CSR, Product Image, and Corporate Reputation as Underling Mechanism to Investigate the Influence of Green Marketing Awareness on Purchase Intention for Policymakers

Marzie Sadeghi[1], Amir Alizadeh Chamazkoti[2], Rosha Makvandi[3] and Milad farzin[4*]

[1]*Phd Candidate, Department of Entrepreneurship, Sari Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sari, Iran.*
E-mail: Sadeghi.partco@gmail.com
[2]*Phd Candidate, Department of Management, Sari Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sari, Iran.*
E-mail: amir.245.a@gmail.com
[3]*Department of Business Management, Karaj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Karaj, Iran.*
E-mail: mcvandi.r@yahoo.com
[4]*Department of Business Management, Rahedanesh Institute of Higher Education, Babol, Iran and*
Department of Business Management, Sari Branch, Islamic Azad University, Sari, Iran
[*]*Corresponding author: Milad.farzin85@gmail.com; Milad.farzin@srbiau.ac.ir*

Abstract: Due to the increase in knowledge and environmental concerns of consumers, awareness of green marketing and purchase of green products has become one of the basic issues in consumer research. For this reason, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of green marketing on the purchase intention of consumers in the retail sector. In this regard, corporate image, which includes corporate social responsibility, product image, and corporate reputation, was considered as a mechanism that facilitates this process. To obtain the required data, we surveyed a group of people with previous experience in purchase of eco-friendly apparel. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed among 423 respondents; 379 were taken for data analysis, eliminating outliers and incomplete questionnaires. The research hypotheses were tested using the structural equation modeling (SEM) technique. According to the results, the awareness of green marketing had the impact on corporate social responsibility, product image, and corporate reputation. In addition, these factors have significant positive effect on the purchase intention of consumers. Interestingly, it is worth mentioning that the product image receives the most influence from green marketing and has the most influence on purchase intention. The results of the present study provide guidance

to marketing practitioners for the segmentation of target consumers and help them discover better ways of designing their marketing campaigns.

INTRODUCTION

Today, the world is challenged by the disrupting ecosystem concerns about how to utilize environmental and natural resources for accelerating industries with "green" engine. The green economy has been promoted across the globe as it seeks to grow the economy and improve the well being of society, while simultaneously protecting the environment. Green economy policies and strategies, if totally embraced, will create business opportunities, create green jobs, and improve the livelihood of the world's poor (Bailey *et al.*, 2016). Green growth means fostering economic development while ensuring that the environment is protected for the next generation. Green economy initiatives catalyze investment and innovation, which will underpin sustained growth and give rise to new business opportunities (Ko *et al.*, 2013). To this end, enterprises are moving towards implementing green marketing practices.

Across the globe, a growing number of companies and consumers have been focusing on environmental issues and sustainable consumption, in light of various reports regarding the negative impact that consumer behavior is having on the planet (Kim *et al.*, 2020). Consequently, there has been an increasing awareness of green marketing, and consumers have been responding to brands that promote environmental responsibility, especially since companies' environmental efforts are now being widely regarded as part of their corporate social responsibility (Farzin *et al.*, 2021a). Green marketing awareness is related to businesses' understanding of their accountability for the quality of the environment while meeting consumer needs, demands and satisfaction (Ko *et al.*, 2013). Green purchase intention is associated with an individual's inclination to buy and use products with eco-friendly features when purchase considerations are based on the product features and the product image. Producers position the environmental benefits of green products in consumers' minds to evoke their purchasing decision. Consumer awareness of green marketing is materialized when consumers have confidence in eco-label and eco-brand which influences their green product purchase behavior (Kong *et al.*, 2020).

Over time, consumers become more socially responsible towards the environment, which leads to socially responsible consumption such as saving energy, buying eco-labeled products, separating waste, or recycling (Schramm-Klein *et al.*, 2015). On the other hand, when businesses and companies develop their products and branches, they

see the need to establish their reputation as good citizens in engaged markets (Martín de Castro *et al.*, 2020). In addition, increasing attention to business ethics and standards of business practices has forced businesses to participate more in corporate social responsibility in the market (Schramm-Klein *et al.*, 2015). This issue is reflected in the widespread belief among consumers that green consumption is a necessity in everyday life as well as in global communities. Thus, consumer perception of green marketing becomes more critical to maintaining the corporate image in a favorable manner than traditional marketing in the consumer market (Mukonza and Swarts, 2020).

Despite the popularity of green marketing as a strategic initiative in Iran, little is known about its impact on consumer response in retailing (Farzin *et al.*, 2021b). Many retailers given green marketing are motivated to act in a socially responsible manner (Schramm-Klein *et al.*, 2015), not only for their ethical obligations but also for marketing performance resulting from consumer response to corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives in Iran. Accordingly, marketers should understand the function of consumers' perceived effectiveness in mapping strategic marketing in the retail venue. In addition, one stream of CSR literature is understanding the performance of consumers' awareness of green marketing, in which the marketing theme influences CSR-related corporate identity, which in turn influences product purchases and usage intentions. Moreover, identifying consumers with different sensitivities towards environmental issues is discussed to create strategic marketing performance. For this purpose, the current study explores the mechanisms through which awareness of green marketing can lead to purchase intention of consumers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Green Marketing with Corporate Image

It has been accentuated that firms need to apply green marketing strategies to gain sustainable competitive advantage. The current environmental problems facing the world require managers to formulate strategies that preserve and protect natural resources (Millar *et al.*, 2012). In fact, green marketing is no longer a niche area, but rather a necessity that is imperative to implement (Ko *et al.*, 2013). Emerging green businesses indicate the positive attraction that green growth has received from marketers across the world (Kautish and Sharma, 2019). Green marketing is defined as "the effort by a company to design, promote, price and distribute products in a manner which promotes environmental protection" (Yadav *et al.*, 2016). Green marketing is part of the key movements in modern business sustainability. Companies focusing on the natural ecological balance in their entire operation are more environmentally friendly while maximizing profits; they reduce environmental pollution, conserve natural resources,

and protect the environment (Walsh *et al.*, 2009b). They gain a unique competitive advantage and develop new markets as they improve their corporate image, reputation, and their product image from the consumer perspective.

There is a saying that first impressions last. Even in business, corporate image is everything because it gives the overall impression of a business (Yadav *et al.*, 2016). Research has revealed that green marketing strategies increase business efficiency and improve corporate image and then lead to business success (Mukonza and Swarts, 2020; Walsh *et al.*, 2009a; Yeo and Youssef, 2010). There is a growing literature on the various perceived benefits of green marketing strategies, including good corporate image, waste control, cost minimization increased customer satisfaction, and increased productivity (Ko *et al.*, 2013). There are several benefits for businesses that adopt and develop green marketing strategies, as they simultaneously reduce environmental pollution and enhance their corporate image (Emeizan *et al.*, 2016). The corporate image consists of three sub-aspects, including "corporate social responsibility, product image, and corporate reputation" (Ko *et al.*, 2013). Based on the above reasoning, the following hypotheses are posited:

H1: Consumer awareness of green marketing is positively influenced corporate social responsibility.

H2. Consumer awareness of green marketing is positively influenced product image.

H3. Consumer awareness of green marketing is positively influenced corporate reputation.

Corporate Image with Behavioral Intention

Behavioral intention is defined as the individual's likelihood to engage in a particular behavior. Owing to the high predictive power of behavioral intentions on actual behavior, behavioral intention is widely studied in consumer behavior and marketing. Numerous studies on corporate image indicate a positive relationship between corporate image and purchase behavior (Ko *et al.*, 2013; Mukonza and Swarts, 2020; Yadav *et al.*, 2016; Yeo and Youssef, 2010;). For instance, Yeo and Youssef (2010) suggest that the more the consumer has a favorable corporate image, the more the likelihood the consumer evaluates a new product positively, suggesting the importance of corporate image in purchase behavior.

Excellent consumer experience with the use of business products and services will lead to a good perception of the corporate image and form a good image for the business. Some studies argue that business' ability to understand the importance of social challenges will create opportunities for them to improve their reputation (e.g. Walsh *et al.*, 2009a; Walsh *et al.*, 2009b). The creation of a corporate image is not only

the result of real forms but also a result of business actions and behavior. In the era of public awareness formation on environmental sustainability, businesses pay more attention to green marketing (Kim *et al.*, 2020). The growing awareness of the community has affected the tendency of businesses to become more concerned about the protection of the environment as part of their social responsibility, (Chaudary *et al.*, 2016). Businesses with green products tend to portray environmentally friendly purchasing decisions that would affect their consumers to get a lot of loyal consumers. They would enable their consumers to make a quick decision on the purchase of green products/ services (Ko *et al.*, 2013).

In the past, a number of studies have shown a significant positive relationship between corporate image and purchase intention/purchase behaviors (Farzin *et al.*, 2020; Ko *et al.*, 2013; Farzin *et al.*, 2022). Farzin *et al.*, (2022) pointed out that corporate image plays an important role in influencing the purchase behavior of consumers. In addition, consumers judge the products of a company with positive reputation more favorably (Walsh *et al.*, 2009b). Lee *et al.*, (2010) in their study noted that corporate image is an important consideration in tourism and hospitality research. Existing empirical researches suggest that the corporate image contributes to a more favorable behavioral intention (i.e. revisit intention) (Han and Kim, 2010; Han *et al.*, 2009; Lee *et al.*, 2010). Similarly, Ko *et al.*, (2013) found that the corporate image of the firm strongly influences the purchase intention of the products and services of a particular firm in a positive way. Thus from above, we can posit that the factors of corporate image has a positive influence on purchase intention of green products.

H4: Corporate social responsibility is positively influenced purchase intention.

H5: Product image responsibility is positively influenced purchase intention.

H6: Corporate reputation is positively influenced purchase intention.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Measurement Tools

A quantitative study was conducted to find out the effect of green marketing awareness on purchase intention with regard to the corporate image including CSR, product image, and corporate reputation. To do this, a structured questionnaire was composed to obtain the answers of the target population, the completion of which required 10 to 20 minutes. The first section of the questionnaire included the queries on the sample demographics and the second section was assigned to the items for the test of the research hypotheses. Responses for all constructs employed in this study were measured on a seven-point scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). These constructs were measured using

scales based on minor adaptations from existing scales. These were green marketing awareness (Mukonza and Swarts, 2020), CSR (Chaudary *et al.*, 2016), product image (Müge Arslan and Korkut Altuna, 2010), corporate reputation (Walsh *et al.*, 2009b), and purchase intention (Farzin *et al.*, 2022). The distributed questionnaire was originally drawn in the respondents' mother tongue (Farsi) which subsequently was translated into English for reporting in the article. It should be noted that for the translation of the original items into Farsi, the double-blind back-translation process was used.

Statistical Population and Sample, Data Gathering and Analysis Method

The population taken for this study is Iranian young adult consumers of fashion retailers. We have chosen this section because they are conscious of new trends in fashion and clothing and are more concerned about the environment (Varshneya *et al.*, 2017). Considering the time and financial constraints, convenience sampling is used which is consistent with the sampling procedure in similar studies (e.g. Farzin *et al.*, 2021b). The research sample included consumers who have had previous experience with the consumption of eco-fashion products. Prior to administering a final questionnaire, the awareness level of respondents in relation to purchase intention of eco-fashion was checked with a set of questions. The respondents who gave satisfactory responses were screened for the final survey. The consumers were personally approached and invited to fill out the questionnaires. The fieldwork was carried out from February to June 2022. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed among 423 respondents; 379 were taken for data analysis, eliminating outliers and incomplete questionnaires. That is a return rate of 0.88, indicating that the understudy sample was large enough to represent the target population. Furthermore, this study used an a priori sample size calculator for structural equation modeling (Soper, 2017). Given the number of observed (N=17) and latent (N=4) variables, the anticipated effect size (d=0.30), the desired probability (p = .05), and the statistical power (.80), a minimum sample size of 141 was required. Thus, our sample (n = 379) met the recommended minimum sample size for sampling adequacy. Table 1 presents the demographics of the research participants.

The descriptive part of the data analysis was performed with the aid of SPSS software and for the inferential statistics, structural equation modeling (SEM) was used in Smart PLS3 software environment. Partial least square method was used for the statistical analysis in this research since it is flexible to the assumptions regarding data distribution and is suitable for the execution of formative prediction models and constructs with fewer measures (Hair *et al.*, 2017). Besides, this method allows both reflective and formative modeling of latent constructs and is an established method for the estimation of cause-related models (Henseler *et al.*, 2009).

Table 1: Sample profile

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage	CF (percent)
		Gender	
Male	128	33.77	33.77
Female	251	66.23	100
		Age	
20-25	83	21.9	21.9
26-30	177	46.7	68.6
31-35	99	26.12	94.72
36-40	17	4.48	99.2
Above 40	3	0.8	100
		Education	
Graduate	283	74.67	74.67
Postgraduate	80	21.1	95.77
PhD	16	4.23	100

RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this study, we analyze and interpret the PLS model in two stages. First, we assess the measurement model, and in the second stage, we test the proposed hypotheses of the structural model.

Measurement Model

Indicator validity shows which portion of the variance in the indicator is explained by the latent variable, where the factor loadings above 0.7 are acceptable (Hair *et al.*, 2017). All the factor loadings, as reported in table 2, are higher than 0.7. The reliability of all the model constructs, measured by Cronbach's alpha, lies within the range of 0.865 and 0.972 which is higher than the standard threshold of 0.7 (Henseler *et al.*, 2009). Hence internal consistency of the model constructs is confirmed. Composite reliability is used to assess if the model constructs together are adequately reliable. The obtained value for composite reliability of the model constructs lies within the range of 0.912 and 0.982 which is higher than the minimum acceptable value of 0.7. Hence the model constructs are adequately reliable in terms of composite reliability.

Next, the research convergent and discriminant validity are examined. The average variance extracted (AVE) for all the research constructs is higher than the suggested threshold of 0.5 (see table 3) whereby the measurement model convergent validity is confirmed. As seen in table 3, the square roots of AVE are absolutely greater than the diagonal correlations, confirming the model discriminant validity at the level of the research constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). In addition, in this study, the obtained

Table 2: Factor loadings and reliability of research constructs

Constructs	Measures	Loads	Cronbach's ±	CR
Awareness of Green Marketing (AW)			0.924	0.943
	AW1	0.893		
	AW2	0.925		
	AW3	0.905		
	AW4	0.887		
	AW5	0.769		
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)			0.869	0.912
	CSR1	0.936		
	CSR2	0.88		
	CSR3	0.914		
	CSR4	0.746		
Product Image (IMG)			0.865	0.917
	IMG1	0.905		
	IMG2	0.873		
	IMG3	0.881		
Purchase Intention (INT)			0.972	0.982
	INT1	0.963		
	INT2	0.973		
	INT3	0.983		
Corporate Reputation (REP)	REP1	0.96	0.894	0.949
	REP2	0.942		

Notes: CR: Composite Reliability

value of variance inflation factor (VIF) for all the indicators lies within the range of 1 and 1.273 which is lower than the critical level (VIF < 5) (Henseler *et al.*, 2009), confirming thereby validity of the composite measurement model (Hair *et al.*, 2017).

Table 3: Convergent, discriminant, and composite validity of measurement model

Constructs	AVE	VIF	AW	CSR	IMG	INT	REP
AW	0.770	1.000	0.877				
CSR	0.725	1.063	0.240	0.852			
IMG	0.786	1.273	0.508	0.234	0.887		
INT	0.947	1.000	0.364	0.306	0.533	0.973	
REP	0.904	1.237	0.464	0.165	0.433	0.465	0.951

*AVE: The average of the extracted variance, the square root of the AVE constructs on the diameter and below the diameter of the correlation between the reported constructs.

Structural Model

The structural model was used to test the research hypotheses. Figure 1 represents the model's overall explanatory power and the regression coefficients of the standard path which indicate the direct effects of the predictor variables on the predicted latent constructs of the model. R-square (R2) value shows the degree to which our model explains variance in the dependent variables. In our model, R2 explains 38 percent of purchase intention variance, 22 percent of corporate reputation variance, 6 percent of CSR variance, and 26 percent of product image variance (see figure 1). In addition, the model overall fit was tested using the goodness-of-fit (GOF) index. Given the obtained value for the GOF index (0.41), the model overall fit is confirmed.
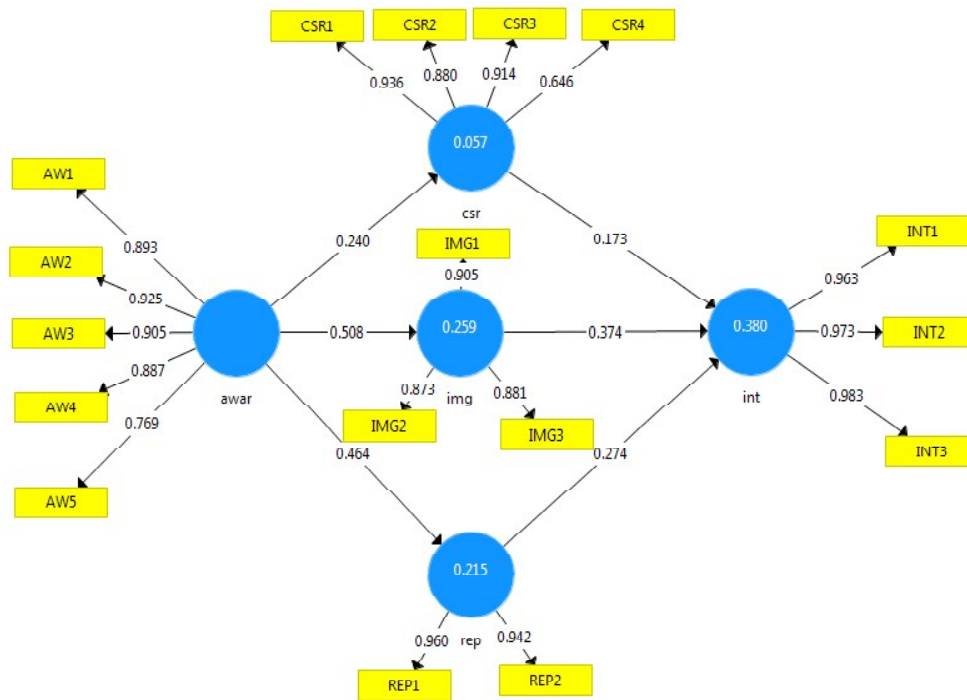

Figure 1: Standardized regression coefficients of the proposed model

The proposed hypotheses were tested by path modeling in PLS which are presented in table 4. The results suggested that AW had positive and significant effects on CSR, IMG, and REP (t-values> 3.29, p < 0.001) confirming the first to third hypotheses. Moreover, it has been found that CSR, IMG, and REP had a positive and significant effect on INT (t-values> 3.29, p < 0.001). As a result, hypotheses 4 to 6 are accepted as well.

Table 4: Test of hypotheses

Hypotheses	Path Coefficients	T Statistics	P Values	Result
AW -> CSR	0.240	4.290	p<0.001	Supported
AW -> IMG	0.508	11.491	p<0.001	Supported
AW -> REP	0.464	7.189	p<0.001	Supported
CSR -> INT	0.173	4.078	p<0.001	Supported
IMG -> INT	0.374	8.568	p<0.001	Supported
REP -> INT	0.274	6.323	p<0.001	Supported

CONCLUSION

With the changing fashion retailing setting, green marketing awareness is viewed as an integral part of the business strategy by the fashion retail sector in Iran. The present study gives an insight to the marketers of the fashion retail sector about how green marketing awareness leads to increasing purchase intention. To do this, corporate image including CSR, product image, and corporate reputation were investigated to explore underlying mechanisms. The results revealed that the awareness of green marketing has a positive and significant impact on CSR, product image, and corporate reputation, which leads to the enhancement of the corporate image. On the other hand, the results illustrated that purchase intention is robust when corporate image promote in the mind of consumers.

Implications

In the present study, the corporate image consists of three factors: corporate social responsibility, product image, and corporate reputation. This finding indicates that the consumers perceive the corporate image as an overall identity in conjunction with product quality and corporate social responsibility aspects. This result shows that corporate image comprises a product of various factors and communicates the identity of businesses. Surprisingly, the product image is a critical antecedent of purchase intention in the fashion retail setting, supporting that the product-related corporate image makes consumers reduce risks of purchase decisions. In addition, corporate reputation is strongly affected by the awareness of green marketing increases a consumer's purchase intention of the product. Such understanding of the effectiveness of green marketing may help consumers have a strong trust toward the company as well as its product quality, ultimately accomplishing business performance in the context of retailing.

From a managerial perspective, this study provides implications for marketers into a strategic application of green marketing in the retail venue. Although green business

is still in its infancy in Iran, green marketing program is feasible to be successful in creating corporate image in a positive way. In particular, marketing managers can expect a synergy effect of the CSR image positioning on product quality image, which may be able to promote eco-fashion consumption and increase retail sales. Thus, marketers should endeavor to reinforce their corporate image or reputations by promoting campaigns or events on a basis of social marketing.

In addition, socially responsible retailers should make an eco-fashion atmosphere to sustain their existing corporate image or good reputation when selecting suppliers or vendors. Moreover, considering an optimistic green business with a fashion product in the retailing, especially at the department store, apparel retailers can develop their brand extension into eco-friendly lifestyle product lines, which may create a socially responsible culture in terms of social welfare. The findings further suggest that marketers wanting to have a good corporate reputation should note how important delivering green marketing practices is to achieve their goal. This is noteworthy as much of the corporate reputation building considers the views of many different stakeholders as important, and considers issues such as social responsibility as key drivers of reputation. Indeed, what might be happening is green practices are casting a 'halo' effect onto the reputation items, i.e., because consumers are satisfied with business, they give more favorable ratings to the elements of business reputation.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has several limitations. The statistical sample used in this study only includes young adults of the Iranian consumer population and the results are confined to eco-fashion apparel consumption. Therefore, caution must be taken in extending (applying) the research results to other segments of the apparel industry. To increase the generalisability of the results, this study can be conducted for different age and cultural groups and different classes of goods. Another limitation is methodological and concerns the research approach. To deepen our insight regarding the purchase intention of eco-fashion, this phenomenon can be examined using other research approaches such as qualitative and semi-experimental ways of addressing the issues. Besides, in future studies, other antecedents such as resistance to change and impulse buying can be examined in connection with other consequences such as brand image and brand personality.

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