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What causes consumers to buy regular food in environmentally friendly packaging

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ABSTRACT

Increasing numbers of food producers are adopting new – more environmentally friendly – packaging materials for their food products. However, a question lingers about what causes consumers to buy regular liquid food in environmentally friendly packaging, especially when such food is typically more expensive and offers little additional nutrition to its consumers. This is the primary question of this dissertation. To answer this question, four studies were conducted.

The first study involves a systematic literature review of the extant studies on consumers' perceptions of foods in environmentally friendly packaging published in the past 25 years. Through synthesizing the extant research on consumers' perceptions of foods in environmentally friendly packaging, this study identifies important similarities as well as important gaps in extant research in this area. Specifically, the literature review shows that current studies are limited in the range of theoretical explanations utilized and, consequently, are limited in the range of studied predictors of consumers' decisions to purchase food in environmentally friendly packaging. The review also highlights limitations concerning the knowledge available regarding how much consumers are willing to pay for environmentally friendly packaging and how this value differs across cultures.

Building on the literature review's findings, the second study answers the question: What factors predict consumers' intentions to purchase milk/juice in environmentally friendly packaging? Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior was used to develop a conceptual model, which was tested on data from 7,028 consumers from 11 countries. The study reveals that consumers' attitudes toward environmentally friendly packaging, having an eco-friendly lifestyle, the perceived affordability of the package and the perceived ease of use of the package

are positively associated with consumers' intentions to purchase liquid food in environmentally friendly packaging. Consumers' perceptions regarding the availability of milk/juice in environmentally friendly packaging are found to moderate the aforementioned relationships positively. Moreover, ecoliteracy appears to positively influence consumers' attitudes toward milk/juice in environmentally friendly packaging and consumers' having eco-friendly lifestyles, which both positively influence consumers' intentions to purchase milk/juice in environmentally friendly packaging.

The third study answers the question: Which factors predict consumers' willingness to pay more for environmentally friendly packaged liquid food, such as milk and juice? Wilson, Lindsey and Schooler's (2000) theory of dual attitudes was used to answer this question. A proposed model was tested on data from 11 countries, with a total of 7,028 respondents. The study shows that consumers' willingness to pay a higher price for liquid food in environmentally friendly packaging is predicted by their positive attitudes toward the environmental friendliness of packaging, the brand of the liquid food producer, and the affordability of the liquid food in the environmentally friendly packaging. Having an eco-friendly lifestyle and ecoliteracy were found to be important predictors of consumers' attitudes toward environmentally friendly packaging.

The fourth study answers the following question: Across cultures, how do the effects of consumers' attitudes toward environmentally friendly packaging vary in their influence on consumers' purchasing intentions for liquid (regular) foods such as milk and juice with environmentally friendly packaging? In this study, the cultural differences and, specifically, the differences based on the cultural value of individualism versus collectivism in consumers' attitudes toward environmentally friendly packaging were tested on the same set of data. The analysis revealed that while ecoliteracy and having an eco-friendly lifestyle significantly shape attitudes toward environmentally friendly packaging in individualistic cultures, the relationship

between attitudes and actual intentions to purchase the liquid food in environmentally friendly packaging is stronger for collectivistic cultures.

This dissertation concludes by discussing the implications of the presented research for future research and practice. In terms of research implications, this dissertation suggests that future research should continue investigating consumers' attitudes as this dissertation found that various attitudes are important predictors of consumers' pro-environmental purchasing intentions and behaviors. Additionally, future research should study consumers' increasing awareness of the effects of packaging on the environment and address consumers' lifestyle changes and changes in their pro-environmental consumption. Future research should also further investigate the existence of cultural differences in consumers' pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors.

Finally, this dissertation has several important practical implications. Among the main implications are implications that concern individuals, industry, and governments. First, all relevant stakeholders are invited to consider the important effects of education on consumers' pro-environmental purchasing behaviors. Next, food and packaging producers are encouraged to engage in developing new marketing and communication approaches for products in environmentally friendly packaging, among which this dissertation discusses opportunities for co-branding and ingredient branding. Finally, governments are called on to consider cultural differences in their policymaking efforts.