

How Green Consumption Values Affect the Intention-Behavior Relationship in C2C e-commerce

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Abstract

The intention-behavior gap is a true concern in sustainability contexts. Given that consumers vary in their pro-environmentalism, we study might green consumption values reinforce the intention-behavior relationship in sustainable consumption? Consumer-to-consumer e-commerce marketplaces provide platforms to implement the circular economy and sustainable consumption in daily life. A two-stage longitudinal study of 210 respondents asks consumers' intentions to buy second-hand Christmas gifts before Christmas and the same individuals' actual behavior after Christmas. The present study finds that intentions predict actual behavior. The effect is moderated by green consumption values suggesting that green consumption values reinforce the effect of intentions on behavior in a sustainability context. The effects are not confounded by age, gender, education, or income of the respondents.

Keywords: Intention-behavior gap, green gap, green consumption values, sustainable consumption, Christmas gifts, consumer-to-consumer e-commerce.

1. Introduction

Countless headlines in the public press have reported a gigantic increase in e-commerce following the COVID-19 pandemic. While the headlines have mainly concentrated on the success of business-to-consumer (B2C) marketplaces, such as Amazon and Walmart, consumer-to-consumer (C2C) marketplaces have received remarkably less attention. The growth of e-commerce has been evident, but so has the rise of commerce between consumers. For example, the fastest growing C2C platforms in the U.S. doubled their number of total visits in 2020 in comparison to the pre-COVID year 2019 (Pasquali, 2022). Indeed, C2C e-commerce market is growing faster than ever.

C2C e-commerce not only benefits trade but also implements the circular economy in daily life. By utilizing goods efficiently and sustainably when consumers recycle products, C2C e-commerce extends product lifecycle and reduces the need to produce new

products, saving emissions in production and transportation. White, Habib, and Hardisty (2019, p. 24) define sustainable consumer behavior as “actions that result in decreases in adverse environmental impacts as well as decreased utilization of natural resources across the lifecycle of the product, behavior, or service”. However, sustainability contexts suffer from the intention-behavior gap of consumers. The earlier literature speaks of a “green gap” suggesting that positive intentions towards green behavior do not necessarily translate into environmentally friendly practices and behavior (ElHaffar, Durif & Dubé, 2020). We study this phenomenon in the purchase of second-hand Christmas gifts on the C2C e-commerce marketplace. Christmas time is relevant for promoting sustainable consumption practices because, for example, the carbon footprint caused by Christmas purchases, 310 kg per person, corresponds to 20 percent of the whole year's carbon footprint, and the share of unwanted gifts alone corresponds to an 80kg carbon footprint per person (Haq et al., 2007). Despite the green gap, several studies show that intention is the most significant factor influencing behavior in general (Ajzen, 1991), but also in driving sustainable behavior (Onel, 2017). Consequently, we suggest that the intention to buy second-hand Christmas gifts predicts actual behavior. However, given that green gap likely plays a role and individual consumers differ in the value they place on protecting the environment in consumption settings (Haws, Winterich & Naylor et al., 2014), might green consumption values lessen the green gap and reinforce the intention-behavior relationship in sustainable consumption?

The study collected data in two time points, before the Christmas to measure respondents' intentions to buy second-hand Christmas gifts, and after Christmas to measure their actual behavior. The data consists of 210 individual consumers who responded both surveys. We use a hierarchical regression model in which we gradually predict the actual purchase of second-hand Christmas gifts with the purchase intention and the interaction term of green consumption values. In the

present study, we control the key demographics in the model.

We make three key contributions. First, we demonstrate that the intention to buy second-hand Christmas gifts significantly predicts the actual purchase behavior of consumers so that the intention alone explains 17.3 percent of the variance of the actual behavior. Thus, the green gap appears not to be as strong as some of the earlier literature suggest (e.g., Nguyen, Nguyen & Hoang, 2019). Second, we show that consumers' green consumption values improve the effect of intentions on behavior. This indicates that pro-environmental intentions are realized more strongly in behavior among those with greater green consumption values. Third, we show that socio-demographics do not explain much of the variance of the actual sustainable behavior.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

The present study builds on the scholarly literature on intention-behavior gap (Carrington, Neville & Whitwell, 2014; Crossler et al., 2014). Additionally, the theoretical background of the study is grounded on the green consumption literature, with consumer-to-consumer (C2C) trade representing one aspect of green consumption. Green consumption belongs to a broader category of ethical consumption (Carrington, Neville & Whitwell, 2010) and it relates to purchasing behavior which seeks to minimize the negative environmental and societal consequences (Nguyen et al. 2019). Green consumption is grounded on three fundamental objectives: 1) to choose green products that are good for health or do not pollute; 2) to dispose of or recycle consumer waste responsibly; and 3) to pay better attention to environmental protection, the conservation of natural resources and sustainable consumption while striving for comfort and health (Shao, 2019). According to White et al. (2019), green consumption behavior means not only actions that lead to a reduction in environmental impact but also a reduction in the use of natural resources.

2.1. Consumer-to-consumer e-commerce

Consumer-to-consumer e-commerce (Jones & Leonard, 2008; Leonard & Jones, 2021; Qin et al., 2021) is a smaller segment within the larger e-commerce market. Consumer-to-consumer (C2C) trade (Yoon & Occeña, 2015; Leonard & Jones, 2010) represents one of the developments regarding green consumption and consequently the present study addresses green consumption through a peer-to-peer (P2P) online

platform, which enables exchange between consumers (Plouffe, 2008). Thus, a phenomenon known as C2C trade refers to the trade between consumers where second-hand goods are usually being sold and bought (Plouffe, 2008; Yrjölä, Hokkanen & Saarijärvi, 2019). C2C trade has some unique characteristics, including the communality of activities (Hamari, Sjöklint & Ukkonen, 2016), intensity of cooperation, and the possibility for consumers to change sides, that is, to act in the role of both provider and recipient (Ertz, Durif & Arcand, 2019). In recent years, C2C exchange has become increasingly popular as it can potentially help to overcome some widely acknowledged societal challenges, including overconsumption, pollution, and poverty (Hamari et al., 2016). Nevertheless, C2C exchanges in P2P online platforms are not without challenges as they can lure consumers into impulsive purchases motivated by making surprise discoveries (Guiot & Roux, 2010; Padmavathy, Swapana & Paul 2019). Green consumption is also obscured by the fact that some C2C marketplaces offer brand new goods for sale (Wang, Wang & Tai, 2002).

2.2. Intention-behavior gap

The intention-behavior gap refers to a widely acknowledged inconsistency between intentions and behavior (Carrington et al., 2014; Crossler et al., 2014). Although numerous studies across disciplines identify the gap between intentions and behavior, systematic research explaining the gap has so far been relatively scarce (Carrington et al. 2010; Carrington et al. 2014; Hassan et al. 2016; Frank & Brock 2018). Overall, intentions are typically thought to point in the same direction as behavior or are at least strongly correlated with the behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein 2005). However, research by Nguyen et al. (2019), for instance, showed that a gap exists between intention and behavior, especially in green consumption.

Research on the green gap between intention and behavior focuses on looking at consumer behavior, rather than attitudes, with the idea that it is possible to influence intentions more effectively than attitudes (Frank & Brock 2018). Combining ethical concerns with all consumption poses a challenge and consequently, according to Carrington et al. (2014), people tend to prioritize what they consider the most important which then is reflected in consumers' purchasing and consumption behavior. Secondary concerns are not always reflected in purchasing behavior as they do not usually lead to the active development of action plans which is required for habit formation. According to Carrington et al. (2014), this prioritization is one of the causes of the gap between intention and behavior. Additionally, a lack of

commitment and a reluctance to sacrifice convenience can explain the gap between intentions and behavior in green consumption (Casais & Faria, 2022). Consequently, we hypothesize that:

H1: Consumer's intention to buy second-hand gifts is positively associated with the actual buying of second-hand gifts.

2.3. Green consumption values

In the present study, green consumption values refer to the tendency of a consumer to express the value of environmental protection through one's purchases and consumption behaviors (Haws et al., 2014). In their research, Do Paço, Shiel and Alves (2019) emphasize that consumers with greater green consumption values are generally more oriented towards the responsible purchasing and protection of environmental resources. The tendency to use physical and financial resources sparingly and consciously correlates positively with green consumption values (Haws et al., 2014). Consequently, green consumption values might be an important factor also when consumers purchase second-hand goods. Since green consumers are more focused on exploiting the full potential of goods before disposing of them (Haws et al., 2014), they are more inclined to look

for multiple uses and creative re-use opportunities for the goods (Do Paço et al., 2019).

Although research on the influence of green consumption values on purchase behavior in C2C marketplaces is scarce, a recent study by Tan et al. (2022) reports that economic and practical values for using the second-hand C2C marketplace negatively affect green consumption values and subsequently weaken the consumers' preparedness to engage in sustainable resale behavior. In contrast, recreational, generative, societal benefit, and protestor values positively influence green consumption values and increase the consumers' willingness to engage in pro-environmental behavior (Tan et al., 2022). Thus, we suggest that the more environmentally friendly the consumer, the stronger the relationship between the intention to behave pro-environmentally and the actual pro-environmental behavior. Consequently, we consider green consumption values as a moderator between intentions and behavior, and hypothesize that:

H2: Green consumption values reinforce the relationship between the intention to buy second-hand gifts and the actual purchase of second-hand gifts.

To account for potentially confounding factors, we control for the effects of age, gender, education, and income in the research model (Figure 1).

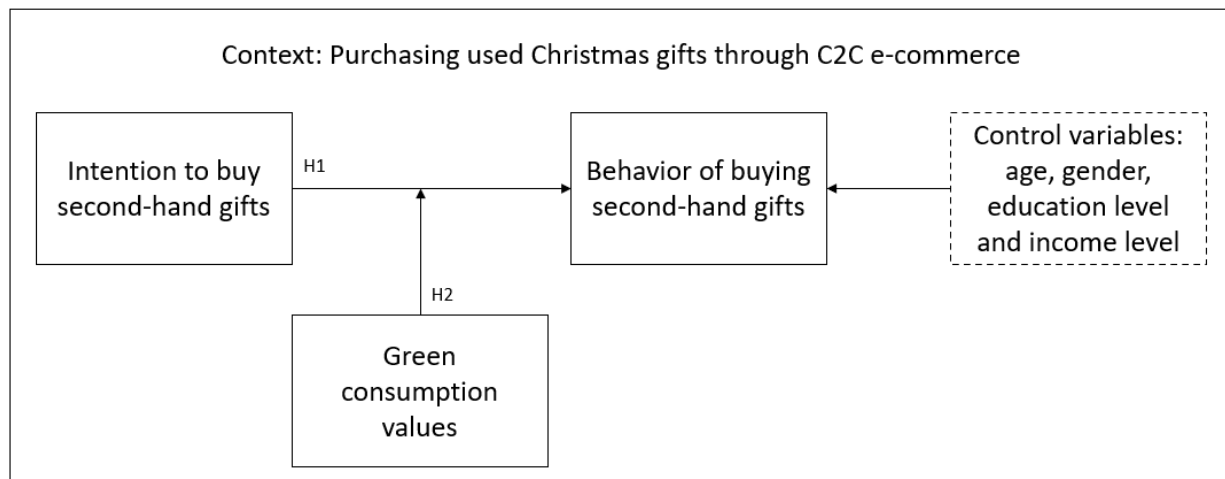


Figure 1. Research model.

3. Data and methods

3.1. Questionnaire and data collection

The second-hand goods trade is the fastest growing segment of e-commerce (Fernando, Sivakumaran &

Suganthi, 2018). Respondents of the present study represent users of Finland's most popular and the largest consumer-to-consumer marketplace. On the marketplace, consumers can sell and buy all types of goods including furniture, hobby equipment, as well as cars and apartments. For the present study, the questionnaire was developed with the idea of gaining a

better understanding of sustainable consumption in an online C2C marketplace using second-hand Christmas gifts as a proxy for sustainable behavior.

Using a survey questionnaire administered to the users of the C2C online marketplace, we collected the data in two phases – before and after Christmas. Before Christmas, a link to the survey was visible on the marketplace’s landing page and visitors to the site could voluntarily participate in the survey with a small incentive of participating in a raffle with the chance of winning a €50 gift voucher.

Before Christmas, we measured behavioral intention with two items that build on Ajzen and Fishbein (2005). Regarding green consumption values, we used four items from Haws et al. (2014). To measure the intentional behavior and the green consumption values, we applied a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Totally disagree to 5 = Totally agree. After Christmas, we measured the actual purchase behavior using a single-item measure asking the participants to indicate how many of the Christmas gifts they bought were second-hand.

In the model, we control the effects of age (continuous variable), gender (categorical variable with 1=male and 2=female), education (categorical variable with 0=no university-level education and 1=university level education) and income (categorical variable with 7 gradually growing income level categories). The sample consists of 210 valid responses from the respondents who participated in both waves of the data collection.

3.2. Construct validation

A confirmatory factor analysis with purchase intention and green consumption values indicates a good fit to the model with $\chi^2(df)=19.629(9)$; CFI=0.984 and RMSEA=0.068. The factor loadings are all significant and greater than 0.698 and the model does not indicate concerns regarding convergent or discriminant validity (Table 1).

Table 1. Construct validation.

Purchase behavior	Factor loading
1. How many of the Christmas gifts you bought were second-hand?	
Purchase intention (CR=0.855; AVE 0.749)	
1. I am going to buy used items as a Christmas gift.	0.781
2. I could think of buying used products as a Christmas gift.	0.942
Green consumption values (CR=0.860; AVE 0.607)	
1. I consider the potential environmental impact of my actions when making many of my decisions.	0.698
2. My purchase habits are affected by my concern for our environment.	0.869
3. I am concerned about wasting the resources of our planet	0.742
4. I am willing to be inconvenienced in order to take actions that are more environmentally friendly.	0.798

4. Results

To test the hypotheses, we used hierarchical regression in Stata and a step-by-step approach in reporting the results (Table 2). Model 1 includes the main effect only, and this model operates as a baseline model for the comparisons that follow. Model 1 shows a highly significant positive effect of purchase intention on the actual purchase behavior ($\beta=0.971$, $p<0.001$), supporting hypothesis H1. Purchase intention alone explains 17.3 percent of the variance of the purchase behavior.

Model 2 adds the control variables, age, gender, education, and income, to the model. The effects of control variables are all statistically non-significant. Adding the control variables improved the model’s explanatory power to $R^2=0.205$. Model 3 adds the moderating variable, that is, green consumption values,

to the model. Prior to adding the interaction term, we orthogonalized the purchase intention and green consumption value variables involved in the multiplicative interaction (Little et al., 2009). The effect is statistically non-significant and does not change the R^2 estimate. Model 4 adds the interaction effect of green consumption values. This model suggests a significant moderation effect at the 90-percent confidence level ($\beta=0.386$, $p=0.063$) and a modestly improved R^2 estimate with $R^2=0.219$, which supports hypothesis H2.

Recent studies and editorials (Brambor, Clark & Golder, 2006; Meyer, Van Witteloostuijn & Beugelsdijk, 2017) highlight that p-values seldom reflect the whole truth and consequently researchers are recommended to report confidence intervals when testing interaction effects. To examine the interaction effects in greater detail, we plotted the marginal effect line and its confidence boundaries, taking into consideration the range of the moderating variables and

using example codes provided by Golder (2021). Figure 2 shows the marginal effect of purchase intention on purchase behavior (solid line and y-axis), and the two dashed lines show a confidence range of 95 percent for the interaction effect, enabling us to detect the conditions under which the interaction effect is statistically significant over the different values of the moderating variables (x-axis). On the left-hand side, the

vertical y-axis shows the magnitude of the marginal effect, while on the right-hand side, the vertical axis depicts a histogram which illustrates the distribution of observations (%) in the sample on the variable depicted on the horizontal x-axis. Figure 2 shows that the interaction effect is positive and significant for the entire range of green consumption values.

Table 2. Model results.

Variables in the model	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	β (p)	β (p)	β (p)	β (p)
Dependent variable				
Purchase behavior				
Independent variable				
Purchase intention	0.971 (<0.001)	0.928 (<0.001)	0.923 (<0.001)	0.929 (<0.001)
Moderator variable				
Green consumption values			0.033 (0.890)	0.042 (0.861)
Interaction term				
Purchase intention x Green consumption values				0.386 (0.063)
Control variables				
Age		-0.016 (0.161)	-0.016 (0.162)	-0.016 (0.169)
Gender		-0.040 (0.916)	-0.047 (0.903)	-0.135 (0.725)
Education level		-0.436 (0.241)	-0.446 (0.240)	-0.425 (0.260)
Income level		-0.276 (0.151)	-0.271 (0.165)	-0.270 (0.165)
Variance explained				
R ²	0.173	0.205	0.205	0.219
ΔR^2 (vs. Model 1)		0.032	0.032	0.046

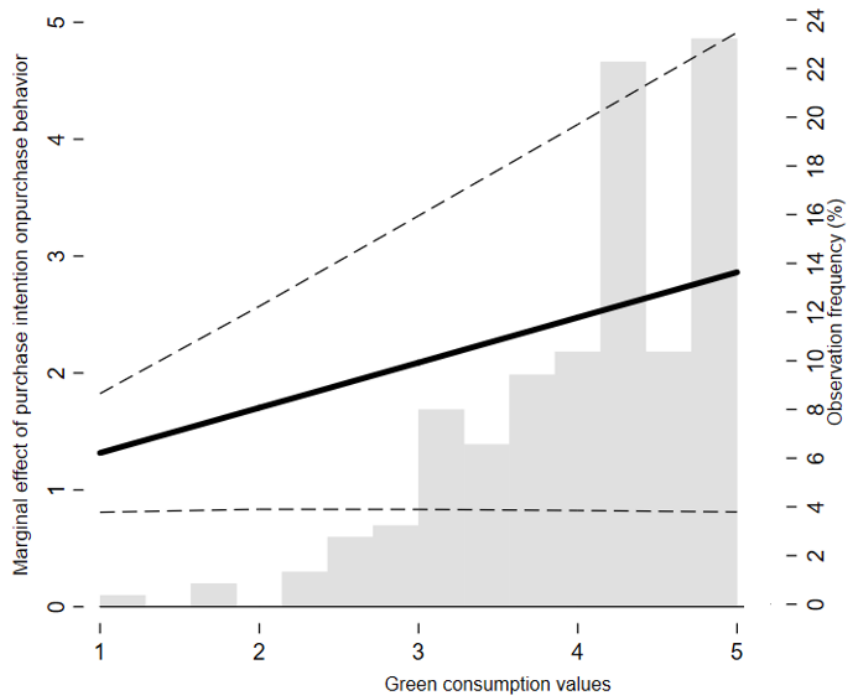


Figure 2. Marginal effects of purchase intention on purchase behavior, moderated by green consumption values.

5. Conclusions

The present study contributes to the intention-behavior gap (Carrington et al., 2014; Crossler et al., 2014; Wirth, 2018) and green behavior gap literature (Gleim & Lawson, 2014; Nguyen et al., 2019) in sustainable consumption (Giddens et al., 2016). The focus of the present study is on C2C e-commerce which has proven its effectiveness in putting the circular economy into action. Building on a two-stage longitudinal study of 210 respondents, we explored whether green consumption values would lessen the green gap and reinforce the intention-behavior relationship in sustainable consumption.

As well as this, we also contribute to the platform economy literature (Hesse et al., 2020; Zimmermans et al., 2018; Mittendorf, 2018) as we extend the green behavior gap literature into C2C e-commerce and to the context of purchasing used Christmas gifts via C2C e-commerce. Overall, the act of giving a gift at Christmas is a relatively little explored phenomenon in the scholarly literature (Fischer & Arnold, 1990), not to mention environmentally responsible consumption upon Christmas (Robinot, Ertz & Durif, 2017). We make contributions to the literature as follows. First, consistent with the existing research, we find that the intention to buy second-hand Christmas gifts significantly predicts the actual purchase behavior so that the intention alone explains 17.3 percent of the variance of the actual behavior. Consequently, the green gap appears not to be as strong as some of the earlier literature (e.g., Nguyen et al., 2019) suggests. Compared to the findings reported in the previous studies and with a focus on the inconsistency in consumers' green consumption intentions and behavior (Carrington et al., 2014; Echegaray & Hansstein, 2017), the gap associated with intentional behavior and actual behavior does not seem to be that large when consumers purchase second-hand Christmas gifts in C2C e-commerce. Moreover, the point of purchase may also play a role, as the earlier literature reports that the green gap vary from purchasing situation to another. The gap is at its smallest in pre-planned, fast purchasing situations and increases if decisions are made only at the time of purchase (Carrington et al., 2014).

Second, we show that consumers' green consumption values strengthen the effect of intentions on behavior. Although the findings of the present study imply that green consumption values do not directly explain the purchase of second-hand Christmas gifts, such green behavioral patterns are more likely to be realized by those who are guided by green consumption values. This indicates that pro-environmental intentions

are realized more strongly in actual behavior among those with greater green consumption values.

Third, we show that socio-demographic factors do not explain the variance in the actual sustainable behavior. This is surprising, given that the existing research (Puška et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2019) argues that young, female and highly educated individuals are more heavily disposed toward environmental issues and behavior, overall. On the other hand, greater green consumption values are known to exist particularly among older, highly educated, and well-earning consumers (Haws et al. 2014). In the present study, the effects of age, gender, education, and income level are not supported on the actual sustainable behavior, indicating that the key findings between intention and behavior, and moderated by the green consumption values, are not confounded by the respondent's sociodemographic characteristics. Consequently, the findings call for more detailed research on how individual-level characteristics, such as socio-demographic factors, are associated with environmental attitudes and behaviors.

The practical implications of the present study provide insights for marketers and C2C e-commerce marketplaces on how consumer intentions are reflected in actual purchase behavior, and about the role that green consumption values play in promoting such behavior. This understanding is highly relevant as Carrington et al. (2010) emphasize that product launches based on mere purchase intentions can easily lead to costly failures. C2C e-commerce can have a remarkable impact in driving sustainable consumption patterns as buying and selling through C2C e-commerce can remarkably extend product lifecycles while also reducing the need to produce new products, saving emissions both in production and transportation. Consequently, it is imperative to understand the intention – behavior linkage in C2C e-commerce and consider how marketers could drive the use of C2C e-commerce, as well as influence consumer attitudes and behavior toward buying more of used products. This is the discussion in which we contribute to, and we consider that an enhanced understanding on the underlying mechanisms can operate an effective avenue in promoting environmentally friendly sustainable behavior through C2C e-commerce.

6. Limitations and future research

The present study's strength lies in a scientifically rigorous two-stage longitudinal study of 210 respondents. However, the study is also bound by limitations which require consideration. As the data for this study was collected in a single country and through the country's largest C2C e-commerce platform, the

respondents of the study represent customers of that specific C2C marketplace. Overall, customers who are registered to a C2C marketplace may have more favorable disposition toward sustainable consumption and green purchase behavior, overall. On the other hand, the C2C marketplace is the largest in Finland and most Finns use it intermittently, and consequently it covers the majority of the Finnish population. Moreover, the subjectively reported measurement items pose a limitation to the present study because consumers generally tend to evaluate their attitudes, values, and behavior more positively than they actually are (Hassan, Shiu & Shaw, 2016; Casais & Faria, 2022). This is reflected also in the measures used in the present study as responses to the green consumption values scale were biased toward higher values. Thus, it would have been desirable to have a broader distribution to detect a richer effect of the variation.

The present study provides insights on how the intention-behavior gap is realized when consumers purchase second-hand gifts through C2C e-commerce. An interesting avenue for future research would be to compare results when consumers make second-hand purchases for themselves versus as a gift. Additionally, we encourage future studies to build on longitudinal research designs to draw more encompassing insights on how intentions are realized in behavior in the long term.

7. References

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