

## THE MEDIATING ROLE OF VALUES ON ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AWARENESS

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### Abstract

In recent years, irresponsible consumption of natural resources and increasing rates of individual consumption has led to rapid industrialization and growing environmental pollution. For this reason, the adoption of environmentally responsible consumer behavior has become a necessity. Since family is the first place where social environment for modelling is formed, parents have an important role in bringing the next generation consumption attitudes. Previous literature emphasizes the effect of the mother's consumption attitudes and behaviors on the child's (Moore and Moschis, 1981). The main objective of this research is to investigate the effect of parents on the individual's environmentally responsible consumption awareness. Values are representative of the general goals and objectives developed at different times and situations (Schwartz, 1992). Individual's values have an effect on behaviors, especially on consumption behaviors. Therefore, this paper examines the influence of individual's values on environmentally responsible consumption awareness. In addition, the effect of demographic characteristics such as gender, age, family income level on the individual's environmentally responsible consumption awareness is explored.

The sample of the study consisted of 293 university students aged between 18 and 28. Schwartz Values List and Environmentally Conscious Consumption and Awareness Scale have been used to collect data. Additionally, participants have also reported their perceptions about their parents' Environmentally Conscious Consumption and Awareness. The results indicated that the mother's environmentally responsible consumption awareness predicted positively individual's environmentally responsible consumer awareness. Also, benevolence values were found to have a mediating role between individuals and mother's environmentally responsible consumer awareness. Finally, universalism values also have a mediating role between individuals and mother's environmentally responsible consumer awareness. This study contributes to the relevant literature by investigating the role of the individual values on environmentally consumption behavior within family scope.

**Keywords:** Socially responsible consumption behaviour, family, values

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Unlimited and irresponsible use of resources led to the rise of environmental problems and resource scarcities. Scientific, technological, industrial development and the rapid progress of modern man in the field of economics improve the quality of life, while damaging the environment and the livings (Rodda, 1991).

Rapid population growth and economic development caused the depletion of natural resources and early exploitation of the needs of the next generation (Roberts, 1996). Thus, next generation needs to develop more responsible consumption attitudes to be able to reduce environmental problems and use the resources carefully.

Socially responsible consumer describes the individuals who are more sensitive to environmental and social problems and are the ones who tend to be less damaging the environment and more careful about their product consumption (Roberts, 1996). In today's environment, individuals must act knowing that the natural resources are needed to sustain the life of others (Pickett-Baker and Ozaki, 2008). Thus, the need for increasing the awareness for socially responsible consumer behaviour is urgent. To increase this awareness family and education institutions are the first environments in which a child will learn to develop good habits (Thogersen and Ölander, 2002).

Family is the first institution where societal values, culture and consumption habits are developed (Moschis, Moore and Smith, 1994). Thus, family has an important role in upbringing the next generation as responsible and environmentally conscious consumers (Moore and Moschis, 1981). Especially mothers have a powerful impact on raising environmentalists and conscious children (Moore and Stephens, 1975). Equally powerful impact can be created via consumer education, which aims to train and inform the consumers. Consumer education is an informational and educational investment including the orientation of economic activity of individuals, addressing their needs, increasing awareness about resources, informing them about their fundamental rights and about their power to influence the market (McNeal, 1992).

Previous literature examined the relationship between consumer attitudes and responsible consumption behavior as well as environmental awareness. However, the responsible consumption awareness has not yet been observed in terms of individual values and in the context of the parents' consumption awareness. Therefore, the main objective of this research is to investigate the role of the mothers and individual values on the individual's socially responsible consumption awareness. The mediating role of individual values between mother's socially responsible consumption awareness and the individual's socially responsible consumption awareness were investigated as well. In addition, the demographics such as gender, age, family income level effect on socially responsible consumer behavior were also explored.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. The next section explains the methodology that we used to reach our main objectives. Then, we report the findings from a survey study. Finally, an overall discussion of the findings, implications and potential directions for future research are presented.

## **2 METHOD**

### **2.1 Participants**

The sample consisted of 171 (58.4%) female and 122 (41.6%) male university students. The average age was 20.56 with a standard deviation of 1.43. Participants were selected from various departments in a university in Istanbul.

### **2.2 Measurement Tools**

#### *Demographic Information Form:*

This form is designed by researchers to collect demographic information such as age, gender, education, parent's education level, parents' working status, income level, areas of study and asks if they volunteer in environmental activities.

#### *Consumption Consciousness on Environmental Responsibility:*

Consumption Consciousness on Environmental Responsibility is a 24-item self-report instrument, developed by Köse & Gül (2014). The scale consists of three factors; "environmental responsibility and consciousness", "consumption and purchasing" and "saving-economy". Higher scores indicate higher level of consumption consciousness on environmental responsibility. The total Cronbach's Alpha reliability value was .76 and subscales were between 0.75-0.81. Examination of scree plot suggested one dimension as "environmental responsibility and consciousness". This factor accounted for 38% of the variance.

#### *Schwartz Value Survey (SVS):*

SVS developed by Schwartz (1992) was adapted to Turkish by Kuşdil & Kağıtçıbaşı (2000). SVS consisted of 56 items measuring individual values. The scale consists of ten factors; power, achievement, security, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, conformity, tradition. By referring to the

literature in this field, we found out that power, achievement, hedonism, universalism and benevolence factors are closely related to the environmental responsibility and they are exclusively used in such studies. (Thogersen and Ölander, 2002) Examination of scree plot suggested two dimensions as universalism ( $\alpha = .80$ ) and benevolence ( $\alpha = .78$ ). These two factors accounted for 36% of the variance.

## 2.3 Procedure

Participants have conducted a survey by filling out a paper form. The survey consists of four sections: demographic form, the Consumption Consciousness on Environmental Responsibility, the perceptions about their mother's Consumption Consciousness on Environmental Responsibility and Schwartz Value Survey.

## 3 RESULTS

52.2% ( $n=153$ ) of the participants were from psychology; 18.1% ( $n=53$ ) were from engineering, 16.0% ( $n=47$ ) were from business; 8.2% were ( $n=24$ ) from law and 5.5% ( $n=16$ ) were from sociology department students. Most of the participants' mothers and fathers were graduates of high school.

Using an independent t-test, it was confirmed that there is a significant difference between male and female participants in terms of environmentally responsible consumption awareness. Females' environmentally responsible consumption awareness is higher than males [ $t(291) = 4.60, p = .01$ ]. Using an independent t-test, it was confirmed that there is a significant difference between psychology students and the students from other departments. Psychology students have more environmentally responsible consumption awareness than the others [ $t(291) = 4.46, p = .01$ ]. We didn't find any significant difference among parent's education level, their working status and income level.

Correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationships between all variables in the study. According to the results, there is a positive and a significant correlation between universalism, benevolence and environmentally responsible consumption awareness (respectively:  $r = 0.34, p < .01$ ;  $r = 0.19, p < .01$ ). It is also seen that there is a positive and a significant correlation between parent's (mother and father) and individual's environmentally responsible consumption awareness (respectively:  $r = 0.31, p < 0.01$ ;  $r = 0.31, p < .01$ ). No other correlations were found significant.

### 3.1.1. Regression Results

A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted with mother's environmentally responsible consumption awareness, universalism and benevolence to determine the predictors of individual's environmentally responsible consumption awareness.

Mother's environmentally responsible consumption awareness significantly predicted individual's environmentally responsible consumption awareness ( $\beta = .18, t(290) = 2.07, p < .05$ ). In addition, universalism ( $\beta = .44, t(290) = 5.55, p < .05$ ) and benevolence ( $\beta = .14, t(290) = 1.71, p < .05$ ) values significantly predicted individual's environmentally responsible consumption awareness. These three variables explained 11% of the individual's environmentally responsible consumption awareness ( $R^2 = 0.11, F(3, 291) = 10.67, p < .01$ ).

### 3.1.2. Mediating Role of Universalism Value in the Relationship between Mother's Environmentally Responsible Consumption Awareness and Individual's Environmentally Responsible Consumption Awareness:

First of all, mother's environmentally responsible consumption awareness was entered into the equation as a predictor of individual's environmentally responsible consumption awareness. Mother's environmentally responsible consumption awareness is a positive and significant predictor of individual's environmentally responsible consumption awareness ( $\beta = 0.31, t = 5.64, p < 0.01$ ). It explained 10% of the variance of individual's environmentally responsible consumption awareness ( $R^2 = 0.10, F(1, 191) = 31.78, p < .01$ ).

Secondly, universalism was entered into the equation as a predictor of mother's environmentally responsible consumption awareness. Universalism is a positive and significant predictor of mother's environmentally responsible consumption awareness ( $\beta = 0.33, t = 5.99, p < .01$ ) and explained 11% of mothers ( $R^2 = 0.11, F(1, 1912) = 35.86, p < .01$ ).

Finally, mother's environmentally responsible consumption awareness and universalism were entered simultaneously into the equation; universalism is a positive and significant predictor of individual's environmentally responsible consumption awareness ( $\beta = 0.27, t = 4.73, p < .01$ ). Also the relationship between mothers environmentally responsible consumption awareness and individuals environmentally responsible consumption awareness relationship strength has reduced ( $\beta = 0.23, t = 3.94, p < .01$ ). The

decrease of the beta coefficient of mother's environmentally responsible consumption awareness was confirmed to be significant by the Sobel test ( $z = 3.24, p < .05$ , see Fig. 1).

### 3.1.3. Mediating Role of Benevolence Value in the Relationship between Mother's Environmentally Responsible Consumption Awareness and Individual Environmentally Responsible Consumption Awareness:

At first, mother's environmentally responsible consumption awareness was entered into the equation as a predictor of individual's environmentally responsible consumption awareness. Mother's environmentally responsible consumption awareness is a positive and significant predictor of individual's environmentally responsible consumption awareness ( $\beta = 0.31, t = 5.64, p < 0.01$ ) and explained 10% of the variance of individuals environmentally responsible consumption awareness ( $R^2 = 0.10, F(1, 191) = 31.78, p < 0.01$ ).

Second, benevolence was entered into the equation as predictors of mother's environmentally responsible consumption awareness. Benevolence is a positive and significant predictor of mother's environmentally responsible consumption awareness ( $\beta = 0.25, t = 4.31, p < 0.01$ ) and explained 6% of mother's environmentally responsible consumption awareness ( $R^2 = 0.06, F(1,291) = 18.57, p < 0.01$ ).

Finally, when mother's environmentally responsible consumption awareness and benevolence were entered together into the equation, benevolence is a positive and significant predictor of individual's environmentally responsible consumption awareness ( $\beta = 0.12, t = 2.02, p < 0.01$ ). Also the relationship between mother's environmentally responsible consumption awareness and individual's environmentally responsible consumption awareness relationship strength has decreased ( $\beta = 0.29, t = 5.00, p < 0.01$ ). The decline of the beta coefficient of mother's environmentally responsible consumption awareness was confirmed to be significant by the Sobel test ( $z = 3.78, p < 0.05$ , see Fig.2).

## 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This part of the study, discusses the findings within the framework of the relevant literature. Previous literature has investigated demographic variables (gender, marital status, age, education level, family income) of the environmentally conscious consumers to examine the relationship between attitudes or consumption (Straughan and Roberts, 1999; Tilikdo and Delistavro, 2001).

### 4.1. Demographic Variables

#### 4.1.1. Gender

First of all, although there are studies that did not find an effect of gender on the attitudes and behavior related to environmentally conscious consumption (Samdahl ve Robertson, 1989), there are more findings about women exhibiting significantly more environmentally conscious behavior than men (Blocker and Eckberg, 1997; Laroche et al., 2001; Webster, 1975; Mohai, 1992; Roberts, 1996). Straughan ve Roberts (1999) identified the environmentally conscious consumer's typical features as young, medium-income, educated and urban women. Furthermore, some researchers found that women are more biosphere (which focuses on the environment and ecosystem values) compared to men (Stern et al., 2005).

Consistent with previous literature, we found that women's environmentally conscious consumption awareness is significantly higher than men's. Women's upbringing, cultural factors and conventional gender roles drive them to be more attached, nurturing, and collaborative and caregiving (Zelezny and Bailey, 2006). Lee (2009) proposed that with the adoption of increasing responsibility and gender roles starting with puberty, women in their early adulthood turn out to be more responsive to issues related to environmental issues.

#### 4.1.2. Income

Many studies showed that income is an important factor on environmentally conscious consumption behavior (Newell ve Green, 1997; Roberts, 1996; Roberts ve Bacon, 1997; Samdahl, Robertson, 1989; Zimmer ve ark., 1994). As the family income increases, conscious consumption behavior is also likewise increasing since environment gain more importance than price (Newell ve Green, 1997). In addition, high-income individuals do have enough economic power to buy environmentally friendly products that can be expensive to purchase (Ay ve Ecevit, 2005).

However, we did not find any significant difference of family income on environmental responsibility awareness. This can be explained by the fact that the participants are college students who have homogenous family profiles. However, we found a significant effect of the pocket money that participants

received from their families on their environmental responsibility awareness. However, pocket money might also vary depending on many factors.

#### **4.1.3. Parents' Education Level**

Although previous literature found a significant positive relationship between the mother's and father's education level and sensitivity to the environment, we did not find significant effect of parents' education on environmentally responsible consumption awareness. Individuals with a high level of education have more information about environmental problems thus they are more sensitive to issues related to environmental liabilities (Çabuk et al., 2008). The findings about education level and environmental responsibility are contradictory: some studies showed that highly educated individuals are more environmentally friendly (Anderson and Cunningham, 1972; Çabuk et al., 2008; Roberts, 1996; Dunlap and Van Lierde, 1978; Zimmer et al., 1994) and there are also studies proving the vice versa (Samdahl and Robertson, 1989). In addition, there also exist studies showing that education is not a predictor of environmentally friendly behavior (Çabuk and Nakıboğlu, 2003; Mainieri et al., 1997; Straughan and Roberts (1999).

#### **4.1.4. Majors**

This study investigated the effect of majors of the participants' impact on environmentally responsible consumption awareness. Psychology students showed significantly higher scores about environmental responsibility than sociology, law, engineering, and business-economics departments' students. The reason for this is thought to be the psychology department students to have higher environmental awareness in which they live as well as in having more information about issues that concern their community.

## **4.2 The Predictors of Environmentally Responsible Consumption Awareness**

### **4.2.1. Mother's and Fathers' Roles on Environmentally Responsible Consumption Awareness:**

This study found a significant positive effect of both mother's and fathers' environmentally responsible consumption awareness impact on the individual's. Individual's attitudes and habits are acquired through early family life (Cüceloğlu, 1996; Nazlıoğlu, 1991). Specifically individual's consumer attitudes and individual consumption patterns are affected by the mother's and father's parental attitudes and behaviors (Bener ve Babaoğlu, 2008; Güven, 2010).

### **4.2.2 Universalism and Benevolence Impact on Environmentally Responsible Consumption Awareness:**

Both universalism and benevolence has been found to be positive predictors of Environmentally Responsible Consumption Awareness

There are various studies that examined the relationship between values and environmental friendly behavior in different countries; universalism and benevolence values are found to be a positive predictor whereas power and achievement values are found to be negative predictors of environmentally responsible behavior (Stern, Dietz and Kalof, 1993; Stern ve Dietz, 1994; Stern et al., 1999).

Schwartz (1994) argues that those who value universalism care about social justice, unity with nature and goodness for humanity. Individuals high on universalism value feel more environmentally responsible and abandon selfish purposes. Our findings are consistent with the conceptual and empirical findings in the previous literature.

### **4.2.3. The mediating role of universalism and benevolence values between mother's and individual's Environmentally Responsible Consumption Awareness:**

We found mediating roles of universalism and benevolence between the mother's and individual's environmentally responsible consumption awareness. Most of our values develop in the early stages of life (Hofstede, 1991). The ideas and values of the parents play a crucial role in shaping our values (Marcia, 1966). Many individuals learn by observing their family and acquire their attitudes and habits.

Family is considered to have an important role in consumer socialization process. Previous literature related to the socialization of consumers, is examining the consumer's socialization process with two perspectives; communication style of the family (Moschis, 1978; Carlson et al., 1990) and parental attitude (Becker, 1964; Baumrind, 1966; Carlson and Grossbart, 1988). The socialization process of children as consumers could also affect their future consumption behavior. Especially the intentional or unintentional behavior of the mother has a significant impact on the socialization process of children as consumers. Mother's attitude and behavior play an important role in shaping their children's consumption attitudes and behavior (Moore and

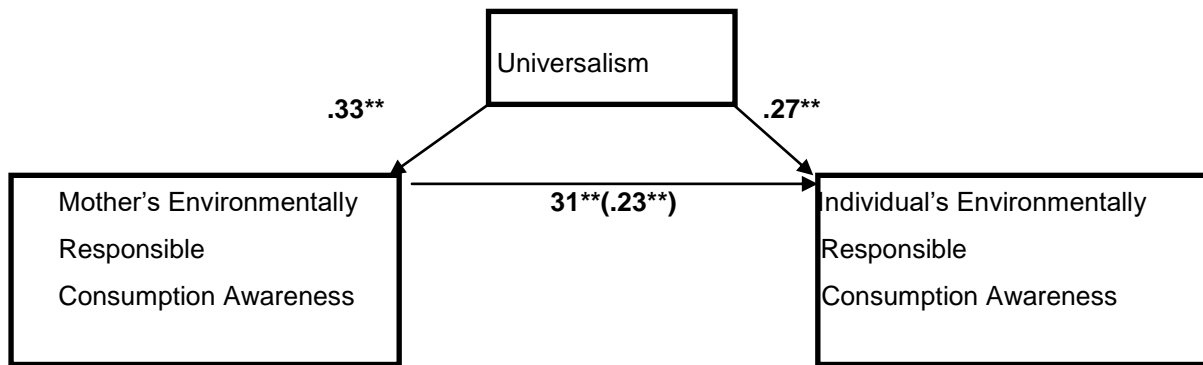
Moschis, 1981) As a result, the mother's environmentally responsible consumption awareness with universalism and benevolence work together to create the individual's environmentally responsible consumption awareness.

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**Figure1:** Mediator Role of Universalism Value in the Relationship between Mother's Environmentally Responsible Consumption Awareness and Individual Environmentally Responsible Consumption Awareness



**Figure2:** Mediator Role of Benevolence Value in the Relationship between Mother's Environmentally Responsible Consumption Awareness and Individual Environmentally Responsible Consumption Awareness

