

Krystyna Mazurek-Łopacińska
Magdalena Sobocińska
Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny we Wrocławiu

Ecologisation of consumption as a trend in consumer behaviour – implications for future research

Given the challenges of the present day, the importance of knowledge about ecologisation of consumption and the possibilities of stimulating its development is increasing. Although a lot of studies have been conducted in this area, there is a need to intensify and extend them to new contexts in order to explain the behaviour of consumers of green products and identify barriers to ecologisation of consumption. The goal of the paper is to present the determinants that shape and differentiate the behaviour of the consumers of eco-products as well as to identify the resulting implications for further marketing research on ecologisation of consumption. The paper is based on in-depth literature studies and the authors' own empirical research of qualitative and quantitative nature, which allowed to identify the types of consumers of green products in Poland. Integrating the results of other research and the authors' own case studies allowed to develop a proposal for a model approach to the studies of stimulants and destimulants of ecologisation of consumption that applies triangulation of approaches and research methods in order to provide a more detailed explanation of inconsistencies in the behaviour of consumers of green products.

Keywords: consumption of eco-products, marketing research, triangulation

JEL classification: D1, E2, M3

Ekologizacja konsumpcji jako trend w zachowaniach konsumentów – implikacje dla przyszłych badań

Zważywszy na wyzwania współczesności, rośnie znaczenie wiedzy na temat ekologizacji konsumpcji i możliwości pobudzania jej rozwoju. Chociaż przeprowadzono w tym zakresie wiele badań, występuje potrzeba ich pogłębienia i poszerzenia o nowe konteksty, aby pełniej wyjaśnić zachowania konsumentów produktów ekologicznych oraz zidentyfikować bariery rozwoju ekologizacji konsumpcji. Celem artykułu jest ukazanie czynników kształtujących i różnicujących zachowania konsumentów produktów ekologicznych wraz ze wskazaniem na wynikające z tego implikacje dla kolejnych badań marketingowych nad ekologizacją konsumpcji. Artykuł opiera się na pogłębionych studiach literaturowych oraz wynikach własnych badań empirycznych o charakterze jakościowym i ilościowym, które stanowiły podstawę dla wyodrębnienia typów polskich konsumentów produktów ekologicznych. Integracja wyników badań innych autorów oraz badań własnych pozwoliła na stworzenie propozycji modelowego ujęcia badań stymulant i destymulant ekologizacji konsumpcji, które zakłada stosowanie triangulacji podejść i metod badawczych

w celu pełniejszego wyjaśnienia niespójności w postępowaniu konsumenta produktów ekologicznych.

Słowa kluczowe: konsumpcja produktów ekologicznych, badania marketingowe, triangulacja

Klasyfikacja JEL: D1, E2, M3

Introduction

Ecologisation of consumption, representing an adoption of an attitude towards the world that is reflected by behaviours in the sphere of consumption which follow the principles of environmental protection, is one of the development trends in lifestyle and consumption. Identifying the models of green products consumption requires combining various perspectives, because consumer behaviour in the market of green products is stimulated by marketing activities, patterns shaped by culture, hierarchies of values, and attitudes towards the environment, as well as by the needs, motives, and experiences resulting from consumption, the level of ecological awareness, demographic and economic factors, and legal considerations. Furthermore, ecologisation of consumption should also be analysed through the prism of megatrends in consumer behaviour. The aim of the paper is to present the determinants that shape and differentiate the behaviour of the consumers of eco-products as well as to identify the resulting implications for further marketing research on ecologisation of consumption.

Among the prerequisites for conducting research on the behaviour of the consumers of green products, the need to achieve the following should be emphasized:

- cognitive objectives that allow to identify the trends and directions of changes in consumption and lifestyle as well as models, stimulants, and destimulants of consumption ecologisation,
- methodological objectives concerning the development of methods of research on consumption ecologisation,
- application objectives related to the development of a pro eco-friendly orientation of enterprises in consideration of the principles of eco-development of the value for customer in the process of management and consisting in formation of knowledge which should indicate the direction of marketing activities aimed at both consumers of green products and people who do not buy them.

1. Ecologisation of consumption – literature review

Consumption ecologisation is related to a transition to higher levels of development, and as such it is reflected in buying and consuming green products, but also to a transition from rational egoism to eco-rationality, i.e., economical and

efficient use of consumer goods and limiting or abandoning consumption of goods that require excessive amounts of non-renewable resources. It is also manifested in purchasing goods that do not generate vast amounts of post-consumption waste, waste segregation and recycling, and use of second-hand products. Consumption ecologisation is also closely related to the consumers' increasing knowledge in the sphere of environmental protection, their active participation in establishing cooperatives with farmers, their involvement in actions of ecological movements, as well as to the replacement of car transport with, e.g., cycling [Kiezel, 2010, p. 188]. This means that the category of consumption ecologisation is broadly defined and encompasses many human activities and behaviours supporting environmental protection.

Correlations between consumption ecologisation and other megatrends, including ethnocentrism, servicization, and deconsumption, are observed. Consumption ecologisation may involve assuming ethnocentric attitudes by consumers. In such a case, they prefer eco-friendly goods originating from their region or country. Such an attitude is based on economic, emotional, or ethical premises. When choosing a product, the purchaser may be driven by the desire to support the development of local producers or to buy fresh produce. Increasing expenses on services provided by, e.g., ecotourist farms, covering accommodation, commercial cooking, sports, culture, education on ecology, entertainment, and various types of therapies, is, in turn, an indication of both servicization and consumption ecologisation. Connected with servicization and ecologisation of consumption is its dematerialisation, whose essence lies in an increasing consumption of intangible assets, such as experiences and health or mood improvements. Changing consumer attitudes and lifestyles also lead to deconsumption and freeganism as some consumers consciously restrict and rationalize their consumption. Ecologisation may also be related to cocooning, i.e., consuming self-prepared meals made of products from ecological farms at home instead of going to restaurants.

Consumers who are sensitive to the issues of environmental protection and sustainable development seem to be socially responsible and take into consideration the consequences of their individual consumer choices. They apply their own purchasing power to effect social change [Moisander, 2007, pp. 404–409].

Scientific literature emphasizes the importance of ecological awareness, which is shaped in the course of a complex process affected by diverse determinants, e.g., social norms, legal regulations, or market communication channels [Poskrobko, 2007, p. 61; Nycz-Wróbel, 2012, pp. 63–76]. Consumers of green products are, in many respects, i.a., demographic and behavioural, a heterogeneous group [Hughner et al., 2007, pp. 94–110]. Their behaviours – purchase intention and actual purchase – are shaped by many interacting determinants.

Table 1. Most frequently studied factors influencing green purchase intention and purchase of green products

	Independent variable	Direction		Independent variable	Direction
Factors affecting green purchase intention	social group/social influence	+	Factors affecting green purchase behaviour	social group/social influence/reference group	+
	knowledge/information	+ or unrelated		knowledge	+
	environmental attitude	+		environmental concern	+
	attitudes towards global products (AGP)	+		environmental attitude	+ or unrelated
	altruistic motives (environmental concern)	+ or unrelated		egoistic motives (health concern)	+
	perceived consumer effectiveness (PCE)	+		limited availability of organic food	-
	trust/confidence in green product	+		price	-
			lack of trust/confidence in green product	-	
			green purchase intention	+	

Source: [Joshi, Rahman, 2015, pp. 135–136].

When conducting research on stimulants and destimulants, it is important to remember that even though consumers regularly express positive attitudes towards sustainable development and green products and manifest concern for the condition of the environment, this is not always translated into their buying behaviours, and in many countries the share of green products in the market is still relatively low [Bray, Johns, Killburn, 2011, pp. 597–608].

The results of research on consumer behaviour conducted by other authors and institutions in different countries, including the UK, Belgium, or Sweden, allow to formulate similar conclusions [Tanner, Kast, 2003, pp. 883–902; Vermeir, Verbeke, 2006, pp. 169–194; Vermeir, Verbeke, 2008, pp. 542–553; Hughner et al., 2007, pp. 94–110; DEFRA, 2006]. This means that there exists a gap described as a “green discrepancy in purchase” between positive attitudes towards the environment and ecology and actual buying behaviours. The question therefore arises as to what factors support these attitudes and what factors weaken the relationship between them and buying behaviours.

Referring to research on specific product categories, including food, attention should be paid to the discrepancy between the hierarchy of life values and food attributes appreciated by consumers and their resulting behaviours. Although consumers highly appreciate health as a supreme value in life, in food consumption they frequently seek mainly pleasure. This phenomenon reflects the essence of the conflict between incommensurate scales of values with respect to food [Gutkowska, 2007, pp. 78–101].

Attempts are made in literature to classify the factors affecting the choice of green products by consumers, who are characterized by changeability of behaviour. According to Henryks's and Pearson's model [2013, pp. 3–19], there are three conceptual levels at play: situational factors associated with the choice of the place of sale, factors affecting the consumer in the place of sale, and background factors (purchasing context, attitudes towards conventional food and organic food). Research aimed at identifying the reasons for buying green food have also been conducted [Makatouni, 2002, pp. 345–352; Zanolli, Naspetti, 2002, pp. 643–653]. The impact of economic factors such as income, prices, and marketing offer on pro-ecological behaviours is also recognised [Witek, 2008, pp. 509–518].

Scientific studies also concern the level of knowledge about regional and green product quality designations, perception of their quality, and the level of trust in the system of quality designations, as well as the importance of the country of origin for making the purchase decision [Bryła, 2015, pp. 11–14].

Mental barriers, lack of trust in green products, and marketing barriers should be indicated among the impediments to the development of this market [Grzybowska-Brzezińska, 2013, pp. 47–58; Pilarczyk, Nestorowicz, 2010, p. 9]. They result from, i.a., insufficient information about the offer, limited number of places that sell these products, and limited scope of use of new marketing concepts by entities operating in the market of green products.

2. Types of consumers of eco-products

Another trend of research on consumption ecologisation concerns the typology of consumers and segmentation of the market of green products. The criteria applied in the authors' own research to distinguish the types of consumers of eco-products include: their model of food purchasing, their reasons for choosing eco-products, limitations to the consumption of eco-products, and degree of adjustment of offer to consumer needs. Applying Czekanowski's method, three types of consumers of eco-products were distinguished: those caring about their own and their family's health and well-being, those sensitive to the issues of environmental protection and socio-economic problems, and those with no predominant type of motivation.

The typology was developed based on the results of quantitative research conducted in 2009 among 300 members of the internet panel of ARC Rynek i Opinia research institute who had purchased eco-products (products bearing the "eco" mark) in a three-month period before the survey. The procedure related to the use of Czekanowski's method was presented in the authors' publication concerning a detailed analysis of the results of the conducted quantitative research [Mazurek-Łopacińska, Sobocińska, 2016, pp. 85–102]. Aiming at the devel-

opment of knowledge about consumer behaviours on the market of eco-products, qualitative research in the form of a focus group interview concerning the motivation accompanying ecologisation of consumption was performed in 2017. Typology of consumers of eco-products is presented because of the concept issue. Research in this sphere needs updating and expanding by new contexts suggested in the model approach further in the paper.

Table 2. Typologies of consumers of green products and green product market segmentation

Authors	Criteria for distinguishing market segments or types of consumers of green products	Market segments or types of consumers of green products
Hartman Group	frequency of purchasing green food, preferred assortment, scope of knowledge about and interest in health and the environment, reasons for not buying green food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – peripheries: consumers who are starting to buy green food – middle: consumers willing to acquire knowledge about green food and becoming aware of its value – core: consumers with high ecological awareness and eco-friendly lifestyle
Kunz, Reuter	frequency of purchasing and consuming green food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – intense consumers – occasional consumers
Łuczka-Bakuła	frequency of doing green food shopping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – regular consumers (at least once a week) – periodic consumers (at least every 6 months) – occasional consumers (less frequently than every 6 months)
Mazurek-Łopacińska, Sobocińska	model of food purchasing, reasons for selecting green products, limitations to the consumption of green products, level of adjustment of the offer of green products to consumer needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – consumers caring about their own and their family's health and well-being – consumers sensitive to environmental, social, and economic issues – consumers with no predominant motivation
Zaremba	level of ecological awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – black type: no knowledge, low ecological awareness – grey type: medium ecological awareness – greyish green type: medium or high ecological awareness, want to be perceived as green type – green type: high ecological awareness – bright green type: very high ecological awareness, postulate return to nature, can present risk of green totalitarianism

Source: Own elaboration based on: [Kunz, Reuter, 2006, pp. 33–37; Łuczka-Bakuła, 2007, pp. 121, 144–147; Mazurek-Łopacińska, Sobocińska, 2016, pp. 85–102; Zaremba, 2004, p. 47].

Consumers who care about their health and well-being constitute the largest typological group (57%) among the Polish consumers of green products. They approach their consumption as an expression of concern about their own, their families', and their children's health. Among the reasons for purchasing green products they also indicate their wish to improve their looks and well-being. They consider the offer of ecological products fully or relatively suited to their needs. More people in this group than in any other of the distinguished groups of consumers either buy only organic food or substitute it with conventional food only as a last resort. They also most frequently buy green products in supermarkets. At the same time, they most often consider price to be an important obstacle to increasing their consumption of green products. Their criteria for choosing green products include quality, price, but also brand. Most of them are aged 18–24 and 45–54 and achieve relatively high income per person in the household.

Another group of consumers (34%) includes those whose choice of ecological products is mainly driven by their care about the condition of the environment as well as the wish to live in harmony, find pleasure in being close to nature, support local producers, and contribute to a decrease in unemployment. They consider the offer of organic food the least suited to their needs. They are sensitive to environmental, social, and economic problems and buy only organic food or substitute it with conventional food only as a last resort. They present ethnocentric attitudes, as it is important for their market decisions that the products should come from Poland. They have a definitely more negative attitude towards globalisation and international corporations than others. They also typically pay more attention to ecological certificates and, at the same time, most frequently follow their own experience. They are most likely to participate in environmental actions. This group includes more people aged 55–65 and with relatively lower income per person in the household than other groups.

The smallest group of consumers (9%) consists of people who do not exhibit one clearly predominant type of motivation. Among the reasons accompanying the choice of ecological products they indicate both the need to care about their health, looks, and well-being, as well as the will to be involved in solving social and economic problems of the contemporary world through the consumption of ecological products. They point to the fact that the offer of ecological products is not well suited to their needs. It must be emphasised that they usually buy conventional food and only once in a while purchase green products – more often cosmetics or cleaning products than food. They also most frequently believe that contemporary problems cannot be solved through pro-ecological behaviours. While choosing ecological food, they mainly focus on price. More frequently than others they also pay attention to the place of purchase and ecological packaging. They search for information about ecological products mainly on websites of pro-

ducers and distributors and in daily press. These behaviours are predominant among people aged 25–44 who have relatively high income per person in the household [Mazurek-Łopacińska, Sobocińska, 2016, pp. 85–102].

3. Future research on ecologisation of consumption – proposal for a research model

In-depth literature studies and the identification of the types of Polish consumers of ecological products indicate the occurrence of other research gaps, and experiences associated with the development of typology encourage to make an attempt at preparing a proposal for a model of research on stimulants and destimulants of consumption ecologisation.

Identifying stimulants and destimulants of consumption ecologisation requires studying the impact of many determinants, including market, cultural, and psychological, and the relationships observed between them. The concept of corporate social responsibility and the growing significance of putting a human face on business must not be ignored either [Nikodemaska-Wołowik, 2011, pp. 30–32]. It is also important to consider legal determinants and the role of the state, keeping in mind that ecological economics questions market efficiency on the following grounds:

- the market does not directly reveal social preferences regarding resources and values which are crucial for the quality of the environment and ecological dimension of the quality of life, because there are no market prices for these resources and values,
- the need for a clean environment does not translate into demand on a macro scale,
- the market is not a mechanism that, from the point of view of inter-generational ecological justice, solves the problems of preserving the sustainability of natural capital,
- the market does not reveal the so-called external value of resources that are crucial for future generations [Fiedor, 2014, p. 408].

Reducing the research gap in the interdisciplinary multidimensional approach to the models of consumptions of green products and limiting interpretational uncertainty requires applying an approach based on triangulation and using methods belonging to various paradigms. It must be emphasised that quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as methods of the same type, can be triangulated [Flick, 2011, pp. 82–87]. The relevance of combining qualitative and quantitative research methods results from the multitude of problems and contexts that should be covered by research: needs, attitudes, processes of value

transmission, value hierarchies, demographic, economic, and legal determinants, level of ecological awareness, processes of making purchasing decisions, and marketing activities of producers and sellers.

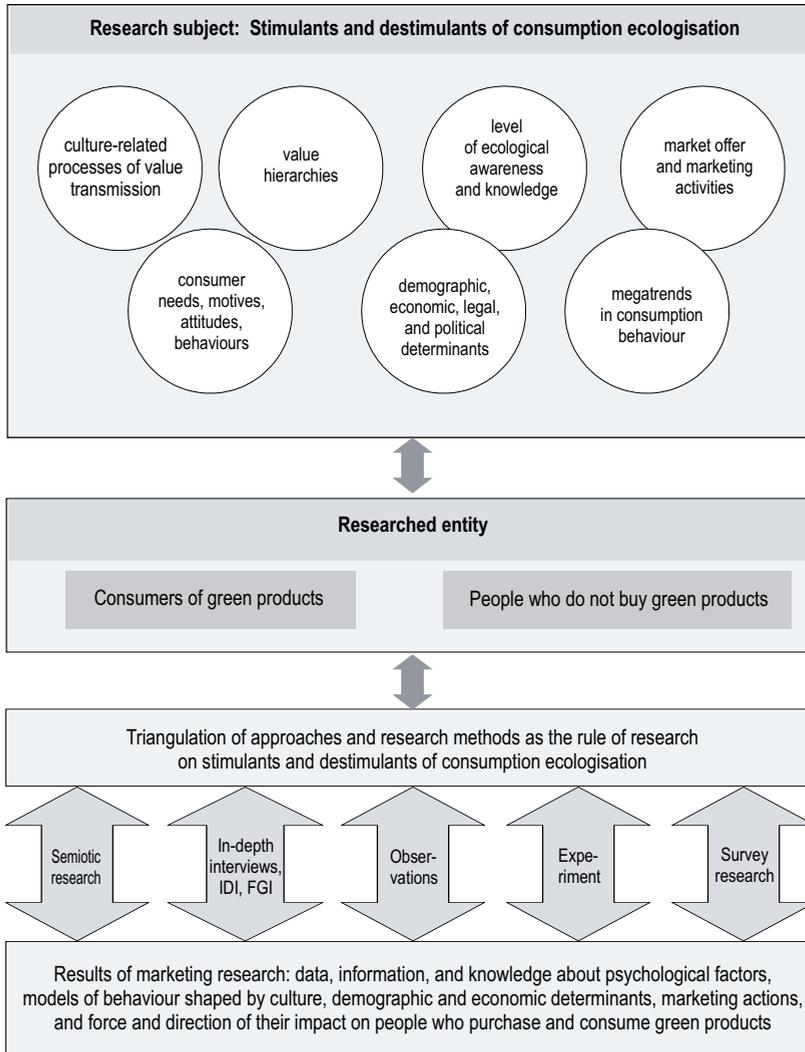


Figure 1. Research on stimulants and destimulants of consumption ecologisation – a model approach

Source: Own elaboration.

In the research process, such an expression of pro-ecological attitudes and behaviours of consumers results in the need to apply an interpretational approach, semiotics, and ethnography along with in-depth interviews as well as a positivist

approach that enables a statistical presentation of the studied issues. The use of combined methods, both quantitative and qualitative, including those based on the output of semiotics, which is still relatively seldom applied, should facilitate the recognition of symbolic meanings, barriers to the consumption of green products, and consumer attitudes and aspirations, not always conscious and coherent.

Applying triangulation in studies of behaviours of consumers of ecological products and the numerous factors affecting them will allow to empirically determine the incidence of particular consumption and behaviour models, including:

- model based on the assumption that man is only a link in the chain of various species and by coexisting with nature he shapes the unity of the environment and people,
- model in which man is in the centre of the universe, willing to make nature subordinate,
- mixed model reflected in declared pro-ecological attitudes that do not correspond with actual market behaviours, in which pro-ecological and not pro-ecological behaviours interweave.

Identifying stimulants and destimulants of ecologisation requires taking into consideration other trends related to consumption, i.a., ethnocentrism, servitization, and deconsumption, and analysing the relationships between them. These processes are part of the so-called new consumption [Bywalec, 2010, pp. 194–226; Sowa, 2010, pp. 179–189]. They were initiated in developed countries, but are also observed in countries at a lower stage of socio-economic development. Assuming such a perspective will allow to look at changes in consumption and the importance of ecologisation in a holistic way.

Because of the multitude of determinants shaping consumer behaviour that support environmental protection, it must be emphasised that research in this area should be multistage, as it is difficult to collect in one go an empirical material allowing for the verification of developed models of consumption of green products.

Conclusions

Identifying the mechanisms that shape consumer attitudes and behaviours in the market of ecological products has become a necessity in the face of challenges associated with the progressing degradation of the environment and depletion of natural resources.

Although there are many studies on the behaviour of consumers of ecological products, they do not explain fully the observed inconsistencies. It should be emphasised that there is a need to determine to what extent the pro-ecological attitude and behaviour of consumers, including Polish consumers, results from the

influence of market factors, and to what extent it is related to psychological, demographic, and cultural patterns.

Answering this question requires the use of triangulation, which should enable going beyond the knowledge gained using only one approach and contribute to the creation of knowledge on several levels thanks to the use of ethnographic studies, in-depth interviews, surveys, and experiments. Since reducing the divergences between the declarations and actual feelings and attitudes of respondents is a challenge for marketing research, semiotic approach finds application in identifying the stimulants and destimulants of ecologisation.

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K. Mazurek-Łopacińska (✉) badania.markt@ue.wroc.pl

Katedra Badań Marketingowych, Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny we Wrocławiu,
ul. Komandorska 118/120; 53-205 Wrocław, Polska

M. Sobocińska (✉) badania.markt@ue.wroc.pl

Katedra Badań Marketingowych, Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny we Wrocławiu,
ul. Komandorska 118/120; 53-205 Wrocław, Polska