes in the prices affect the intention to purchase green products. Results of this study imply a positive relationship between price sensitivity and green purchase intention through the mediating variable attitude towards EFA, that is, respondents will intend to purchase more given a lower price. A quite similar result was found by Liobikiene et al. (2017). They concluded that the importance of price significantly and negatively determined green purchase, that is, people who put value in the importance of price tend to buy green products seldom. A possible explanation for this is because people, particularly Philippine university students in this study, believe that EFAs are more expensive than non-green products.

Lastly, the results suggest that attitude towards EFA mediates the relationship between functionality and green purchase intention. This implies that while university students' emphasis and consideration of the functions of environment-friendly alternatives is a factor that determines positive perceptions and opinions (attitude), this developed attitude is the linking factor that will translate to purchasing green products such as environment-friendly alternatives.

CONCLUSION

Conceptualized based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), this study investigated different factors that may influence green purchase intention of MSU-IIT students. Although the study forwent to test the effects of subjective norm and perceived behavioral control, variables such as awareness of environment-friendly alternatives, environmental concern, price sensitivity, and functionality of environment-friendly alternatives have been used as determinants of attitude to explain green purchase intention through a mediating variable.

MSU-IIT students are deemed to know more and are more aware of EFAs. As a result of that, they pay attention to the environmental and social consequences of EFAs and they are conscious of green products. Further, respondents evaluate them more favorably; thus enhancing their intention to buy or switch for such products. This may possibly be partially attributed to their embodiment of #TatakIIT, as well as potentially the effect of course subjects encouraging pro-environmental behaviors.

As such, MSU-IIT students' purchasing preference may be said to be highly driven by the functionality of the product. The increase in effectiveness of environment-friendly alternatives, in terms of use in relation to unsustainable ones, translates into green purchases. The more the EFAs are deemed to be highly functional and similar as a substitute for unsustainable products relevant to food, then the more positive the students see the EFAs are. As a consequence, with a highly positive valuation of such EFAs, then more MSU-IIT students intend to switch or buy EFAs.

As a brief implication of such results, MSU-IIT students are inferred to have a highly positive valuation of environment-friendly alternatives. They have a strong sense of appraisal for green products and, consequently, are more inclined to buy or switch to EFAs. Notwithstanding the influencing effects of the identified independent variables, the theories of previous studies are confirmed even within the limited scope of MSU-IIT students. A highly positive attitude towards EFA in the MSU-IIT students would partially be attributed to their embodiment of the #TatakIIT tag. There is also the potential effect of general education course subjects encouraging pro-environmental behaviors that will be taken by everyone in the campus as it is included in all curricula. Nevertheless, because of this favorable and positive assumption, they are more likely to show an intent to purchase EFAs.

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