Chapter 12

Should I Recycle or Not?
Effects of Attitude Strength and Social Pressure

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ABSTRACT

Pro-environmental attitudes do not always result in environmentally friendly behavior. To determine how ecologically friendly behavior can be stimulated, some attitudinal, situational, and personal variables that have been shown to affect attitude-consistent behavior are investigated in influencing recycling behavior. Previous research has shown contradictory results concerning attitude strength, social pressure, and the attitude-behavior relationship. Either strong attitudes or strong situations predict attitude-behavioral consistency. The results indicate that attitude strength is a more powerful predictor of attitude-behavior consistency than social pressure. Strong attitudes are more likely to result in attitude-consistent behavior, regardless of social pressure. Only when attitudes are weaker does social pressure have an impact on attitude-behavior consistency. Moreover, this effect is moderated by individuals’ levels of self-monitoring.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-4430-4.ch012
INTRODUCTION

The general belief that positive attitudes towards a certain brand or proposal will result in attitude-consistent buying behavior, leads most marketers to try to induce positive attitudes. However, as a lot of social psychological and consumer research has already demonstrated, the relationship between attitudes and behavior most often is not that straightforward. Attitudinal (e.g. strength), personal (e.g. ignorance about products) as well as contextual (e.g. availability) factors may moderate the attitude-behavior relation (for a meta-analysis see Glasman & Albarracin, 2006; Kraus, 1995). To get a better picture of the extent and nature of the influence that attitudes have on behavior, it is important to identify these moderating variables, and the relation between them.

In this study, several attitudinal, personal and contextual factors are investigated with respect to environmentally conscious behavior. Despite consumer’s growing concern about environmental problems facing our planet, a concern that has rendered some consumers to behave in a more ecologically friendly manner, experts warn that environmental conditions have severely deteriorated over the last several years. Positive attitudes towards environmentally friendly behavior alone will thus not solve our environmental problems. Still more consumers must be encouraged to act on their positive attitudes and behave in a more ecologically friendly manner. It is important to identify ways of establishing that.

BACKGROUND

Consumers’ engagement in pro-environmental behavior is, despite the continued efforts, still difficult to predict. Little empirical evidence exists to support that pro-environmental attitudes and beliefs generally translate into environmentally conscious behavior such as recycling (Knussen, Yule, MacKenzie, & Wells, 2004; Lee & Holden, 1999; Hume, 1991). As mentioned before, several variables have been identified that might moderate the attitude-behavior relationship.

According to Tanner (1999), especially personal factors are put forward to explain the attitude-behavior inconsistency, while contextual behavior related factors are often neglected. However, behavior often depends on an immediate situation that might impose different constraints on behavior than on verbal expressions of an attitude (Wallace, Paulson, Lord, & Bond, 2005). Smith and Terry (2003) concluded that attitude-behavior relations cannot be well understood without reference to the social context in which behavioral decisions are made and enacted. This conclusion
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