

Conceptual Framework for Sustainable Consumer Behavior in Thailand

Orapan Khongmalai

Thammasat University, Thailand
okhongmalai@yahoo.com

Anyanitha Distanont

Thammasat University, Thailand
anyacitu@tu.ac.th

Sintawat Sintanabodee

Thammasat University, Thailand
Sintawat.sin@gmail.com

Abstract

This study uses a qualitative research approach to develop a conceptual framework for sustainable consumer behavior change in the context of Thailand. The methodology consists of the review of theories, concepts, and relevant research for using as model development, and the in-depth expert interview to confirm the conceptual framework. The research results can be summarized as a conceptual framework that attitudes on health and environment, marketing mix 4Es, innovation, green finance, and government support affect awareness of green products and purchase intention, leading to sustainable behaviors that include green purchase behavior and 2R1U behavior.

Keywords: Sustainable Consumer Behavior, Green Finance, Conceptual Framework

INTRODUCTION

Lately, the trend of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been being discussed more widely and given more attention, especially climate action and responsible consumption and production. As the world is at risk of facing extreme weather that is more severe. It is the cause of natural disasters that are more frequent and dangerous (United Nations Environment Program, 2022; Williams et al., 2022). It affects and changes the livelihoods of humans and animals. Many countries around the world, as well as Thailand and all sectors are aware and pay attention to the above environmental problems. Therefore, trying to jointly solve the problem by the government, accelerating the implementation of various policies and measures to determine the direction of the country's development, as well as being a role model for the business sector.

The business sector gradually adjusts strategies and business practices to be in line with environmental conservation, while the public sector is trying to change their lifestyle by consuming green products that are more environmentally friendly (Tetra Pak Index, 2021), as well as reducing the amount of harmful waste that pollutes living beings and the environment.

For Thailand, the government and business sectors have been taking action to create a green society that is environmentally friendly for some time, while the change of the people's sector is still in its early stages. Only some of them have begun to change their behavior to consume more green products (Kasikorn Research Center, 2021). Therefore, it is interesting to see how the behavior of most Thai consumers should be adjusted to have sustainable behavior. This led to the research question about what are the processes or procedures for sustainable consumer behavior change and what are the influences of factors? The research results will be of great benefit to relevant sectors in using it as a guideline to drive consumers to transform their behaviors into sustainable behaviors to jointly prevent and solve environmental problems in a concrete way.

Objective

To develop a conceptual framework on sustainable consumer behavior, change in the context of Thailand.

Related theories and concepts

Theory of Planned Behavior

Theory of Planned Behavior is a theory developed from Theory of Reasoned Action to predict and explain human behavior in specific contexts. The theory states that human behavior will come out from the intention of human to do that first and the intention is influenced by attitude toward the behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control. The study of consumer behavior related to green products in the past used Theory of Planned Behavior as the basis and applied other factors to explain further, such as environmental knowledge, environmental concerns, product awareness, and pricing due to the changing circumstances and environment of human society (Sheoran & Kumar, 2020; Wijekoon & Sabri, 2021; Zhuang et al. 2021).

Diffusion of Innovation Theory

Diffusion of Innovation Theory is widely used in the study of innovation because it addresses the perspective of those who use innovation in accepting and are interested in the easy implementation of innovation. The innovation must have features that make users perceive that it is more useful or valuable than what already exists (relative advantage). This is in line with the concept of user experience and needs (compatibility) which can be understood and used easily (simplicity or in theory mentions complexity), is available to try without binding any conditions (trialability), and can clearly see the change in a better direction (observability). In recent years, many studies related to innovation have applied the above five characteristics to studies, such as the studies done by Lou et al. (2017), Oturakci and Yuregir (2018), and Reyes-Mercado and Rajagopal (2017).

Buying Decision Process

Kotler and Armstrong (2017) described the buying decision process of consumers as when consumers are faced with new and complex buying situations. A consumer's buying decision must go through a 5-step consideration and decision-making process, including need recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior. The concept of buying decision process can be applied in the study to better understand consumer behavior toward green products because, in the context of Thailand, most consumers think that there are not many green products in the market. In addition, many types of products are new items that have just become available and are not widely used yet.

Sustainable Behavior

Sustainable behavior is a responsible action aimed at protecting the natural environment and human society for the well-being of present and future generations (Anđić & Vorkapić, 2014; Tapia et al., 2013). Large groups of consumers are key to creating sustainable behaviors by helping to conserve finite natural resources, equitable access to resources, and mutual assistance (Choi, 2016) through the consumption of green products, both tangible goods and intangible services, and reducing or eliminating the consumption of traditional products that do not pay attention to the environment (Siddique et al., 2021; Soomro et al., 2020; Chaudhary & Bisai, 2018). Moreover, after consuming the product, waste is another environmental problem that will follow. Helping to reduce the amount of waste is a behavior that helps conserve the environment (Nindyati, 2014), including reducing consumption to the extent necessary, avoiding extravagant consumption (reduce), for example, choosing to consume refill products (refill), reusing products that are still usable many times before discarding (reuse), such as reusing packaging bags until they run out of performance and the use of obsolete or unusable products to invent, modify into new products, or use for other purposes without going through the industrial processing process (upcycle). These behaviors are in line with consumer lifestyles in daily life (Worasuda Khwansuwan & Satinee Wattanakit, 2020).

Green Purchase Intention

Green purchase intention expresses the tendency and willingness of consumers to purchase green products (Amin & Tarun, 2021; Siddique et al., 2021), which is consistent with Fontes et al. that explained that purchase decision is a characteristic that indicates the likelihood that an individual consumer will purchase a product for consumption. In addition, the willingness of the consumer to pay money to obtain the product that the consumer wants to consume (the Willingness to Pay) can also be an indicator of the intention to purchase the product. The studies done by Le (2021), Piyanoot Kamalanon et al. (2022), and Chaudhary & Bisai (2018) show that green consumption behavior, which is a sustainable behavior, comes after consumers have green purchase intention. This is consistent with the theory of behavior according to the plan that human behavior arises from the intention of humans to perform that behavior.

Green Product Awareness

Studies on green product awareness in the past, such as those done by Al-Kumaim et al. (2021), Lestari et al. (2021), Prayoga et al. (2020), and Wong & Tzeng (2021), found that green product awareness is an important factor that leads to consumer intention to purchase green products. The studies did not clearly distinguish the components of awareness. Rather, green product awareness is described as demonstrating understanding, knowing, and thinking about green products under various circumstances, especially those related to the environment. It was found that the study separated the components of awareness into 2 components: 1) Recognition that refers to knowing or understanding the details of the products under that brand, and 2) Recall that refers to thinking or thinking of the brand when wanting products under that brand. The definition of each component above is similar to the studies in the context of green products (Piraporn Nuchprasert & Thirawat Chantuk, 2017; Rungnapa Somsakul & Prapon Premthongsuk, 2019). Therefore, the components of product awareness are classified into 2 components: Recognition, which represents the understanding or perception of green products, and Recollection, which represents thinking of green products when consumers get to know about the environmental situation.

Health and Environmental Attitude

Most studies of attitudes related to green consumer behaviors in the past mainly refer to environmental attitude because environmental conservation behaviors are associated with environmental awareness and

understanding, such as the studies done by Ampol Chayomchai (2020), Dhir et al. (2021), Li et al. (2019), Siddique and Hossain (2018), Yadav and Pathak (2016), and Zaremohzzabieh (2021). In addition, the situation of environmental problems changing from the past, causing natural disasters to become more severe and in turn affecting human lives and properties. This results in increased anxiety and stress in humans, leading to increased mental and physical health problems and potentially fatal outcomes (American Psychiatric Association, 2019; Sciencealert, 2022). However, few studies address health attitude, such as the ones done by Abdulsahib et al. (2019), Darsono et al. (2019), Effendi et al. (2015), and Nitima Aungatichart et al. (2020). In this study, health and environmental contexts were considered at the same time. The components of attitude were divided into 2 components: knowledge and concern for health and environment. This is in line with human attitude-forming processes according to the study by Bakanauskas et al. (2020).

Green Marketing Mix 4Es

A marketing mix is a group of marketing tools that are used together and consistently by business operators to communicate and present information to consumers and hopefully achieve a given marketing objective. Many studies in the past used 4Ps and 4Cs marketing mix tools to study. However, as consumer behavior in communicating and accessing information has changed, currently, digital channels, like social media, are more popular, because it is convenient and can access information that interests them easily and quickly. As a result, the customer journey has changed completely. The marketing mix 4Es tool offered by Brian Fetherstonhaugh was adapted to the changed customer journey as the tool to make it more relevant to the current context (Konhäusner et al., 2021). The marketing mix 4Es consist of delivering a good product experience (Experience), presenting the right product value (Exchange), presenting products through the right channel at the right time (Everyplace), and creating a passion and attachment to the product until they become disciples (Evangelism). Kitiya Issavarestagul (2019) found that the above marketing mix 4Es is a tool that helps raise consumer awareness of green products.

Green Financial Innovation

The banking and finance sector is an industry that uses new technologies to develop innovations or financial products that will help prevent and solve environmental problems. Carbon Tracking is a green finance innovation developed by combining big data, artificial intelligence, and payment products. The service is currently being used to track and analyze the cumulative greenhouse gas emissions of various products that consumers are paying for. The tool calculates the number of greenhouse gases generated by the production and service processes of each product and shows the data as numbers graphs or pictures. This will allow them to track their own spending (Andersson, 2020; Masayo, 2021; New Energy Nexus, 2020). The innovations have begun to be talked about more and more as the financial and banking sectors in foreign countries have started to gradually release innovations for consumers such as England and Japan, to make consumers aware of environmental problems and change their behavior. However, the carbon spending tracking tool is not yet available to Thai consumers. The Thai financial and banking sector is under study and development. Therefore, if consumers want to accept the carbon-spending tracker innovation and widely use it, innovation should have 5 attributes according to the innovation diffusion theory. This is consistent with the studies on financial products done by Jamshidi and Hussin (2018) and Miranda and Balqiah (2020).

Government Support

Government support is essential in driving change in both the business and people sectors, especially the changes to prevent and solve environmental problems (Rajadurai et al., 2021) that require cooperation from stakeholder groups in all sectors, both businesses and people through the implementation of clear and

practical environmental policies and sufficient incentive measures to encourage people to pay attention and consume more green products. This is consistent with the studies of Din et al. (2016), Kumar et al. (2019), and Rajadurai et al. (2021), which found that government support affects consumers' awareness of green products.

The results of the literature review can be summarized as the expected factors that may be important in the conceptual framework of sustainable consumer behavior in the context of Thailand, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Observed variables in each of the latent variables and reference to previous studies		
Latent variables in this study	Observed variables in each of the latent variables	Reference to previous studies
1. Sustainable Behavior	1.1 Green Purchase Behavior	Siddique et al. (2021), Soomro et al. (2020), Chaudhary & Bisai (2018)
	1.2 2R1U Behavior	Nindyati (2014), Worasuda Khwansuwan & Satinee Wattanakit (2020)
2. Green Purchase Intention	2.1 Purchase Decision	Fontes et al. (2021), Piyanoot Kamalanon et al. (2022)
	2.2 Willingness to Pay	Piyanoot Kamalanon et al. (2022)
3. Green Product Awareness	3.1 Recognition	Al-Kumaim et al. (2021), Pirapom Nuchprasert & Thirawat Chantuk (2017), Rungnapa Somsakul & Prapon Premthongsuk (2019), Wong and Tzeng (2021)
	3.2 Recollection	Pirapom Nuchprasert & Thirawat Chantuk (2017), Rungnapa Somsakul & Prapon Premthongsuk (2019)
4. Health and Environmental Attitude	4.1 Knowledge	Nitima Aungatichart et al. (2020), Siddique and Hossain (2018), Yadav and Pathak (2016)
	4.2 Concern	Ampol Chayomchai (2020), Darsono et al. (2019), Nitima Aungatichart et al. (2020), Siddique and Hossain (2018), Yadav and Pathak (2016)
5. Green Marketing Mix 4Es	5.1 Experience	Kitiya Issavarestagul (2019)
	5.2 Exchange	Kitiya Issavarestagul (2019)
	5.3 Everyplace	Kitiya Issavarestagul (2019)
	5.4 Evangelism	Kitiya Issavarestagul (2019)
6. Green Financial Innovation Attributes	6.1 Relative Advantage	Jamshidi and Hussin (2018), Miranda and Balqiah (2020)
	6.2 Compatibility	Jamshidi and Hussin (2018), Miranda and Balqiah (2020)
	6.3 Complexity	Jamshidi and Hussin (2018), Miranda and Balqiah (2020)
	6.4 Trailability	Jamshidi and Hussin (2018), Miranda and Balqiah (2020)
	6.5 Observability	Jamshidi and Hussin (2018), Miranda and Balqiah (2020)
7. Government Support	7.1 Policy	Din et al. (2016), Kumar et al. (2019), Rajadurai et al. (2021)
	7.1 Incentive	Din et al. (2016), Kumar et al. (2019), Rajadurai et al. (2021)

Methodology

This study is a qualitative research conducted by starting from the review of theoretical concepts and past research related to consumer behavior to understand the process of changing consumer behavior, especially the thought process of consumers in making a decision to buy green products, as well as the search for factors that influence behavioral change and the components of each factor. After that, they were used as information for model development for changing sustainable consumer behavior. Then the developed thought process and conceptual framework were used to conduct in-depth expert interviews to confirm the factors and components of each factor, as well as the relationship between the factors. This study requires a team of 7 experts, consisting of 1 expert on green product business operations, 1 expert on green product policy development and design, 1 expert on product analysis and development, 1 expert in planning and design related to marketing, and 3 green product consumers who have 7, 4, and 3 years of experience in consuming green products.

Results of the Study

According to the review of theoretical concepts and past research related to consumer behavior and in-depth expert interviews, the consumer's thought process in deciding to buy green products was analyzed and defined as shown in Figure 1 by applying the Planned Behavior Theory (TPB) and the Buying Decision Process concept to be applied in the analysis of thought process. It starts with consumers recognizing that they are interested in or wanting to consume certain products to alleviate their problems or satisfy their needs causing them to start searching for various information to be analyzed and compared. The source of information comes from consumers themselves who have knowledge, understanding, and concerns about the situation or problems that occur at that time, such as their own health and environmental issues. Eventually, it leads to an attitude toward those issues. Some of the information comes from outside consumers get, for example, from business operators trying to offer their products through marketing mix tools, from financial service providers that provide information through financial products and innovations, and from the government that provides information through the implementation of various policies and measures (Government Support). When consumers receive the information, they will compare the information to evaluate and select the products that best meet their needs which may be considered based on value, ease to buy, support to address environmental problems, and other benefits. Comparing such information will make consumers aware of green products (Green Product Awareness) that are products that can meet their needs the most. This results in the decision and intention to consume green products (Green Purchase Intention) and ultimately leads to repeated consumption of green products continuously resulting in green consumption behavior (Green Purchase Behavior), which includes sharing experiences and persuading others to use green products.

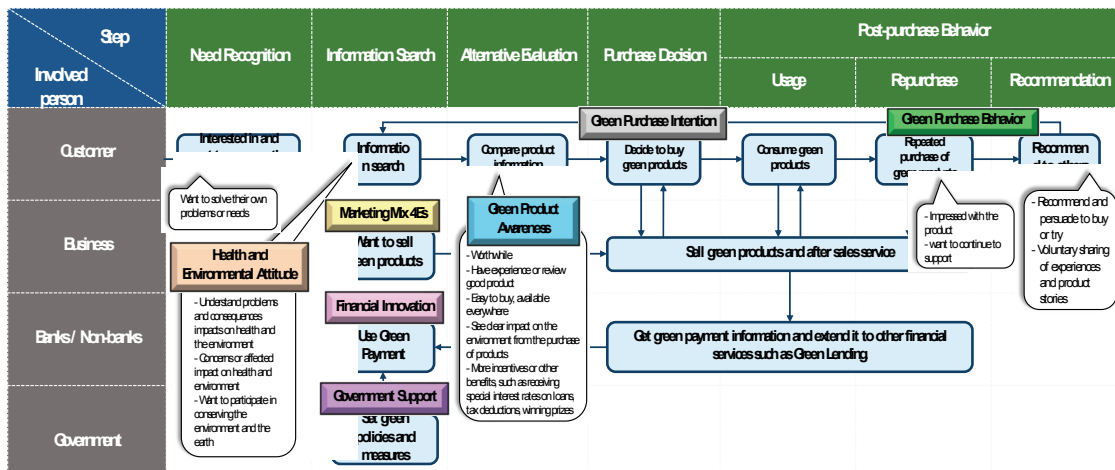


Figure 1 Green Product Buying Decision Process

According to the thought process of buying green products of consumers above, a conceptual framework for sustainable consumer behavioral change can be developed as shown in Figure 2. In other words, attitudes derived from knowledge and concerns about health and the environment are fundamental factors that can arise from within consumers themselves. It will make consumers turn their attention to green products until they become aware of green products. As for the marketing mix 4Es tool that entrepreneurs try to use to offer green products and adopted green finance innovations help consumers to see their actions on the environment and the support of policies and incentives from the government that will create consumer interest and turn to consume green products. It is an external factor that helps consumers to recognize and remember green products, which is an element of awareness of green products more easily. And when there is awareness, it will result in a consumer's purchase intention, as demonstrated by the decision and

willingness to pay for choosing green products to consume until they have consumed green products and continued efforts to reduce waste in the long-term to create sustainable behaviors.

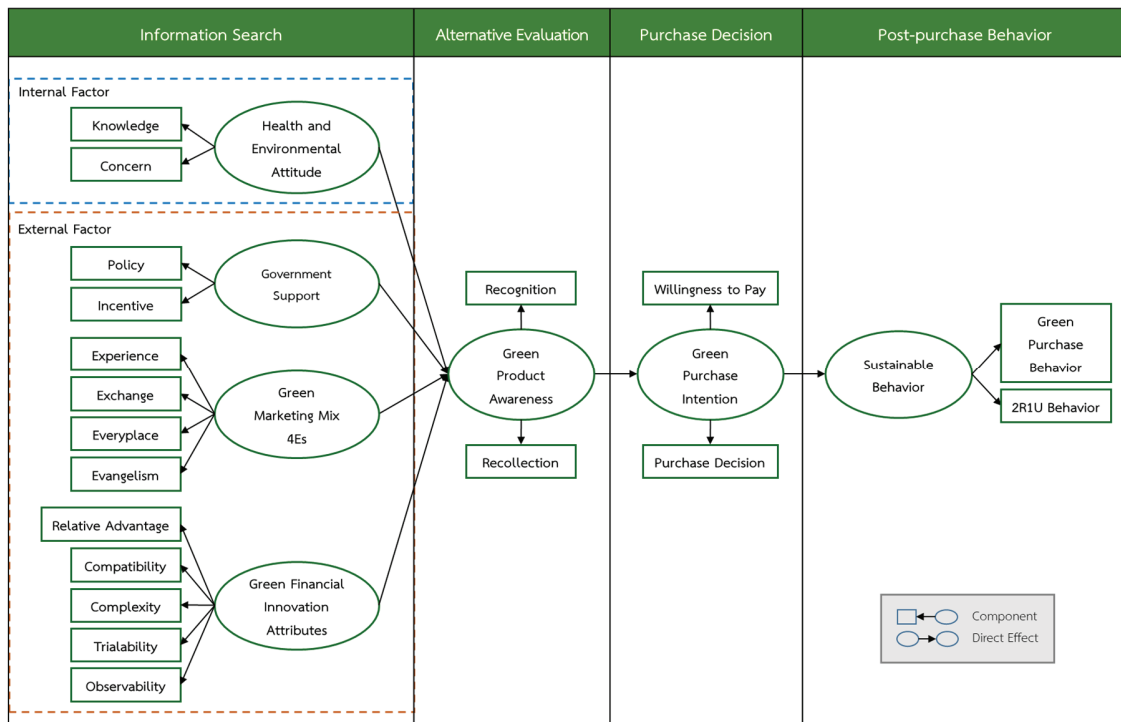


Figure 2 Conceptual Framework for Sustainable Consumer Behavior

Discussion

According to the data analysis, it can be concluded that the change in sustainable consumer behavior (Sustainable Behavior), consists of Green Purchase Behavior and waste reduction behavior (2 R1 U Behavior). They are influenced by health and environmental attitude, which are internal factors from the consumers themselves and promotion from relevant sectors by obtaining information on green products through the marketing mix 4 Es from the business sector, information on spending that creates an environmental impact through green finance innovations from the banking sector and support information from the government sector, which is an external factor for consumers. These result in awareness of green products and subsequent purchase intentions for green products until sustainable behaviors are realized.

Recommendations

The developed conceptual framework of sustainable consumer behavior change can be used for empirical studies to analyze the influence of each factor to suggest supportive approaches to drive consumers to change their behavior sustainably and concretely. It can also be used as a basis for further study of other factors that may be relevant in the future.

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