

Chinese Consumers' Green Purchase Practices: A Review

Lina Hu¹, Ernesto B. Arpon²

¹Student, Graduate School, Angeles University Foundation

²Professor, Graduate School, Angeles University Foundation

Abstract

This paper reviews current research with significant findings on Chinese consumers' green purchasing behavior in the 2000 to 2023 interval. The main direction of the article is to focus on the factors analyzed in the current research that influence consumers' green purchasing intentions and behaviors, and others include social comparison strategies, advertising appeals, traditional cultural values, and environmental responsibility. The study found that factors such as social comparison strategy, advertising appeal, traditional cultural values, and sense of environmental responsibility have a significant impact on Chinese consumers' green purchasing behavior. In a collectivist society, consumers tend to adjust their purchasing decisions according to the behavioral norms of the social group. Emotionally appealing advertisements are more likely than rationally appealing advertisements to stimulate consumers' environmental awareness and purchase motivation. The concepts of "benevolence" and "propriety" in traditional culture promote green purchasing by emphasizing mutual assistance, responsibility, and compliance with environmental norms, but the "face-saving" culture sometimes leads to superficial environmental behavior. Consumers' sense of environmental responsibility, influenced by education, social norms, and personal values, is an important factor driving green purchasing intentions. Despite consumers' strong willingness to buy green, there are often significant gaps in actual behavior which are attributed to factors such as price, convenience, product availability, and information transparency. Brand authenticity can help enhance consumer trust and emotional connection, thus increasing the likelihood of green product purchases. Government subsidies and the green consumption points system can effectively increase the market share of green products. Future research can further explore the relative importance of each factor and effective strategies to bridge the gap between purchase intention and actual behavior. Meanwhile, new approaches such as digital platforms and behavioral interventions are also worthy of attention to better promote sustainable consumption in China.

Keywords: China Buying Behavior, Comparison Strategies, Environmental Responsibility, Green Advertising Appeals, Green purchase practices, Social Traditional Cultural Values.

1. Introduction

At China's 19th National Congress in 2017, the leaders of China's ruling party explicitly proposed "insisting on the harmonious coexistence of human beings and nature. It is necessary to establish and practice the concept that green water and green mountains are golden silver mountains and adhere to the basic state policy of saving resources and protecting the environment." (Sheng, 2018). Since China's 19th National Congress, the Chinese government has begun to vigorously advocate the construction of

ecological civilization, and through policy guidance and environmental protection publicity and education, to promote the public's green consumption behavior (Gao,2022). However, there are still challenges in popularizing green consumption among the masses in China, which include insufficient consumer awareness, insufficient supply of green products, and the gap between green consumption behaviors and willingness.

Green purchasing behavior generally identifies that consumers give priority to environmentally beneficial products in the purchasing process to reduce the negative impact on the environment. The factors affecting consumers' green purchasing behavior are complex and diverse, and in recent years, domestic scholars have conducted extensive research on these factors. The Government of China has been actively encouraging green procurement practices through various initiatives, such as subsidies for environmentally friendly products, a green consumption point system (carbon credits), and public awareness campaigns. These efforts aim to create a more sustainable consumer culture and reduce the environmental impact of consumer choices (Jin,2020).

However, despite the government's strong push for green purchasing, the adoption of sustainable purchasing behaviors by Chinese consumers continues to evolve. This review identifies several factors that primarily influence Chinese consumers' green purchasing behavior, namely the social comparison strategy factor, the green advertising factor, the traditional culture factor, and the social responsibility factor.

Social comparison strategy refers to the fact that Chinese consumers usually adjust their purchasing behaviors according to the norms and behaviors of their perceived social groups, especially in the context of a collectivist society; green advertising appeals refer to the fact that both emotional and rational advertising appeals significantly influence consumers' green purchasing intentions, with emotional appeals being more effective in eliciting environmental awareness and motivation; traditional cultural values refers to the fact that the concepts of "benevolence" and "propriety" in traditional Chinese culture promote green purchasing behavior by emphasizing mutual care, responsibility, and adherence to environmental norms.

Consumers' education on environmental responsibility, social norms, and personal values are key factors driving green purchase intentions. These factors constitute environmental responsibility, which contributes to the gap between consumer intentions and behavior, meaning that despite strong intentions to purchase green products, there is often a significant gap between intentions and actual behavior due to factors such as price, convenience, product availability, and information transparency. Brand authenticity refers to the fact that authentic brands that consistently demonstrate environmental commitment and provide transparent information enhance consumers' sense of trust and emotional connection, thereby increasing the likelihood of purchasing green products. Government intervention, on the other hand, refers to the fact that subsidies and green consumption point systems can be effective in increasing the market share of green products, given the limited rationality of consumers in the decision-making process.

By examining these variables and their impact on green purchasing behavior, this paper contributes to a better understanding of the current state of green purchasing practices in China. As the Chinese government continues to promote sustainable consumption, the insights from this study can inform the development of more effective policies and marketing strategies to encourage the widespread adoption of environmentally friendly purchasing habits.

2. Chinese Green purchase practices

2.1 Impact of Social Comparison Strategy

The social comparison strategy involves consumers adjusting and changing their behavior by comparing themselves with others. This strategy is particularly promising in green consumer behavior because it can motivate consumers to adopt more environmentally friendly purchasing decisions through social pressure and recognition. Gong Xiaochen's (2019) study shows that the social comparison strategy can significantly enhance consumers' green purchasing behavior. Specifically, when consumers see other people adopting green consumption behaviors, they feel certain social pressures and expectations and thus are more inclined to imitate these behaviors.

According to Chen (2013), collectivism largely influences the way individuals to participate in and respond to environmental issues in Chinese society. Consumers may shape their purchasing behavior based on the perceived norms and behaviors of their social groups as a direct result of the social comparison process inherent in these societies.

Research has shown that social comparisons contribute significantly to green purchase intentions and behaviors. Cui & Cheng (2021) showed that when consumers know that their peers have positive attitudes towards green products, their willingness to purchase such products increases. This effect is especially pronounced when social comparisons involve close peers or influential social groups.

In green purchasing, social comparisons can be leveraged through various marketing strategies, such as displaying testimonials from satisfied customers, emphasizing the popularity of green products among specific social groups, or using social media influencers to promote green products. These strategies create a sense of social acceptance, which can be a powerful incentive for other consumers to adopt similar behaviors (Zhang & Li, 2017). In China, where society has a highly collectivist culture and individual behavior is often strongly influenced by group norms, the application of social comparison strategies is of great relevance.

2.2 Influence of Advertising Appeal on Green Consumption Behavior

Advertising appeal refers to the fact that advertisements convey information through emotion and rationality to influence consumers' attitudes and behaviors. Nannan Lu (2020) found that advertising appeals in social media have a significant impact on consumers' green consumption behavior. Specifically, both emotional appeal and rational appeal advertisements can enhance green purchase intention, but the effect of emotional appeal is more significant. This finding has important implications for the promotion strategies of green products.

In the modern self-media society, consumers are exposed to more and more advertisements on media platforms with "traffic" as the direction of pursuit. For green products, advertisements not only need to convey product information, but also need to stimulate consumers' environmental awareness and purchase motivation, which can more effectively influence consumers' emotional resonance (Lu,2020). The advertisement content needs to stimulate consumers' emotions through emotional rendering, so as to effectively influence consumers' attitude and behavior towards green consumption.

Bhutto's (2019) study, right in the midst of which this group is particularly concerned about the ethical implications of their purchasing choices, driven by a broader awareness of environmental issues, which is often amplified through digital platforms. Social media plays a pivotal role in fostering a community around sustainable consumption by not only informing young consumers about green products, but also demonstrating peer engagement and endorsement of these products.

Therefore, what emerges is that the influence of peer opinion is particularly powerful, reinforcing social norms among young consumers who value environmental responsibility. This social media-mediated peer influence creates a powerful social proof mechanism that can encourage or dissuade young people from purchasing green products, depending on the prevailing attitudes in their networks. In addition, the visibility of environmental campaigns on these platforms increases the salience of sustainability issues (Qi,2021), making them more relevant and urgent for younger audiences. This increased relevance often translates into a willingness to engage in green purchasing behaviors, aligning individual actions with broader social and environmental goals.

For example, by showing the positive impact of green products on environmental protection, or by evoking consumers' sense of responsibility for environmental protection through a storyline, emotional appeal advertisements can enhance consumers' recognition and love for green products.

2.3 Influence of traditional cultural values on environmental behavior

Traditional cultural values play an important role in shaping consumer behavior and attitudes. In China, the concepts of "benevolence" and "propriety" in traditional culture have profoundly influenced people's behavioral patterns. A study by Laukov (2015) found that the concepts of "benevolence" and "propriety" in traditional Chinese cultural values significantly promote consumers' green purchasing behavior. However, the "face" culture in traditional culture limits the sustainability of green behavior to some extent.

"Ren" is an important moral code in traditional Chinese culture, emphasizing mutual care and responsibility among people. In environmental behavior, the concept of "benevolence" is reflected in the care and protection of the environment. When consumers buy green products, they not only consider their own interests, but also pay attention to the positive impact of these behaviors on others and society. Therefore, the concept of "benevolence" helps to enhance consumers' environmental awareness and behavior (Zhai,2024).

"Ritual" refers to etiquette and norms, and is also an important part of traditional Chinese culture. In environmental behavior, the concept of "etiquette" is reflected in following environmental norms and standards. When consumers buy green products, they are influenced by social norms and etiquette and are more inclined to choose products that comply with environmental standards. Therefore, the concept of "etiquette" promotes consumers' green purchasing behavior through the form of social norms (Zhai,2024).

In the context of different cultures, especially in the comparison between collectivist and individualist societies, Chen's (2013) study comprehensively explores how deeply rooted cultural norms and values influence consumers' environmental attitudes and behaviors, especially in China compared to the United States. Traditional Chinese cultural values rooted in collectivism emphasize the importance of group harmony and collective over individual. These values have a profound impact on environmental behavior because they promote a collective approach to solving environmental problems.

In this study, Chen (2013) explores how these cultural tendencies influence Chinese consumers' green purchase intentions, noting that their decisions tend to be oriented towards collective rather than individual interests. This contrasts with the United States, where individualistic values predominate, and where environmental behavior is more self-driven and less influenced by community norms. This dichotomy is crucial for understanding the different effects of environmental policies and marketing strategies in different cultural contexts. For example, in China, public recognition and community-based initiatives may resonate more with consumers as they tend to align with the collective actions of their

social groups.

In addition, this study reveals the role of traditional cultural values in shaping consumer behavior and environmental perceptions. In a collectivist society such as China, concern for the environment is not only an individual issue but also a social issue that reflects collective well-being. Therefore, incorporating traditional cultural values into environmental activities can greatly increase the acceptance and effectiveness of environmental activities and utilize cultural consistency to promote more sustainable practices.

However, the influence of "face" culture in traditional culture on environmental behavior is dual. On the one hand, to maintain their social image and status, consumers may choose green products to demonstrate their environmental awareness and social responsibility. On the other hand, the "face" culture may also lead consumers to be hypocritical and superficial in their actual behavior, only showing green behavior in front of others, but not practicing environmental protection in private.

3. Conclusion

Through the survey collection of this research and the review of existing literature, this study concludes the following influencing factors from the researcher's current study.

Factors such as social comparison strategies, advertising appeals, traditional cultural values, and environmental responsibility have a significant impact on Chinese consumers' green purchasing behavior. In a collectivist society, consumers tend to adjust their purchasing decisions according to the behavioral norms of social groups. Emotionally appealing advertisements are more likely than rationally appealing advertisements to stimulate consumers' environmental awareness and purchase motivation.

The concepts of "benevolence" and "propriety" in traditional culture promote green purchasing by emphasizing mutual assistance, responsibility, and adherence to environmental norms, but the "face-saving" culture sometimes leads to superficial environmental behaviors. Consumers' sense of responsibility for environmental protection, influenced by education, social norms and personal values, is an important factor driving green purchasing intentions.

Despite consumers' strong willingness to buy green, there is often a significant gap in actual behavior, which is attributed to factors such as price, convenience, product availability, and information transparency. Brand authenticity can help to enhance consumer trust and emotional connection, thereby increasing the likelihood of purchasing green products. Government subsidies and the green consumption points system can effectively increase the market share of green products.

The researcher believes that in promoting green consumption practices in China, we should consider China's social needs, consumer needs, and utilize the media to publicize the green concept to more Chinese people, as well as adopt multi-pronged and comprehensive measures through the government, merchants, and the media to make substantial progress.

Finally, this study has the significance of literature and theory to understand the sustainable consumption behavior of Chinese consumers, and the researcher hopes that in future research, it will be able to provide a reference for the integration and discussion of the literature for the development of a more targeted and effective green marketing strategy.

4. Future Research Perspectives

As the role of digital platforms is becoming more significant in the new era of advocacy and crowd-sourced communication influences, the researcher hopes that future research should explore how these

platforms, such as online news media, digital newspapers, and other communication methods, can be utilized to promote the dissemination of sustainable consumption content.

While many studies have focused on understanding the factors that influence green purchasing behavior, less attention has been paid to designing and testing behavioral interventions to encourage sustainable consumption. Future research could draw on behavioral economics and psychology to develop and evaluate interventions such as commitment devices, feedback mechanisms, or gamification to incentivize green purchasing behavior.

References

1. Ansu-Mensah, P. (2021). Green product awareness effect on green purchase intentions of university students': an emerging market's perspective. *Future Business Journal*, 7(1), 48.
2. Bhutto, M. Y., Zeng, F., Soomro, Y. A., & Khan, M. A. (2019). Young Chinese consumer decision making in buying green products: An application of theory of planned behavior with gender and price transparency. *Pakistan Journal of Commerce and Social Sciences (PJCSS)*, 13(3), 599-619.
3. Chan, R. Y. (2001). Determinants of Chinese consumers' green purchase behavior. *Psychology & marketing*, 18(4), 389-413.
4. Chen, L. (2013). A study of green purchase intention comparing with collectivistic (Chinese) and individualistic (American) consumers in Shanghai, China. *Information Management and Business Review*, 5(7), 342-346.
5. Cui, Baojun & Cheng, Wenjian. (2021). Study on the Influence Mechanism of Consumers' Green Purchasing Intention Based on Social Interaction Perspective. *Journal of Fujian Agriculture and Forestry University (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)* (03), 42-50. doi:10.13322/j.cnki.fjsk.2021.03.006.
6. Gong, Xiaochen. The booster effect of social comparison strategy on green purchasing behavior - Based on an experimental study. *Operation and Management* 1-11. doi:10.16517/j.cnki.cn12-1034/f.20231008.010.
7. Gao, Lin. (2022). Research on the Influence of Advertising Appeal on Consumers' Green Purchase Intention under Social Crowding Situation (Dissertation, Donghua University). <https://link.cnki.net/doi/10.27012/d.cnki.gdhuu.2022.001623>doi:10.27012/d.cnki.gdhuu.2022.001623.
8. Jin, J., Zhao, Q., & Santibanez-Gonzalez, E. D. (2020). How Chinese consumers' intentions for purchasing eco-labeled products are influenced by psychological factors. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 17(1), 265.
9. Lau, K. F. & Wang, Lulu. (2015). The influence of traditional Chinese cultural values on environmental protection behavior - Based on consumers' green product purchasing behavior. *Journal of Shanghai University of Finance and Economics* (02), 64-75. doi:10.16538/j.cnki.jsufe.2015.02.001.
10. Lv, N. N.. (2023). Research on the influence of advertising appeals on green consumption behavior in social media Master (Dissertation, Inner Mongolia University of Science and Technology). Master <https://link.cnki.net/doi/10.27724/d.cnki.gnmkgk.2023.000005>doi:10.27724/d.cnki.gnmkgk.2023.000005.
11. Qi, X., & Ploeger, A. (2021). Explaining Chinese Consumers' Green Food Purchase Intentions during the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Extended Theory of Planned Behaviour. *Foods*. 2021; 10.

- Effects and Implications of COVID-19 for the Human Senses, Consumer Preferences, Appetite and Eating Behaviour, 113.
12. Sheng, Guanghua & Xie, Fang. (2019). Research on the psychological characteristics of Chinese consumers' green purchasing behavior. *Social Science Front* (03), 74-82.
 13. Sheng, Guanghua, Ge, Wanda & Tang, Li. (2018). Influence of consumers' sense of environmental responsibility on green product purchasing behavior--taking energy-saving home appliances as an example. *Statistics and Information Forum* (05), 114-120.
 14. Sheng, Guanghua, Ge, Wanda & Tang, Li. (2018). The influence of consumers' sense of environmental responsibility on the purchase behavior of green products--taking energy-saving home appliances as an example. *Statistics and Information Forum* (05), 114-120.
 15. Sheng, Guanghua, Gong, Siyu & Xie, Fang. (2019). Theoretical basis and empirical test of the formation of Chinese consumers' green purchase intention--TPB expansion model based on ecological values, personal perception relevance. *Journal of Social Sciences of Jilin University* (01), 140-151+222. doi:10.15939/j.jujss.2019.01.jj3.
 16. Sheng, Guanghua, Wanda Ge & Beibei Yue. (2018). Implementing the spirit of the 19th National Congress to build a beautiful China - The influence of consumer self-concept on green purchasing behavior. *Business Research* (12), 1-10. doi:10.13902/j.cnki.syyj.2018.12.001.
 17. Tu, P., Wang, Y. G. & Zou, P.. (2017). Introduction to the column on marketing innovation in China's new normal. *Management Science* (05), 1-2.
 18. Wang, Na, Ran, Maogang & Zhou, Fei. (2017). Research on the Influence Mechanism of Brand Authenticity on Green Purchasing Behavior. *Journal of Huaqiao University (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)* (03), 99-111+131. doi:10.16067/j.cnki.35-1049/c.2017.03.008.
 19. Xie, Fang, Sheng, Guanghua & Gong, Siyu. (2019). A study on the influence of reference groups on Chinese residents' green purchasing behavior in the context of universal environmental governance. *China Population-Resources and Environment* (08), 66-75.
 20. Xu Yang . (2019). Research on the Connotation Development of Collectivist Values under the Perspective of Ecological Civilization (Dissertation, Nanjing University of Finance and Economics). <https://link.cnki.net/doi/10.27705/d.cnki.gnjcj.2019.000270>doi:10.27705/d.cnki.gnjcj.2019.000270 .
 21. Zhai, X. W.. (2024). The Moral Framework of Benevolence, Righteousness, and Ritual and its Practical Limitations - A Sociology of Knowledge Examination. *Social Science Digest* (05), 103-105.
 22. Zhang, Yan & Li, Xiaoyong. (2017). A Gap Study on Consumers' Green Purchasing Intention and Purchasing Behavior. *Resource Development and Market* (03), 343-348.
 23. Zhao, Aiwu, Du, J. & Guan, Hongjun. (2015). Green Purchasing Behavior of Finite Rational Consumers Based on Computational Experiments. *Systems Engineering Theory and Practice*(01), 95-102.
 24. Zhang, Yan & Li, Xiaoyong. (2017). A Gap Study on Consumers' Green Purchasing Intention and Purchasing Behavior. *Resource Development and Market* (03), 343-348. doi:CNKI:SUN:ZTKB.0.2017-03-017.