

# Intention-Behavior Gap in Greener Consumption among Young Sri Lankan Consumers



In today's world, we heavily rely on natural resources for activities, business, and survival. We are consuming resources at an unsustainable rate. However, our planet can only produce a finite number of resources and can only withstand a certain degree of greenhouse gas emissions. With the unbearable increase in natural resource consumption and green gas emissions, we are forced to experience various global challenges including climate change, desertification, lack of resources, loss of biodiversity, land degradation, etc. There is a burgeoning movement to adopt sustainable practices to mitigate these adverse consequences. Some companies have even developed sustainability programs, guidelines and plans to achieve sustainable goals [1]. Specifically, people are moving towards green consumption. As a result, studies on green consumption have emerged as a significant new frontier over the past few years attracting attention from both academics and professionals.

Consumers not "walking their talk" is a serious concern. According to the literature, green attitude and intention are the two factors which influence the actual behavior towards green consumption. Even though consumers display an intention or a favorable attitude to behave in an environmentally friendly manner, many of them do not act on this intention. They tend to buy harmful products irrespective of their desire to buy greener alternatives. This phenomenon is called the intention-behavior gap. Empirical studies reveal evidence for this gap. For example, a study conducted in the UK shows a 46-67% favorable attitude towards organic food and the proportion of actual purchases was only 4-10% [2].

We conducted a study with the participation of undergraduates in the Department of Transport Management and Logistics Engineering, University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka to investigate this intention-behavior gap concerning a green product among young consumers in a developing economy. Bamboo straws used for drinking purposes were the product in question. Firstly, there were asked to fill out an online survey to study their buying

intention of bamboo straws. According to our results, almost 94% of participants are willing to buy a bamboo straw instead of a plastic straw (refer Figure 01). Secondly, we sold a reusable bamboo straw for 200 rupees and participants had the chance to purchase a bamboo straw if they were willing to buy it. Surprisingly, only 19% of participants bought bamboo straws (refer Figure 02). Our results confirm the intention-behavior gap further.

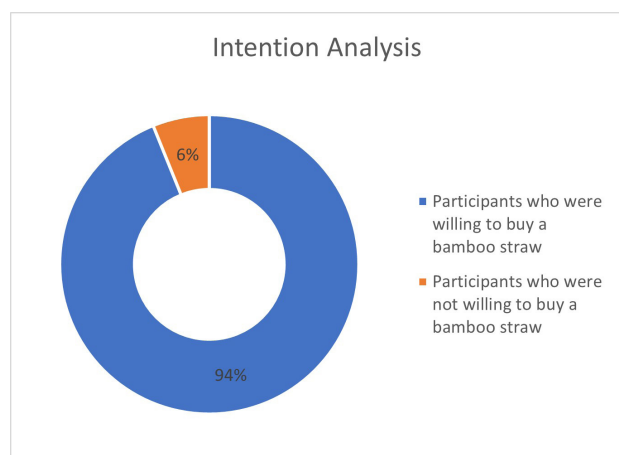


Figure 1: Intention Analysis

This attitude-behavior gap is an important discussion point due to the unpredictability of people concerning their stated behavior and buying behavior. Companies use questionnaires and surveys as marketing tools to understand the demand for green products and to determine purchasing intentions. However, the results of these questionnaires or surveys do not reflect the actual demand and the buying patterns due to the intention-behavior gap. For instance, consumers tend to answer surveys in a way that represents them in a positive light but displays a different behavior in reality [2]. On the other hand, when consumers behave differently from their intentions, companies struggle to carry out their operations. Therefore, it is crucial for companies to understand the real greener consumers who “walk the talk” while also ascertaining how to judge others to act accordingly.

According to the literature, the intentions of the consumer may change over time. Consumers fail to act based on their intentions as they forget to

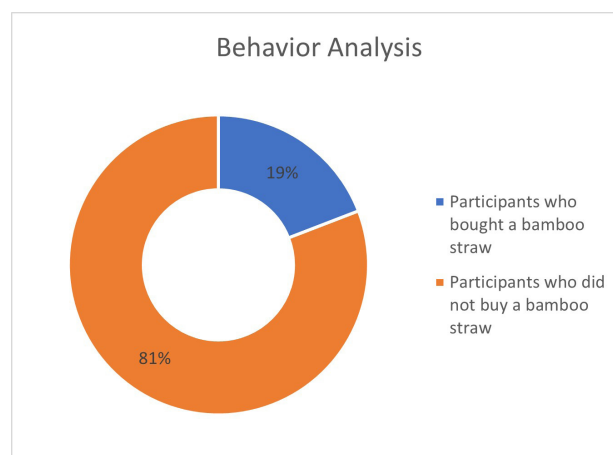


Figure 2: Behavior Analysis

start or keep a specific behavior for a long period of time [2]. Therefore, when the intentions are translated into actions over a long period, there is a high chance to observe a different behavior. Thus, it is critical to study the timing of measurement of intention and the respective behavior when measuring the gap.

The decision to purchase could be influenced by various factors. For example, when a person who is willing to follow green consumption experiences a temporary unavailability of a green product or a huge discount for a product harmful to the environment, their behavior could deviate from their intention [3]. An online survey conducted with undergraduates in the Department of Transport Management and Logistics Engineering, University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka reports several factors which drive the behavior of young consumer. Those factors are the availability of the product, price of the product, quality of the product, the life span of the product (if it is a reusable product), characteristics of the customer, emotions and experience of the customer, brand loyalty

and sustainable practices followed by the company. However, these drivers might create a less rational consumption which subsequently reduces rational thoughts about eco-friendliness and the environmental impacts of their purchases. Therefore, understanding the impact of these drivers on purchasing behavior and finding ways to use them to close the intention-behavior gap would add more value to the extant literature. To better understand the behavior of greener consumers, models which are based on experimental designs can be employed from the field of behavioral operations. Moreover, companies should use these types of models to understand the intention-behavior gap. Based on these models they could build and adopt strategies that increase and encourage greener consumption in the long run, for the sake of both, their businesses and the environment.

**References:**

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