
The influence of green branding on purchase intention, willingness to pay and consumers' emotional response: an experimental study

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Abstract: While sustainability and branding have been widely debated topics over the past decades, there is still no evidence if green branding influence consumers purchase behaviour, specifically the purchase intent, willingness to pay and consumers' emotional response. So, this study was designed to verify the influence of green branding on consumer purchase behaviour. The research was developed by an experimental between subjects, and 197 students participated. The main results show that rates of purchase intent are higher in condition without green branding, although this difference is not significant between groups. About willingness to pay, consumers were more willing to pay for the product without the green branding ad, and this difference is significant. Also, consumers of commercial product without green branding feel more emotionally involved. So, we concluded that green branding does not influence the purchase intent, the willingness to pay and neither influences the consumer emotional response. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords: green branding; willingness to pay; purchase intention; emotional response.

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1 Introduction

Branding plays an important role by modelling the different consumer perceptions (Hartmann et al., 2005). Brands are built to establish associative ties in consumer’s memory, and providing product experiences, above all, generating a climate of trust between consumers and companies (López-Pérez et al., 2017). Pounder (2010) explains that well-known brands are those that perpetuated over the years, having some quality attributes related.

As well as brands, green branding becomes an important part of companies’ value proposition (Kim and Periyayya, 2013). One of the main concerns to build a green brand is that a firm’s ‘greening process’ is not linear, but an ‘irregular process’ which several green marketing strategies are used to target different stakeholders (Rivera-Camino, 2007). So, it is necessary that the cultural and personal values were aligned with green consumption behaviour (Sharma and Jha, 2017) to improve the results of companies’ green marketing strategies.

However, recent studies have found that consumers’ willingness to engagement is the key to develop a sustainable production and consumption system (Peattie, 2010). In the same way, many studies have examined how to motivate green consumption (Vassallo et al., 2016; Lundblad and Davies, 2016; Giraldi and De Oliveira, 2017), studying this subject on the companies’ view. Nevertheless, there is a lack of research examining the effects of consumer perceptions of green marketing strategies in the direction of green behaviours (Cronin et al., 2011) as well as few studies have focused on green branding (Chen, 2010).

The studies about green branding are based mainly on surveys which report emotional influences of brands (trust, satisfaction, and long-term commitments) through image, and attributes of awareness (Rios et al., 2006; Butt et al., 2017; Walsh and Dodds, 2017). It is noteworthy that emotional benefits of the brand change consumer response and encourage loyalty and reliability, which can be maximised through the perception of brand value or product usefulness (López-Pérez et al., 2017).

Moreover, most previous studies on green consumption or on sustainable consumption were about developed countries (Geng et al., 2017). Studies from emergent countries such as Brazil have gained an increasing attention in recent years. About green consumption, in Brazil, Braga et al. (2016) found that being concerned about environmental issues does not necessarily mean being a consumer of green products, and this is the main motivation of our study. Also, studies such as Jabbour and de Sousa Jabbour (2014) listed that marketing studies should analyse the Latin America sustainable management, once that differs from developed economies.

So, this study was designed to verify the influence of green branding on consumer purchase behaviour. In this sense, extends and complements the literature in two ways: first, build an integrate model to examine the influence among green branding and the

willingness to pay, purchase intention and emotional response. Second, the phenomenon is observed through an experimental study the consumer perspectives about green branding in an emergent country.

In order to develop the framework of this research, we look for some research streams of green consumer behaviour, use as a basis of the research hypothesis. Next, we present the methodological aspects of our experimental study that assume a between-subjects design after we present the main results and discussions.

2 Brand management and green branding

It is recognised by brand management that companies should align they are values to costumers' values, focusing on their needs and expectations; the singularities and profiles of organisations and the market demand, able to develop bonds of intimacy, excitement, surprise and relationship between people (Butt et al., 2017; López-Pérez et al., 2017). So, Anderson and Weitz (1992) and Walsh and Dodds (2017), imply the importance of the effectiveness of communication to empower and motivate the relationship with consumers.

Moreover, Yao et al. (2016) mentioning that the way that companies advertise products and services can influence consumer attitudes. Before, Bendapudi and Berry (1997) sustenance those ideas companies that this practice helps to maintain the relationship for the long-term, strengthening your customer commitment, its attractiveness and the benefit for the relationship strengthen. The communication of the brand attributes generates the consumer complicity, reinforcing or arousing the involvement with the product, making a commitment and affectivity with the brand (Adaval, 2001; Pimentel and Reynolds, 2004; Butt et al., 2017).

As well as brands, green branding becomes an important part of companies' value proposition (Kim and Periyayya, 2013) and companies need to manage their brands not only to be green, but effectively to gain competitive advantages. The study of green branding is relatively recent in marketing research, and it becomes an important academic and practice research topic since seek to understand the impacts of green brands on consumer purchase behaviour (Butt et al., 2017). Positioning a brand as a 'green brand', comprehends an active communication and differentiation of the brand from its competitors through its environmentally friendly attributes (Rios et al., 2006).

2.1 Green branding and consumer purchase behaviour

Green purchase behaviour is defined as purchasing and consuming products and services that have a minimal impact on the environment (Kumar and Ghodeswar, 2015; Suki, 2013; Solaiman et al., 2017). Green purchase behaviour differs from general purchase, because when the consumer chooses to buy green products he is concerned with the environment and the human well-being (Solaiman et al., 2017). So, green consumer behaviour should play a role on purchase intention.

According to Polonsky (2011), consumer shows criteria on green consumption:

- 1 prefer recyclable packaging
- 2 is concerned with the origin of the goods

- 3 search brands that provide information about their products
- 4 use sustainable packages or refill.

Although the product is chosen, the consumer goes through a buying decision process. So, some scholar claimed that it is necessary to explore further how the green brand factors impact attitude and green purchase behaviours (Chen, 2010; Huang and Yang, 2014; Rios et al., 2006). So, we set the first hypothesis of the study.

Hypothesis 1 Commercial products with green branding influence positively (H1a) the purchase intention and (H1b) the willingness to pay.

Emotional response corresponds to different perceptions of satisfaction, confidence and commitment (Schoefer and Diamantopoulos, 2009). Previous studies present the impact of emotional response on satisfaction (Ladhari, 2007) and behavioural intentions (Zeelenberg and Pieters, 2004), as well as, generate a positive impact on consumption and on positive word-of-mouth (Das and Varshneya, 2017).

Consumers exposed to marketing stimuli consider advertisements, product packaging, positioning of brands, inductors of emotions (Lee et al., 2013; Chen et al., 2014). It should be noted that the emotional influences on the market are not limited to those that are created intentionally, but the incidental emotions can also affect a diversity of consumer responses, how their perceptions, choices, coding information and decision-making (Maheswaran and Chen, 2006; Agrawal et al., 2013). These emotional appeals influence consumers to change the way in which the information is provided (Achar et al., 2016).

Emotions can also influence the promotion of green consumption. Wang and Wu (2016) list that some emotions like pride, guilt, anger and respect, can influence consumers to make green consumption choices. Collaborating, Sirieix et al. (2017) highlights a double paradox between standards and emotions. That is, the personal standards encourage not to waste, while the social rules encourage waste. In this sense, Lavareda (2011) explained that emotions happen without awareness are complex answers, immediate and multiple stimuli.

On this way, the second hypothesis of the study is listed.

Hypothesis 2 (H2a) Commercial products with green branding influence positively the consumer response quotient.

3 Materials and methods

While the purpose of this article was to verify the influence of green branding on consumer purchase behaviour, we conducted an experiment factorial between-subject, where the independent variable – green branding – was manipulated to test the Hypotheses H1–H2. First, participants were asked to access an entertainment website, where there was an advertisement about a shoes brand that was launching a new product (see Figure 1).

The data collection happened through an electronic questionnaire, being answered individually by participants. In scenario 1 (treatment group), we provided green branding to test the Hypotheses H1a, H2b and H2a, and participants were exposed to the following advertisement:

Brand ECO2ME shoes Slogan: ‘Sustainable shoes for feet responsible’. In the lower-left corner, in addition to the icons of social networks, brand added the recycling icon.

In the scenario 2 (control group), respondents were exposed to an ad, which kept the same design structure, changing only the attributes of the products and consumer characteristics:

Brand company shoes Slogan: ‘Comfortable shoes for feet adventurers’. Mindful that in the lower left corner contains only the icons of social networks.

Figure 1 Advertisements used in the experiment (see online version for colours)



Source: Developed by the authors (2017); first, treatment group and second, control group

3.1 Measurements

In the first part of the questionnaire, the respondents indicated in a seven-point semantic differential scale to measure the emotional response to advertisements about each of the 20 items, proposed originally by Wells (1964). This questionnaire was translated and adapted for Brazilians by Mello et al. (2006). In the second stage, the respondents indicated via seven-point Likert scale the extent of agreement or disagreement with each of the 12 statements of the emotional quotient of Wells (1964).

The purchase intent was measured with an item, measured by a seven-point Likert scale of (how likely would you buy the ECO2ME/company shoes footwear? very unlikely/very likely). The willingness to pay was verified through an open question where the participants should write how much they are willing to pay, in Brazilian reais (R\$), for the product described in the scenario (Homburg et al., 2005).

The instruments were pre-tested with 35 participants, being these, PhD Professors and researchers, managers and marketing and green or sustainable innovation experts. Measures reliability was verified through the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient, indicating high internal consistency ($\alpha \geq 0.80$), keeping all the variables in the original dimensions.

We proceed also a verification of the manipulation, and so, an item was used, measured on a seven-point Likert scale (I totally disagree/strongly agree), where the respondent should indicate the degree of agreement with the statement that the situation of the scenario referred to green or eco-friendly products.

3.2 Research sample

Participated in this study, 212 students from technical courses, undergraduate and graduate classes, randomly distributed between the two scenarios. 15 participants were excluded as outliers. Therefore, the final sample was composed by 197 participants, were 52.3% were female; the age average was 27 years (being the minimum age 17 and the maximum age of 61 years).

3.3 Data analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS statistics 21 (IBM software). First, we proceeded the preparation of the data matrix, were missing values were identified and questionnaire's excluded. Analysis of normality was verified using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and no abnormal variables were observed. Second, we verified the averages and standard deviations by univariate statistics, and use bivariate analysis to check the difference between the groups (through a t-test). Finally, we used ANOVA, to verify the Hypotheses H1 and H2. The Emotional Quotient of Wells was calculated as proposed in Wells (1964).

4 Results

In this section, we present the main analysis from both scenarios. In the first section, we present the data from

- 1 handling verification
- 2 green branding influence on purchase intent
- 3 influence of green branding on willingness to pay
- 4 consumer response to green advertising.

Finally, the analysis of the consumers

- 5 emotional quotient.

4.1 Handling verification

The results showed that the manipulation was successful, i.e., in commercial condition with green branding, participants realised that it was eco-friendly products ($M = 4.73$), while on condition of commercial branding, participants did not have this perception ($M = 2.30$; $F = 1.99$; $p < 0.001$).

4.2 *Green branding influence on purchase intent*

An ANOVA was performed to check the effect of the green branding on purchase intent. The participants demonstrated higher average of purchase intent on the condition without green branding ($M = 3.99$) than provided with green branding ($M = 3.81$). But, this difference was not significant between the groups ($F(1,197) = 0.513$; $p = 0.454$). So, we could not support the H1a, that green branding positively influences green products purchase intent.

4.3 *Green branding influence on willingness to pay*

In checking the influence of green branding on willingness to pay, we found that respondents who answer the scenario 1 (with green branding) were willing to pay an average of R\$114.43. On the other hand, respondents of scenario 2, without green branding information, are on average willing to pay R\$139.79. We verify that the difference was significant ($F(1,197) = 6.943$; $p < 0.009$), however the willingness to pay for the product without green branding was higher. So, the results do not support the Hypothesis H1b.

4.4 *Consumer response to green branding*

To understand the consumer response to green branding, the semantic differential scale (Wells, 1964) recorded the results of 20 items. In this step, respondents evaluated the emotional response, and the smaller the value, the greater the approximation of positive adjectives, and the higher the average value the greater the approximation with the negative adjectives.

For the analysis of these construct, we used the t-test for differences between the groups to analyse the scenario with green branding and without, in which it was possible, one finds significance in three variables belonging to the scale of semantic differential, as showed in Table 1.

Table 1 Consumer response to green branding

	<i>Scenario 1</i>		<i>Scenario 2</i>		<i>Between-groups</i>		
	<i>With green branding</i>		<i>Without green branding</i>		<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>			
It has meaning to me	3.14	1.67	4.18	2	1	7.47	0.07*
Easy to understand	1.83	1.21	2.27	1.4	1	5.35	0.02*
Simple	1.60	0.89	1.92	1.1	1	5.83	0.01*

Note: $p < 0.05$ is significant.

Source: Based on survey data (2017)

We found that advertising without green branding is easier to understand ($m = 2.27$) and is simpler ($m = 1.92$). The variable 'it has meaning to me' indicates that the scenario 1, with green branding is better evaluate ($m = 4.18$). It is then possible to note, that the commercial product without green branding have better emotional response.

Also, we analyse the factors:

- 1 attractiveness
- 2 significance
- 3 utility.

Each factor, is represented on the scale for certain items, witch 1 to 11 presents the attractiveness; 12 to 16 the significance; and the item 17 to 20 the utility (Wells, 1964).

Table 2 Consumer response to advertising in every scenario

	<i>Scenario 1</i>		<i>Scenario 2</i>		<i>Cronbach's alpha*</i>
	<i>With green branding</i>		<i>Without green branding</i>		
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Attractiveness	2.56	1.66	3.00	1.67	0.915
Significance	2.67	1.62	3.40	1.84	0.796
Utility	2.64	1.44	2.87	1.74	0.781

Note: $\alpha > 0.60$ is required.

Source: Based on survey data (2017)

The results show in Table 2 present that commercial product without green branding, is better evaluate in terms of attractiveness, significance and utility. Also, consumers of commercial product without green branding, sign the utility dimension as a positive aspect of the product ($M = 2.87$; $\alpha > 0.749$).

4.5 Analysis of the emotional quotient of Wells

Finally, we look for the emotional quotient of Wells. Twelve observable variables were evaluated using the original formula as proposed by Wells (1964), in which, six variables are favourable and six are not. After that, this score was divided by 12 (total number of variables) and multiplied by one hundred to obtain a single score for each scenario (with green branding and without green branding). The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Emotional quotient of Wells for every scenario

	<i>Scenario 1</i>	<i>Scenario 2</i>
	<i>With green branding</i>	<i>Without green branding</i>
EQ coefficient	22.08	22.75
SD	10.41	10.75

Source: Based on survey data (2017)

Through these results (see Table 3) we found that both scenarios (with and without green branding) have similar results. However, results indicate that consumers feel more emotionally involved with the advertisement without green branding. Therefore, there is no support for the Hypothesis H2a.

5 Discussions

The results of our study can be analysed as a new approach of green branding, because we found that green branding does not influence the purchase intent, the willingness to pay and neither impact the consumer emotional response.

Marketers should know that green branding appeal in advertising may not have the same result in developed economies and emerging economies (such as Brazil). And this is not an education level effect (because we look for technical, undergrad and grad students), but maybe, is a cultural effect – which is a future study recommendation.

However, previous studies show that environmental awareness can influence the green products consumption behaviour, because it is only through this that new consumption behaviours are put into practice, instigating a new environmentally responsible attitude, because the more knowledge of the context of environmental sustainability, the greater the consciousness, as well as sustainable attitude (Heiskanen et al., 2014; Perera et al., 2016; Schroeder and Anantharaman, 2017) and purchase intent. Also, as proposed by Altin et al. (2014) and Mei et al. (2016), it is through environmental awareness and the individual convictions about the environmental questions that consumers use to act and have green attitudes.

Our results support also the fact that when an organisation is positioned as a green or sustainable company, should not believe that these per se add value to the brand. This is, companies should note that is not enough delivers a product or service with ecological attributes and expect the recognition for corporate image (as proposed first by Polonsky, 2011; Zampese et al., 2016). It is mandatory develop another attribute, that influence consumers to pay more, have positive emotional response and influence the purchase intention.

Also, it is inferred that the product advertised with green branding have better average about attraction, which can be explained by the symbolic dimension, i.e., consumers consider the brand on an emotional level where the products are assessed for the ability to communicate, mean and be something (Sirgy and Su, 2000) but not exactly have purchase intention. In a study developed by Joshi and Rahman (2017) the authors found that the sustainable purchasing behaviour of young people is favourable when is related to support for environmental organisations, subjective norms, attitudes of consumers in relation to consumption, the influence of perceived market and environmental awareness of these.

Despite the hypothesis test, H1a, H1b and H2a are not supported. It is clear through the results and especially the low difference in the emotional quotient of both brands, the existence of an involvement with consumers. As the main managerial contribution, we highlight the possibility of organisations use their brands to promote the value of sustainability facing its customers and others interested in your services or products. Corroborating with Kumar and Christodouloupoulou (2014), we found that it is necessary to develop the integration between branding and sustainability, emphasising these sustainable practices and their impacts that will arouse the consumer environmental awareness.

In addition, although there is no significant influence of green branding on the purchase intention, willingness to pay and emotional response, it is necessary to understand that the consumer relationship with the brand, in the real world, can impact the commercial evaluation (Dreze and Husserr, 2003), Besides, it is necessary to stimulate increasing approaches in relation to environmental sustainability, which

requires changes in different levels of organisations, the environment and society (Kruiter et al., 2012; Severo and Guimarães, 2015) arousing consumer environmental awareness.

6 Conclusions

This study was designed to verify the influence of green branding on consumer purchase behaviour. The main results show that the rates of purchase intent are higher in condition without green branding compared the condition with green branding, although this difference is not significant between the groups. Besides, about the willingness to pay, consumers were more willing to pay for the product without the green branding ad, and this difference is significant.

About the consumers' emotional response, the commercial product with green branding has greater positive relationship in aspects of meaning for consumers. In the same add, the most relevant factor and close to the positive aspects, by presenting general average lower the attractiveness, i.e., the emotional response of consumers indicate that these consumers are drawn by the product, although indicate the lowest indexes of purchase intent and willingness to pay, which in fact, explains the findings. Already consumers of commercial product without green branding sing the utility factor closer to the positive aspects, as well as feel more emotionally involved by this ad, corroborating with the results found in items of willingness to pay and the intention to purchase this type of product, better than the green branding results.

These results have some limitations. First, we are not able to generalise these results to developed economies. Also, the attitudes of consumers in relation to a product or brand are not formed instantly, and for this study, were created two fictional brands, and the ads were do not have the same picture, which can influence the results. The last limitation to be highlighted is that in the sample of the study in question, only students of technical level, undergraduate and postgraduate studies and that for the measurement of the reactions and emotional quotient, we rely on the scale developed by Wells (1964).

As suggestions for future studies, we recommend the use of real brands positioning them as green or sustainable. We have also suggested the addition of the variable environmental awareness as moderating variable of green branding and purchase intention, willingness to pay and consumer emotional response.

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