Influence of Conative Attitudes towards Green Advertising on Black Generation Y Students' Environmental Behaviour

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Abstract

This article reports on a study undertaken to determine the influence of conative attitudes towards green advertising on black Generation Y students' environmental behaviour in the South African context. In South Africa, the Generation Y cohort, which is defined as including individuals born between 1986 and 2005, accounted for 40 percent of the country's population in 2011. The African portion of this cohort (hereafter referred to as black Generation Y) comprise an estimated 84 percent of this cohort. This translates into black Generation Y individuals being a market force of significant importance to marketers, including those engaged in green advertising efforts. Despite the importance of this market segment, their consumer behaviour remains under researched in general, specifically concerning their attitudes towards environmental issues and marketing. In order to address this shortfall in the literature, a structured, self-administered questionnaire was used to gather data on conative attitudes towards green advertising and how this influences environmental behaviour from a sample of 400 black Generation Y students across four South African public registered higher education institutions' campuses situated in the Gauteng province. Data analysis included measurement of model fit, independent z-tests and path analysis using structural equation modelling. According to the results, there was acceptable fit between the proposed two-dimensional model for measuring conative attitudes towards green advertising and the data in the sample. The findings suggest that in South Africa, black Generation Y students' conative attitudes towards green advertising have a significant positive influence on their environmental behaviour.

Keywords: *Green advertising, conative attitudes, environmental behaviour, South Africa, black Generation Y students*

1. Introduction

Green advertising represents an important marketing tool for communicating an organisation's green image and is the driving force behind fostering environmental awareness and environmentally friendly behaviour (Leonidou, Leonidou, Palihawadana & Hultman, 2011). As with any type of advertising, an important determinant of the success of green advertising is consumers' attitudes towards green advertising and corresponding environmental behaviour (Haytko & Matulich, 2008). Typically, attitudes are viewed as consisting of a cognitive, affective and conative component, where the conative component represents the likelihood or intention to act in accordance with the cognitive and affective components. The conative component is of particular importance to marketers as it suggests the actual behavioural intentions of a target market (Schiffman, Kanuk & Wienblit, 2010).

The youth of today, labelled as the Generation Y cohort (includes individuals born between 1986 and 2005) (Markert, 2004; Eastman & Liu, 2012), represent the future of environmentalism, which makes them an important target market for the green movement (Lee, 2009). In the South African market, the African portion of this cohort (hereafter referred to as black Generation Y) is of particular interest to marketers given that they make up 84 percent of the county's Generation Y cohort (Statistics South Africa, 2011).

There is a dearth of published literature on the South African Generation Y's consumer behaviour in general. In particular, there is lack of published research that focuses specifically on the significantly sized black Generation Y cohort's conative attitudes towards green advertising. In order to address this gap in the literature, this article reports on a study undertaken to determine black Generation Y students' conative attitudes towards green advertising and their consequent environmental behaviour. The study focuses students in particular because a tertiary qualification is generally linked to a higher future earning potential (Loudon & Della Bitta, 1993; Mowen, 1993; Schiffman et al., 2010; Taskinsoy, 2012) and a higher social standing within a community (Schiffman et al., 2010). The combination of these two factors increases likelihood of the student portion of this cohort having a greater opinion leadership capacity amongst the wider black Generation Y target market.

Green marketing

Green marketing is, in a sense, an oxymoron in that it merges the seemingly contradictory concepts of marketing, which focuses on facilitating and encouraging consumption, and environmental concern, which focuses on environmental conservation. The paradoxical combination of these two concepts is made possible through the social marketing concept's philosophy of sustainability (Peattie & Charter, 2003), which stipulates satisfying current consumers' needs and desires in a sustainable manner so as to ensure the standard of living of future generations (Peattie & Charter, 2003; Kotler, 2011).

Kotler (2011) predicts that environmental issues will have an increasingly significant influence on the practice of marketing in terms of ensuring the availability and quality of natural resources for succeeding generations.

In an effort to address global environmental awareness, many organisations are greening their business practices and adopting green marketing as a way of communicating these efforts to their target markets, with green advertising being one of the primary marketing communication tools being used to create a pro-environmental organisational image (Haytko & Matulich, 2008; Schiffman et al., 2010; Leonidou et al., 2011).

Green advertising

Advertising is an important element of the marketing communication strategy and includes the dimensions of informativeness and persuasiveness (Kotler, 2003). A target audience's attitudes towards advertising in general, as well as towards a particular advertisement serve as important predictors of their attitudes towards the object of those advertisements (Schiffman et al., 2010). While the cognitive and affective components of attitudes towards advertising messages are undoubtedly important (Ducoffe, 1996), ultimately it is the conative attitudinal component that denotes the persuasive value of an advertising appeal, in that it manifests as an intention to take a specific action or engage in a particular behaviour (Schiffman et al., 2010). Determining a target audience's conative attitudes towards green advertising serves to not only justify the use of such an appeal in reaching that target market but also as a predictor of that target market's attitudes towards pro-environmental behaviour.

Advertising represents a salient social phenomenon that not only stimulates demand but that also serves to shape lifestyles and value orientations in society (Pollay & Mittal, 1993), and is credited as being the driving force behind public awareness of green issues and the growing demand for green products and services (Leonidas et al., 2011).

Banerjee, Gulas and Iyer (1995) define green advertising as any advertisement that links environment issues with a service or product with the view of enhancing a green lifestyle. Chang (2011) adds that green advertising constitutes advertisements that show products or services in an environmentally friendly manner, whether it be in the production process or in the features of the products and services that conserve resources and energy.

According to Banerjee et al. (1995), the last decade has seen a surge in the number of marketers targeting the green segment of the population with green advertising, with advertisements designed to inform target audiences about the pro-environmental characteristics of their products and services. Green advertising is considered as pivotal to encouraging environmentally friendly behaviour. From an organisational viewpoint, green advertising is an essential tool for communicating an organisation's green image and, if successfully executed, may possibly lead to achieving a sustainable competitive edge (Leonidou et al. 2011).

Studies suggest that when designing green advertising, it is better to adopt emotional rather than rational appeals (Lee, 2009; Pickett-Baker & Ozaki, 2008). Laroche, Bergeron and Barbaro-Forleo (2001) add that green advertising should educate consumers of the convenience of purchasing green products and services, as many still perceive being environmentally friendly as an inconvenience. Furthermore, Pickett-Baker and Ozaki (2008) highlight that green

advertisements need to be relevant and engaging and should contain information, not only on the benefits of green products and services but also on improvements made to them.

Green advertising may be used as an effective tool in an organisations overall environmental marketing strategy. This, ultimately, translates into a competitive advantage; however, to achieve green advertising benefits, organisations must win over the trust of both consumers and stakeholders. This task might prove to be difficult when trying to capture the Generation Y market, as this generation is quick to identify and criticise unauthentic and untruthful marketing claims (Leonidou et al., 2011; Ottman, 2011).

Generation Y

In generational studies, today's youth are classified as Generation Y and includes those individuals born between 1986 and 2005 (Markert, 2004; Eastman & Liu, 2012), which, in 2012, puts them at eight to 27 years of age. The Generation Y cohort accounted for approximately 40 percent of South Africa's 50 587 757 population in 2011. In terms of race, the black Generation Y cohort accounted for approximately 84 percent of the South African Generation Y cohort and 33 percent of the total South African population (Statistics South Africa, 2011).

International studies indicate that Generation Y members socialisation into a media-saturated, brand conscious and materialistic world (Wolburg & Pokrywczynski, 2001; Bakewell & Mitchell, 2003) has made them more vigilant to marketing practices which seem to be dishonest or bogus (Ottman, 2011), which is an important consideration in designing green advertising messages targeted at this cohort.

There are indications that Generation Y individuals prefer to consume from organisations that contribute to sustainability by means of helping people, communities and the environment (Barton, Fromm & Egan, 2012; Smith, 2012). They are purported to be significant users of the Internet (Schwalbe, 2009; Barton et al., 2012), mobile telephony (Kumar & Lim, 2008; Schwalbe, 2009) and virtual social networking sites (Nicholas, Rowlands, Clark & Williams, 2011:44; Barton et al., 2012). Accordingly, Lee (2009) suggests that green marketers utilise new media platforms to reach this cohort. The reach of these new platforms may be of importance to green marketers targeting Generation Y members, as research indicates that they, more so than previous generations, actively encourage others to support cause campaigns (Barton et al., 2012). Furthermore, Spero and Stone (2004) advise the use of the emotional appeal to get the Generation Y individuals to connect to brands. In terms of green advertising, Lee (2009) echoes this sentiment and advocates that green marketers should focus on an emotional rather than rational green appeal in their advertising message design when targeting this generational cohort.

The black Generation Y cohort represents an important target market for green marketers in South Africa and, as indicated by Barton et al. (2012), getting this generational cohort to engage with brands, including green brands, involves designing marketing messages that are applicable to, and mindful of, them.

Methodology

1.1   Sampling method

The target population relevant to this study were the full-time black Generation Y students, aged between 18-24 years, enrolled at South African registered public higher education institutions (HEIs) in 2012. The sampling frame comprised the 23 registered South African public HEIs, as listed by Higher Education in South Africa (HESA, 2011). Using a judgment sampling method, this sampling frame was narrowed down to four HEIs located in the Gauteng Province – two of which are country-based and two of which are city-based. A non-probability convenience sample of 400 full-time undergraduate black Generation Y students was used to conduct this study. Lecturers at each of the four HEIs were contacted and requested to distribute the questionnaire to their students either during class or after class.

1.2   Research instrument

This study used a structured, self-administered questionnaire to gather the required data. In order to measure black Generation Y students' conative attitudes towards organisation-generated green advertising, a two-dimensional scale from a scale developed and validated by Haytko and Matulich (2008) was used. The original scale, which was designed to measure overall attitudes towards green advertising, comprised four dimensions. However, as this study was concerned with conative attitudes towards green advertising, only two dimensions were used, namely consumer

responses to the companies and their products (13 items) and consumer specific behaviours (four items). The environmental behaviour of black Generation Y students was measured using the 15-item scale of Haytko and Matulich (2008), to which a sixteenth and a seventeenth item pertaining to littering were added. The questionnaire included a section designed to gather relevant demographical data from the respondents. In addition, the questionnaire included a cover letter outlining the purpose of the study and providing relevant contact details.

The questionnaire was piloted on a convenience sample of 50 students on a South African HEI campus that did not form part of the sampling frame in order to establish its reliability. A Cronbach alpha value of 0.773 was computed on the consumer-related response to green advertising and one of 0.817 for the specific behavior related response to green advertising. The environmental behaviour scale returned a Cronbach alpha value of 0.904. The recorded reliability of all scales exceeds the suggested Cronbach alpha level of 0.700 (Pallant, 2010).

1.3 Results

Of the 400 questionnaires handed out, 295 were returned completed, which translates into a response rate of 74 percent. The majority of the respondents indicated being 19 years of age, followed by those who indicated being 18 years of age and 20 years of age. Concerning the respondents' year of study, the majority indicated being first-year students, followed by those who indicated that they were in their third year. There were a greater number of female respondents than male in the sample. The sample included slightly more respondents from city-based universities than country based universities. Table 1 provides a description of the sample.

Table 1. Sample description

Age	Percent (%)	Gender	Percent (%)	Year of study	Percent (%)	Institution	Percent (%)
18	24	Male	41	First year	67	University A:	
19	26	Female	59	Second year	12	Country based	31
20	24			Third year	19	University B:	
21	14			Postgraduate	2	Country based	16
22	6					University C:	
23	3					City based	27
24	2					University D:	
						City based	26

In the main survey, a Cronbach alphas for the constructs of conative attitudes towards green advertising were both above the suggested 0.700 value, with an alpha of 0.822 computed on the consumer-related response scale and an alpha of 0.765 on the specific behaviour related response scale. The Cronbach alpha for the environmental behaviour scale was 0.871. In order to assess construct validity, the average inter-item correlations were computed, where values ranging from 0.15 and 0.50 indicate convergent and discriminant validity (Spiliotopoulou, 2009). The two constructs within the conative attitudes towards green advertising scale, as well as the environmental behaviour scale, all scored average inter-item correlation values within the recommended range. This suggests that the items in the scales, as well as the items within the individual constructs in the conative attitudes towards green advertising scale, are both sufficiently correlated to suggest convergent validity, yet not so highly correlated from measures from which they are intended to differ, which indicates the presence of discriminant validity (Iacobucci & Churchill, 2010).

The proposed model for measuring conative attitudes towards green advertising was assessed using AMOS, Version 21 to determine whether the data in the sample fit the model, with the model being specified as comprising the two latent factors of consumer related responses and specific behaviour related responses to green advertising, consisting of 13 and 4 indicators respectively. The last loading on each latent factor was fixed at 1.00. Inspection of the model indicated no negative error variances and no standardised coefficients exceeding or very close to 1.00; that is, the results exhibited no offending estimates in the model. Table 2 provides four model fit indices. While the Chi-square statistic was significant, which typically alludes to poor model fit, this statistic is known to be sensitive to large sample sizes (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2010), as is the case with this study. As such, two incremental fit indices (Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)) and two absolute fit indices (Goodness-of-fit Index (GFI) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)) were used to measure model fit.

Table 2. Attitude-towards-green-advertising model fit indices

Model Fit Indices	Values
Chi-Square (degrees of freedom)	208.56 (118) p=0.000<0.05
Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI)	0.93
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.05
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.92
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI))	0.91

Typically, GFI, CFI and TLI values in the 0.90s (preferably close to 0.95), and small RMSEA values (preferably 0.06 or less) are indicative of good fit (Byrne, 2010). While the CFI and TLI values in this study are slightly low, the GFI and RMSEA values reported in Table 2 suggest acceptable model fit. In addition, to establish the reliability and convergent validity of the two-dimensional measurement scale, the composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were calculated. The CR and AVE values for each dimension are reported on in Table 3.

Table 3. Measurement model reliability and reliability

Dimension	CR	AVE
Consumer related responses to green advertising	0.93	0.50
Specific behaviour related response	0.80	0.50

Both constructs exceed the critical level of 0.70 for the composite reliability and make the cut-off value of 0.50 for the AVE values (Malhotra, 2010). This infers that the proposed model for measuring conative attitudes towards green advertising is a reliable and valid measuring instrument.

Means above 3 were computed for both of the constructs in the conative attitudes towards advertising scale. Similarly, means above 3 were computed for environmental behaviour. A one tailed z-test was used to measure whether the recorded means are significant, with the expected mean set at 3 and the significance level at *a*=0.05. The recorded means, standard deviations, standard errors, and computed z-scores and p-values are set out in Table 4.

Table 4. Black Generation Y students' conative attitudes towards green marketing and their environmental behaviour

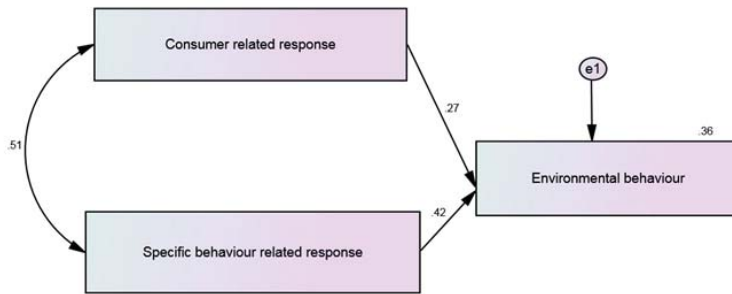|	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard error	t-value	p-value
Consumer related response to green advertising	3.54	0.53	0.03	17.506	0.000*
Specific behaviour related response to green advertising	3.35	0.77	0.04	7.807	0.000*
Environmental behaviour	3.42	0.59	0.03	12.240	0.000*
*Significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed)					

P-values of p<0.05 were computed for both constructs pertaining to conative attitudes towards green advertising, as well as for environmental behaviour. This suggests that the black Generation Y students have significant positive conative attitudes towards green advertising and behave in an environmentally responsible manner.

Path analysis was the conducted to determine the influence of conative attitudes towards green advertising on black Generation Y students' environmental behaviour.

A path diagram was specified for the structural model testing the influence of the two conative attitudes towards green advertising dimensions on environmental behaviour. A regression weight constraint of 1.00 was specified for the effect of error on the endogenous value. Figure 1 presents the estimated structural equation model.

Figure 1. Estimated structural equation model

As is evident from Figure 1, at a significance level of a=0.05, there are significant positive relationships between the dimensions of conative attitudes towards green advertising at 0.51. Specific behaviour related response to green advertising (0.42: p=0.000<0.05) has larger significant effect on black Generation Y students' environmental behaviour than consumer related behaviour response to green advertising (0.28: p=0.000<0.05). Looking at the squared multiple correlation coefficients, the two conative dimensions of attitudes towards green advertising account for 36 percent of the variance in environmental behaviour.

Discussion

Environmental issues continue to have a significant effect on the practice of marketing as the urgency of ensuring the availability and quality of natural resources for succeeding generations becomes increasingly evident. The future of the green movement is very much dependent on the attitudes and behaviour of today's youth, known as the Generation Y cohort. In the context of South Africa, the sheer size of the black Generation Y cohort makes them crucial to the current and future state of the country's environment. Given the elevated social standing associated with having a tertiary education, black Generation Y graduates in particular are likely to be important trendsetters and role models concerning environmental attitudes and behaviour.

This study sought to determine black Generation Y students' conative attitudes towards green advertising and the influence of those attitudes on their environmental behaviour. The findings of the study suggest that black Generation Y students have significantly positive conative attitudes towards green advertising and towards pro-environmental behaviour. The hypothesised two-dimensional model for measuring conative attitudes towards green advertising was assessed and found to be reliable, valid and exhibit acceptable model fit. In terms of this model, consumers' conative attitudes towards green advertising consist of the two dimensions of consumer related responses and specific behaviour related responses. While the cognitive and affective components of attitudes towards green advertising are crucial indicators of a target market's perceived value of the green advertising appeal, organisations are more likely to be interested in their conative attitudes towards green advertising. The conative attitudinal component provides an indication of consumers' likelihood to engage in a specific behaviour or take a specific action. Gaining an understanding of consumers' conative attitudes towards green advertising fosters a clearer understanding of their likelihood of showing a preference for green market offerings and the organisations making them. Therefore, from a marketing point of view, determining a target audience's conative attitudes towards green advertising provides an indication of that target market's inclinations towards actual purchasing intentions towards organisations and their market offerings that employ the green advertising appeal.

This study found that black Generation Y students have significantly positive conative attitudes towards green advertising and towards pro-environmental behaviour. This infers that the use of the green advertising appeal would be appropriate when targeting this market segment in South Africa. As the Generation Y cohort is known to be vigilant and highly critical to bogus marketing hype, care needs to be taken in ensuring the authenticity of green advertising claims. Suitable advertising platforms for reaching this target cohort include the Web, mobile telephony and virtual social networks. In accordance with international studies, it is suggested that emotional rather than rational green marketing appeals are employed.

In terms of the structural equation model, the findings of the study indicate a strong positive relationship between the conative attitude dimensions of consumer related responses and specific behaviour related responses to green

advertising. The study found that specific behaviour related responses to green advertising had a larger significant effect on black Generation Y students' environmental behaviour than consumer related behaviour responses to green advertising. Taken together, the two conative dimensions of attitudes towards green advertising accounted for 36 percent of the variance in environmental behaviour. This suggests that black Generation Y students' conative attitudes towards green advertising predict their pro-environmental behaviour and that they will continue to champion the green movement future generations in South Africa.

Limitations and future research

When interpreting the results of this study, there are limitations that need to be considered. The first limitation being that non-probability sampling was used to gather the required data. Even though care was taken to include both city- and country-based universities, and to include demographic questions concerning age, year of study and gender in an effort to indicate target population representation, care should be exercised in generalising the results to the wider South African black Generation Y cohort, especially given that the study was limited to the Gauteng province.

Furthermore, a cross-sectional research design was followed in the study, which only offers a snap shot in time. Attitudes towards green advertising may vary in accordance with the actions of marketers. It would only take a few publicised unethical green marketing activities to change create a sense of cynicism towards green marketing practice in general.

In addition, the study focused on consumer- and behaviour-related attitudes towards green advertising (that is, the conative attitudinal component) and did not take into account cognitive and affective attitudes towards green advertising. Future research into overall attitudes towards green advertising (cognitive, affective and conative) is advised.

Conclusion

Green advertising is a significant marketing communication tool for conveying an organisation's green image to its target market(s) and represents a driving force behind fostering environmentally friendly behaviour. As with any type of advertising, an important determinant of the success of green advertising is consumers' attitudes towards green advertising and consequent behaviour in relation to the environment. In South Africa, the significantly sized black Generation Y segment is of specific importance to the future of the green movement. Marketers are advised to consider the student portion of this age and ethnic cohort in particular given that black Generation Y members with a tertiary education are likely to manifest as pertinent opinion leaders and trendsetters amongst their peers.

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