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Green consumption practices for sustainability: An exploration through social practice theory

Purpose

By applying social practice theory to green consumption this paper extends our understanding of consumer insight on green consumption processes beyond linear decision making. The purpose of this paper is to provide knowledge about how best to mitigate perceived barriers to green consumption processes including the purchase and disposal of household products, and to contribute to current discourse about widening social marketing research beyond a predominant focus on individuals' behaviours.

Design/methodology/approach

Thematic content analysis exploring the lived experiences of participants' green consumption was undertaken from 20 in-depth interviews from Australian consumers. These interviews were analysed through a social practice lens.

Findings

The research identified six emergent social practice themes of green consumption. By employing social practice theory, a different paradigm of social research than the linear models of behaviour is used. This unconventional investigation into the green consumption process, including the purchase and disposal of household products, extends literature past the attitude-behaviour gap and highlights the importance of aligning green consumption processes with social practice.

Originality/value

By integrating social practice theory into the marketing discipline, this paper explores consumption as part of sustainable marketing and provides suggestions about how best to mitigate perceived barriers to green consumption processes. These insights have relevance to micro, meso and macro levels of social marketing, and can help alter consumption practices making them more sustainable.

Keywords

Green consumption processes, Sustainability marketing, Social practice theory, Social marketing.

Introduction

Environmental awareness has increased recently (Meng, Siriwardana and McNeill, 2013). Green consumers are defined as environmentally conscious individuals who seek to consume products and demonstrate green consumption processes that cause minimal environmental impact (Roberts, 1996). From a social marketing viewpoint, a green consumer is someone who leans towards this type of behaviour (Moisander, 2007). A green consumer links purchasing, consuming and disposing of products with the potential for environmental preservation and sustainability (Hailes, 2007). They avoid purchasing products they perceive as environmentally harmful through production, use and final disposal; consume much energy; have excessive packaging; and, contain ingredients coming from threatened habitats or species (Akehurst, Afonso and Martins Goncalves, 2012).

Consumers' decisions to buy and use environmentally friendly products may directly contribute to the reversal of environmental deterioration and thus translate powerful incentives for organisations to improve their performances (Liu, Wang, Shishime and Fujitsuka, 2012). As a result of these factors organisations have started differentiating their products by highlighting green attributes (Deshwal, 2012) through their green marketing communications (Grimmer and Woolley, 2014) whereby they communicate the environmental benefits of purchasing that product. However, more research is needed on the view of consumers toward green marketing (Kemper and Ballantine, 2019), how effective green marketing is, and when green marketing strategies work (Marketing Science Institute, 2018). One key challenge faced by researchers is how to close the gap around what consumers say they are going to do and what they actually do; termed the attitude-behaviour gap, as seen in linear decision models (Nguyen, Nguyen, and Hoang, 2019). Although consumers may have positive environmental values, attitudes and intentions, this frequently fails to translate into green purchasing

behaviour and other pro-environmental behaviour (Moser, 2015). Therefore, this study focuses on facilitators and barriers to green consumption processes of household products, from the consumer's perspective within their socially constructed environment, beyond linear decision models. These green consumption processes incorporate both the purchasing and disposal of green products.

Green marketing communications and their impact on green consumption processes have been the focus of significant research largely focusing on marketing strategies, such as, general environmental benefits associated with purchasing a product, for example, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and landfill (Grimmer and Woolley, 2014). More research, however, is needed to understand consumers' green consumption processes. To counteract a strong focus on linear decision models in previous research green consumer behaviour literature (e.g., theory of reasoned action and theory of planned behaviour) and their associated issues, an approach based around ideas and theories of social practice is applied in this study as a complementary theoretical lens (Hargreaves, 2011). By applying a social practice approach, this investigation centres more on social practices that consumers undertake and inconspicuous consumption they go through, rather than focusing on 'moments' of decision making (Hargreaves, 2011). This takes the investigation away from rational cognitive states toward a broader understanding of behaviour including the wider social forces. This social practice approach helps to overcome the downstream criticism of social marketing by looking at the practices of everyday activities to understand these at a collective rather than an individualistic level (Spotswood, Chatterton, Morey and Spear, 2017). This study advances knowledge on sustainable green consumption behaviours by extending the previous lens of the linear approaches of the attitude-behaviour gap models by utilising social practice theory (Hargreaves, 2011) and answers calls for further research into green consumption behaviour (Nguyen et al. 2019). It contributes to the social marketing literature by investigating behavioural change within a broader, dynamic market

incorporating social forces (Fry, 2014), and by integrating social practice theory into social marketing it helps mitigate some of the limitations of both of these approaches and gains by their combination (Spotswood et al., (2017). Therefore, in response to the 2018 call by the Marketing Science Institute this study contributes to consumer insight on effective green marketing, specifically, green consumption processes through social practice theory, and provides knowledge about how best to mitigate perceived barriers to green consumption.

Social Practice Theory

Social practice theory is a qualitative methodology that, in this study, focuses on household social practices surrounding consumption processes rather than on what underlies decision making. The principal implication of a theory of practice is that the sources of behaviour lie in the development of practices themselves and not the decision making (Hargreaves, 2011; Shove and Pantzar, 2005). Social practice theory, therefore, diverts attention away from moments of individual decision making, and towards the doing of various social practices and inconspicuous consumption (Shove and Warde, 2002). The practice itself, rather than the individuals who perform them or the social structure that surround them, becomes the core unit of analysis and it is the habit, routine and tacit knowledge involved in the activity that becomes the focus (Meier, Warde and Holmes, 2018). The practices are by their very nature, not individual, but are in fact social – i.e., shared (Blue, Shove, Carmona and Kelly, 2016). This social analysis overcomes limitations highlighted in previous social marketing research of focusing on an individual and their behaviour (Rundle-Thiele, David, Willmott, Pang, Eagle and Hay, 2019).

Practices are interconnected and are an implied way of knowing, saying and doing things (Schau, Muñiz and Arnould, 2009). While practices link behaviours, performances, and representations via procedures, understandings and engagements it is consumption that follows

practice (Schau et al., 2009). They are the central source of ‘desire, knowledge and judgement’ (Warde, 2005, p. 145). The practices also require the availability and coexistence of competence, materials and meanings (Blue et al., 2016). For example, the consumer needs competence (know-how about what can be recycled in their weekly shopping), materials to complete the practice (a recycling bin), and the meaning (an understanding to society about landfill and how long it takes to break down various plastics). As coined by Shove and Pantzar (2005), skills, stuff and image.

Skills are learned routines including the consumer’s knowledge, their competence level, way of feeling, and completing the practice (Shove and Pantzar, 2005). These skills capture knowledge about how to act appropriately, how to recognise, and respond to appropriate practices, as well as what is normal, acceptable, and appropriate (and what is not), and learned competence required to complete the practice.

Stuff captures the tangible and material elements used in the practice (Shove and Pantzar, 2005). In practice theory, the interaction between a consumer and a product is often significant as it becomes part of the practice itself and may be different in each situation.

Finally, image focuses on socially shared ideas or concepts connected with the practices that give meaning to it, reasons to connect with it and understandings for why it exists. It connects the norms, values and ideologies of the practice together (Shove and Pantzar, 2005).

Interest in practice theories has increased in behavioural research, particularly in research on sustained consumption, including food consumption, energy use and sustainable transport (Meier et al. 2018). Pro-environmental patterns of consumption utilising social practice theory does not depend upon educating or persuading individuals to make different decisions, but instead on transforming practices to make them more sustainable (Southerton et al., 2004). Therefore, social practice theory is recognised by policy makers, academics and

advocates as an approach to help discover new ways to alter behaviours that are socially harmful and environmentally damaging (Meier et al., 2018).

Social practice offers a broader understanding of green consumption processes and is an appropriate lens for this study. This study contributes to theory by integrating social practice into the marketing discipline and by exploring green consumption as

part of sustainable marketing. Green consumption does not depend upon educating or persuading individuals to make different decisions, but rather depends on changing practices to make them sustainable (Southerton et al. 2004).

Method

To interpret meaning from the experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2013) and in line with social practice theory, twenty semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted. As the primary aim of this study is to explore enablers and barriers to green consumption processes and given that there is limited qualitative research that provides these insights using social practice theory, interviews are deemed appropriate (Hargreaves, 2011).

The interviews were conducted over a two-month period. Participants were recruited using a snowball, purposive sampling technique utilising the researchers' networks. As purposive sampling is open to potential selection bias and/or sampling error (Zikmund, 1997) data collection continued until data saturation was reached (Boddy, 2016). Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) argue, where there is a certain amount of structure in the interviews as in the current study, data saturation occurs for most research projects at twelve interviews. Interview questions were designed to solicit information from the participants about their understanding of green consumption processes. The questions focused on perceptions and attitudes towards consuming and disposing of products and their understanding of green consumption processes.

The participants ranged in age from 20 to over 69 years (see Table 1) and they all resided in the same large metropolitan city in Australia. Two researchers conducted the interviews independently using a semi-structured interview guide. Initially three interviews were conducted as pilot interviews to test the suitability of the interview guide and to make small adjustments to the wording of the questions where necessary. Following this the interviews were conducted, typically lasting between 45 to 60 minutes. All interviews were audio taped and subsequently professionally transcribed for analysis and interpretation. The analysis of the data followed Creswell (2013). After sorting and coding of data using NVivo 11, categories and themes were identified through thematic content analysis. The researchers analysed the data separately in order to make comparisons between their identified categories and themes to minimise bias and to validate the findings (Spiggle, 1994).

[Insert Table 1]

Social practice theorists focus on the various elements that make up a practice. One area of disagreement centres on defining exactly what a practice is. Some theorists focus on the various elements that make up a practice, while others focus on the connections between these elements. Warde (2005) for example offers the view that there are inside (individual routines as they improvise new doings) and outside (as different practices encounter each other) practices. Reckwitz (2002) believes that practices involve the body, the mind, things, knowledge, discourse/language and structure and process. And, Shove and Pantzar (2005) propose that practices are made up of assemblages of images (*meanings* and *symbols*), skills (forms of *knowledge, procedures*) and stuff (*materials, technology*).

For the purpose of this study in examining household practices, the Shove and Pantzar (2005) social practice framework will be applied as it is able to provide good insight into

practices in relation to consumers' green consumption processes of household products. This framework correlates with the aim of the research as it assumes consumers are likely to purchase and dispose of products when **Images** are present and the *meaning* of the marketing makes them feel good about the process and they use their meanings of *symbols* as important heuristics for both marketing communications and Government regulations (Leonidou, Leonidou and Kvasova, 2010). Consumers use their **Skills** through *knowledge* to interpret marketing communications (Cowan and Kinley, 2014), and through *processes* with regards to their green consumption behaviour (Shaw and Riach, 2011). The **Stuff** surrounding green consumers are the *materials* that help save the environment (Chen and Chang, 2012) and the *technology* that contributes to the solution (Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006). Therefore, the use of Shove and Pantzar (2005) - Images, Skills and Stuff as the framework of analysis is well matched to this study.

Findings and Discussion

A thematic analysis of the data was conducted using Shove and Pantzar's (2005) social practice theory framework – Images, Skills and Stuff. Overall six emergent themes are identified from the interviews formed from twenty-five descriptive categories. These themes were: *Interpreting green marketing communications*, *Interpretation of everyday green consumption efforts*, *Motivations toward green consumption*, *Social influences on their green consumption*, *Barriers on their green consumption* and *Work life balance*. These themes and their descriptive categories are identified in Table 2.

[Insert Table 2]

The themes include a combination of the three elements from Shove and Pantzar (2005). Within these three elements the components of meanings and symbols (Images), knowledge and process (Skills) and technology and materials (Stuff) are captured in the descriptive categories. The descriptive categories drawn from the emergent themes are reordered into classifications for analytical interpretation. This reordering allows development of deeper insights relating to a higher order of thinking of key findings therefore informing future theory building regarding green consumption practices. Table 3 shows the development of the analytical classifications built from the descriptive categories.

[Insert Table 3]

The four key analytical classifications are: *Scepticism of Credible Green Marketing Communication*; *Power and Meaning of Green Symbols*; *Awareness Driving Green Understandings*; and *Interpretations, Influences and Motivations from Information Sources*. The commonality tying participants together in these findings is the marketing aspect of green consumption processes sits on top of a cluster of related practices that are performed collectively to achieve a sustainability objective. Therefore, the findings further enhance our understanding of enablers and barriers to green consumption processes. Each key analytical classification is discussed in more detail below.

Scepticism of Green Marketing Communication

Some participants' interpretation of green marketing communications was that of scepticism, and they showed concern that they are being deceived by organisations. It is important for consumers to be able to differentiate those organisations with sound credentials

from those that are simply green washing (deceiving acts or any company practice that intentionally misleads consumers through false advertising about their green claims) (Vermillion and Peart, 2010). Product labels are an area where consumers look for green product and organisational indicators (Biel and Grankvist, 2010). Labels are applied to nearly every product, signifying any number of benefits, and consumers attempt to decipher meaning in their household shopping practices. This information gives participants ideas as to what the product is for, reasons for using the product and, ultimately, reasons to engage in green consumption processes. Participants' scepticism and label importance is illustrated in the following quotes:

Sticking something in recycled cardboard and then claiming it's a green product is usually just a bit of bulls#. (Participant 10)*

I always read the labels, what's in them and their country of origin. I think it's easy to tell which products are green by reading the label. (Participant 17)

This finding builds on the branding literature which suggests that consumers search for clues such as the environmental stance of products; whether the company has an environmental corporate image, the information on labels, packaging choices, and post-consumption options such as recycling (Grimmer and Woolley, 2014). However in this current research some participants indicated they found it difficult to make sense of all the information on the label and they noted scepticism about the product's environmental claim presented in the labelling which is echoed in other research (Bleda and Valente, 2008). Horne (2009) suggests that labels are most successful for green consumption when they are simple, allowing for clear decision making, but not too simple so that they undermine the efficacy of the environmental claims. Participants also questioned the organisations' motives as they drew on their own knowledge

about what is acceptable or appropriate for an organisation to claim when they are green (fits with the Skills element of Shove and Pantzar, 2005). Prior studies investigating the link between environmental labelling and consumers' green consumption behaviour highlight that although eco labelling may have an impact on intention to purchase it doesn't often have an impact on actual purchase behaviour (highlighting again the attitude-behaviour gap) (Rahbar and Wahid, 2011). Therefore, it must be acknowledged that green communication and labelling have a complex role in the social practices of consumers.

Green marketing communication should disclose product information about the environmental impact to differentiate the product being sold. This study found that consumers like the idea of a green ideology, yet it is not completely embedded in their value system because of scepticism. Therefore, they tend to have mixed green and non-green processes. Transparency about the green credentials of the product and organisation can become a potential enabler to green consumption processes and should be promoted by way of the product label and by providing additional information such as website addresses or QR codes. These can lead consumers to organisational websites and other such platforms allowing more detailed information to be displayed around the green credentials.

Power and Meaning of Green Symbols

The use of symbols is powerful shorthand to represent something meaningful about the green product prior to consumption. The findings suggest that if consumers can clearly identify some consistent "green" symbols this would both clarify what the organisation's green credentials mean and have power to drive purchase behaviours. This indicates that participants identify some images with 'green' consumption such as the arrows from the recyclable symbol, words such as "eco", and colours such as greens and earthy browns as illustrated in the following quotes:

I can't bring the label to mind but it's normally green and trees. (Participant 05)

Something I would expect to see on the green packaging is the colours are not as colourful, they're probably more earthy greens and browns. (Participant 14)

This finding is important as it suggests quite a cognitive demand on consumers when trying to determine what symbolises green which is a potential barrier to green consumption processes. This corroborates Thøgersen (2000) who emphasised recognition, understanding and trust in green labelling. Furthermore, Thøgersen, Jørgensen and Sandager (2012) found that with low involvement green products, having a heuristic (in this instance an organic label), made the decision-making process easier for consumers. This also suggests that organisations can be more vigilant in their green marketing communications by introducing and promoting a green symbol across their product range and potentially gain first mover advantage in this sector through branding of their recognisable symbol. This study has found that important green marketing communications tools, such as logos, are not strongly positioned in the participants' minds or evoked set. Therefore, the importance of the powerful meanings that symbols contain appears not to have been fully recognised and utilised in green marketing communications. These results are consistent with previous green consumption studies which identified the importance of trust or transparency in the green information/label (Rex and Baumann, 2007). Often when consumers recognise government or multi-stakeholder involvement in the green credential of the product or organisation then they are more likely to trust it (Horne, 2009).

Awareness Driving Green Understandings

A participant's awareness provides them with the ability to perceive, feel or be aware of objects, thoughts and/or emotions. This study found that an individual's environmental

awareness drives their comprehension of their green consumption processes. Some participants suggested that awareness and understanding of their green consumption efforts were well-developed prior to the current green marketing trend. What is interesting about this finding is that participants embedded green social practice norms seemed to be the most prevalent in raising their consciousness of green consumption. This finding builds on the beliefs literature that suggests that by increasing awareness and knowledge of environmental factors, individuals may associate their actions with environmental benefits, thereby increasing their own attitudes and reinforcing social norms (Cowan and Kinley, 2014).

Childhood memories were identified as powerful, and often it was the simplest dealings that triggered them, and acted as enablers for their green consumption. Participants reminisced about their past behaviours and reflected on how their thoughts of being green had changed over the years. Participants felt they already had a heightened awareness about being green consumers through learned green mental routines when they were younger. These learnt social norms have become ingrained into what ‘should be done’ by way of participants’ personal norms or moral standards (Moser, 2016) as evidenced in previous studies (Huang, Lings, Beatson and Chou, 2018). Participants also identified that they have positively impacted their children’s level of awareness and understandings of green consumption processes by engaging them in green consumption practices, as shown through the following quotes:

I remember bringing in the two bins for our recycling and just the normal rubbish.

(Participant 04)

There was no such thing as green consumption back then, that's what everybody did.... Everybody had water tanks, you naturally recycled, you saved everything and that was kind of green. (Participant 16)

This finding suggests that influences and enablers in green consumption processes are learnt behaviour, in that variations in behaviour through awareness and understanding often occur over a period of time and become habit forming which has been acknowledged before in prior research (Galarraga Gallastegui, 2002) as a contributor to green consumption.

Interpretations, Influences and Motivations from Information Sources

Participants have trouble displaying consistent green consumption processes because they are unclear as to what green consumption is. Organisations are attempting to use their green marketing communication to educate consumers about their products' green attributes, yet consumers find it difficult to distinguish which products are in fact 'green'. The participants reported that although they are willing to buy green products this is not reflected in their actual shopping behaviours. This attitude-behaviour gap has been identified previously (Moser, 2015). The lack of transition between willingness and actual behaviour appears to be due in part to the limited green information or green branding on the product label thus creating high cognitive demand for product research prior to the shopping trip or choosing non-green consumption alternatives at the point of purchase as also proposed by Rex and Baumann (2007) and Moser (2016). Green branding can ease the barrier of consumers having to interpret information; however, this study found that participants could not recall any green brands, which indicates that the green product options are not in their evoked set, as illustrated below:

I don't know any green marketing; I can't recall green marketing immediately.

(Participant 01).

I've gone blank, I can't think of any green marketing examples. (Participant 13)

The idea of a lack of green information also extended to other 'green' processes such as recycling. Participants tended to see recycling efforts post-consumption as the main manifestation of their everyday green consumption processes. This is illustrated with the following quotes:

When I think about green consumption I think of recyclable, biodegradable and saving the environment. Like wastage, recycling and water usage. (Participant 07)

We're really conscious of all the things we use because we don't have garbage services so we sort everything into different types of recycling. (Participant 11)

However, participants indicated a lack of knowledge in a lot of areas around recycling which they felt impacted on their green consumption processes post-consumption. Ecological knowledge has been seen in previous studies as contributing to purchasing behaviour, specifically about recycled products (Bonini and Oppenheim, 2008). While they had a propensity to 'think' green, there was often a pretext not to perform green behaviours. They put this down again in part to a lack of information provided on the product label about how to enact a behaviour which resulted in their confusion:

It is hard to know how to use them, it's like the coffee cups; it's cardboard but it's coated in coffee and the same with tins; do you rinse then chuck? (Participant 01)

I do get very confused sometimes what are recycling and I've heard that you have to clean them before you put them in and I'm not sure about that. (Participant 08)

In summary, this study extends our current understanding of consumer insight on green consumption processes through social practice theory and provides us with knowledge about how best to mitigate perceived barriers to green consumption processes. The results identified four key analytical classifications which highlight the gap between intentioned and actual practices in green consumption – *Scepticism of Green Marketing Communications; Power and Meaning of Green Symbols; Awareness Driving Green Understandings; and Interpretations, Influences and Motivations from Information Sources*. The following section discusses these findings and their implication for theory and practice in green marketing communications and green consumption.

Conclusions

In exploring lived experiences of participants' green consumption processes, this study provides a redirection of existing views through negotiating pathways between various green practices. In doing so, this study makes contributions to literature and practice within the broad area of marketing sustainability and more specifically, green consumption and specifically helps to overcome the limitations identified with the linear attitude-behavioural models which are often used to explore green consumption behaviour (Nguyen et al., 2019). What this research has demonstrated is also the interlinked nature between the barriers and enablers to green consumption processes. Through investigating social practices associated with green consumption, we progress toward mitigating the perceived usage barriers.

Contributions for research

This study contributes to research and improves understanding of green consumption processes by offering deeper insights into practices as sources of behaviour change, rather than the application of a more traditional linear and rational process of decision making. This study has found that the following concepts have not yet been fully explored in the marketing literature.

First, employing social practice theory framework represents a different paradigm of social research than that found in the linear models of behaviour (Hargreaves, 2011). Moser (2015) maintained that further research should scrutinize the attitude-behaviour gap and identify major barriers that hinder consumers from translating their green attitudes into practice. This study followed Moser's (2015) call and contributes to the literature by offering an unconventional investigation into the green consumption processes of household products that extends past the lens of the attitude-behaviour gap. This investigation also integrates the views within the social marketing literature that focusing on behavioural outputs is too narrow and it is important to investigate behavioural change within a broader, dynamic market incorporating social forces (Fry 2104). Spotswood et al., (2017) highlight the need to put practice theories into social marketing to mitigate some of the limitations of both approaches and to benefit from their combination. This current study contends that while consumers often intend to act in a way consistent with sustainable behaviour, they exhibit confusion about what they need to do to demonstrate green consumption processes. Therefore, it is important to clarify these practices in government, policy and organisational strategies to increase green consumption processes.

Second, this study supports Mylan (2015) and Paddock (2017) that linkages between practice elements are under-researched. Given that there is limited qualitative literature in green consumption (Gleim, Smith, Andrews and Cronin, 2013) this study contributes to the body of work by providing rich, qualitative insights. Gupta and Ogden (2009) discuss the lack of green

consumption success because of compromises in performance quality for green products combined with their limited availability and higher prices. The findings of this current study indicate that consumers tend to exhibit mixed green and non-green behaviours throughout their consumption processes, and it is important to extend the interrelationships found in this study, in the literature.

Contributions for practice

The findings in this study have implications for assisting marketers, social marketers, governments and policy makers to develop programs to enhance green consumption processes for social betterment (Kotler and Zaltman, 1971). A considerable body of research has laid out the persuasive appeals and content elements in green marketing. This study offers further practical implications beyond green marketing and establishes the importance of aligning green consumption processes with social practice.

Green marketing communication

Research suggests that consumers search for clues as to the environmental credentials of products (Grimmer and Woolley, 2014). This study has found that the meanings of symbols, such as logos, has not been fully recognised in green marketing communications. Extant literature concludes that effective branding for environmentally friendly products could influence and convert passive green consumers, who are willing to purchase pro-environmental products, into actual green consumers (Bose and Luo, 2011). Green branding can also ease the burden of consumers having to interpret information at the point of purchase and at the point of disposal, however, this study also found that consumers could not bring to mind any green brands, which indicates that green product options are not in their evoked set. Therefore, this finding indicates that although information about sustainability is important for overcoming

perceived barriers to green consumption processes, current green branding does not appear to be fully recognised and utilised in green marketing communications.

Consumers search for clues as to the environmentalism of product ranges, for example, whether the organisation has an environmental corporate image, packaging choices and post-consumption options such as recycling from the information on product labels (Grimmer and Woolley, 2014). However, while this study supports this research it also found a great deal of scepticism exists regarding product labels and expectations that the products and organisations do not really deliver on their environmental promises. Such conflicting interpretations indicate marketers are not effectively communicating with their target markets regarding their green credentials. This indicates the need for further regulation, and policy developments around product labels and educating consumers about how to interpret labels. This education needs to happen at a broader level beyond the organisation to create transparency in the industry and to ensure consistency between organisations. This consistency will enable social marketers to communicate the cues to identify the 'green' level of products in an effort to increase green consumption processes.

Green Consumption Processes

This study has found that there are green behaviours consumers would like to do but do not, specifically around post-consumption behaviour (e.g., recycling); even though they often feel this is the primary way they engage in green household consumption processes. This finding supports Cowan and Kinley (2014), who conclude that it is difficult to predict a consumer's intention to perform a green behaviour. The decision to adopt pro-environmental behaviours, such as recycling, can be affected by the availability of appropriate infrastructure, facilities and green options (Phipps et al., 2013). Moreover, Leonidou et al. (2010) suggest that green consumers demonstrate an interest in product characteristics, such as recyclability,

chemical content, organic ingredients, etc. This highlights the importance of making facilities for recycling readily available within communities but also including suitable information on both the product label and in marketing communications about what can be recycled and how.

Furthermore, collecting data from a sample with a wide age range has revealed that influences in green behaviours may be generational, in that variations in behaviour through awareness and understanding will occur over a period. This reflection enables social marketers to develop proactive green marketing communication campaigns with a view that future generations will engage in green consumption processes and be influenced to purchase and dispose of products in a sustainable way.

This research has suggested that while consumers are keen to demonstrate green consumption often there is disconnect in the knowledge they have around green processes and how to overcome perceived barriers to green consumption. This believed limitation in knowledge indicates the importance of transparency of green marketing and educating the consumer. The challenge is that it is not a case of just 'adding' further information as there is also scepticism around the truthfulness of the claims made by organisations and challenges around the easy identification of 'green' products. This suggests the importance of policy development around the 'green' grading of products and their parent organisations, thus making it easier for consumers to easily identify more environmentally friendly products and lessen the cognitive load at the point of purchase and post-consumption disposal. A 'green' grading system could be like the health star ratings of pre-packaged food which countries such as Canada, France and Australia have introduced. These star ratings are consistent across products in each of these countries and are mandated by government which removes scepticism and makes it easier for consumers to make informed choices. Green marketing communications could be used to support these ratings, translating more consistently into higher green consumption processes.

Limitations and Further Research

While this study contributes to sustainable marketing and social practice literatures, the research design still contains limitations. These findings are relevant to green consumption processes therefore caution should be exercised in extending the findings beyond this context. Furthermore, generalisation of the findings to other countries and cultures could be problematic if they have socio-economic characteristics and product labelling significantly different from Australia. The sample investigated in this current study was limited to one city within Australia. Future research could explore the potential similarities and boundaries of the findings in other countries.

Despite the limitations, this study improves understandings by offering a critical redirection of existing views on social marketing, specifically within the realm of green consumption processes and social practice. At a micro level, this study builds a foundation for future research into social marketing that could be more successful in influencing green consumption processes. Studies could further examine post-consumption behaviour especially as this research indicated that participants felt their recycling efforts were their most dominant green consumption. More research will thereby provide insight into further enhancing green consumption practices, help to achieve more positive influences in the broader community, and with the support of policy change around packaging and education, help with the societal goal of improving environmental sustainability

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Table 1. Sample characteristics

Participant	Gender	Education	Household status	Household income \$AUD	Occupation
01	Female	Undergraduate Degree	Single	\$25,000 to \$65,000	Administration Officer
02	Female	Undergraduate Degree	Couple	\$66,000 to \$105,000	Administration Officer
03	Female	Undergraduate Degree	Couple	\$25,000 to \$65,000	Administration Officer
04	Female	High School	Couple	\$146,000+	Personal Assistant
05	Female	Undergraduate Degree	Single	\$25,000 to \$65,000	Administration Officer
06	Female	High School	Family	\$106,000 to \$145,000	Library Assistant
07	Female	Undergraduate Degree	Family	\$66,000 to \$105,000	Social Worker
08	Female	Apprenticeship	Family	\$66,000 to \$105,000	Hairdresser
09	Female	High School	Family	\$106,000 to \$145,000	Student Engagement Officer
10	Female	Higher Education	Couple	\$146,000+	Library Manager
11	Female	Higher Education	Couple	\$146,000+	Counsellor
12	Female	Undergraduate Degree	Family	\$66,000 to \$105,000	Social Worker
13	Female	Higher Education	Family	\$66,000 to \$105,000	Librarian
14	Male	Higher Education	Single	\$66,000 to \$105,000	Academic/Consultant
15	Female	Higher Education	Single	\$25,000 to \$65,000	Retired
16	Female	High School	Single	Less than \$24,000	Retired
17	Male	Primary School	Single	Less than \$24,000	Retired
18	Female	High School	Single	Less than \$24,000	Retired
19	Male	Higher Education	Couple	\$25,000 to \$65,000	Retired
20	Female	High School	Couple	\$25,000 to \$65,000	Retired

Table 2. Summary of emergent themes and their descriptive categories

Emergent themes	Element	Components of element	Descriptive categories
<i>Interpreting green marketing communications</i>	Images	Meanings	– <i>Interpreting Green is more than Practical, it is Emotional</i>
		Symbols	– <i>Label Looking to Authenticate Green</i> – <i>Recognising Green Symbols</i> – <i>Identifying Plastic Shopping Bags as a Symbol of negative Green Credentials</i>
	Skills	Knowledge	– <i>Interpretations of Being Seen as Green</i>
<i>Interpretation of everyday green consumption efforts</i>	Images	Meanings	– <i>Consumers Interpretation of Green Consumption</i> – <i>Mixed Green Consumer Practices</i>
	Skills	Process	– <i>Changing Practices Over the Years</i>
	Stuff	Materials	– <i>Tangible Elements used in Green</i>
<i>Motivations toward green consumption</i>	Images	Meanings	– <i>Local Suppliers are Favoured as Green</i>
	Skills	Knowledge	– <i>Push or Pull, Individuals level of Greenness motivating their interest in Green Marketing</i>
		Processes	– <i>The Halo Effect (Product, Price, Place, Promotion)</i>
<i>Social influences on their green consumption,</i>	Images	Meanings	– <i>Green Learning, Acquiring new Comprehension</i>
	Skills	Knowledge	– <i>Growing up Green, Family Influences that Affect Individuals to be Green</i> – <i>Circle of Life, Encouraging Children to Engage in Green Practices</i>
	Stuff	Technology	– <i>Green eWOM</i>
<i>Barriers on their green consumption</i>	Images	Meanings	– <i>Green Branding not in the Evoked Set</i> – <i>Which one is Green, Reachable Desire and Limited Comprehension</i>
	Skills	Knowledge	– <i>Transparency in Green Product Life Cycle (Process, Product, Packaging)</i>
	Stuff	Technology	– <i>Green mMarketing Responsiveness</i>
<i>Work life balance</i>	Skills	Process	– <i>Green Consumption Practices</i>
		Knowledge	– <i>Green Consumption Practices Individuals would like to do but do not</i>
		Process Knowledge	– <i>Eco Certified Services, Consumers tick of Approval</i> – <i>Individuals Green Work Routines</i> – <i>Governments Influence on Practices</i>

Table 3. Integration of descriptive categories drawn into four analytical classifications

Descriptive categories	Analytical classifications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Interpreting Green is more than Practical, it's Emotional</i> – <i>Label Looking to Authenticate Green</i> – <i>Interpretations of Being Seen as Green</i> – <i>Mixed Green Consumer Practices</i> – <i>Government Influence on Practices</i> 	<p><i>Scepticism of Green Marketing Communication</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Recognising Green Symbols</i> – <i>Identifying Plastic Shopping Bags are a Symbol of negative Green Credentials</i> – <i>Tangible Elements used in Green</i> – <i>Eco Certified Services, Consumers tick of Approval</i> 	<p><i>Power and Meaning of Green Symbols</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Changing Practices over the Years</i> – <i>Push or Pull, Individuals level of Greenness Motivating their interest in Green Marketing</i> – <i>Circle of Life, Encouraging Children to Engage in Green Practices</i> – <i>Green mMarketing Responsiveness</i> – <i>Green Consumption Practices</i> 	<p><i>Consciousness Driving Green Understandings</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Consumers Interpret of Green Consumption</i> – <i>Local Suppliers are Favoured as Green</i> – <i>The Halo Effect (Product, Price, Place, Promotion)</i> – <i>Green Learning, Acquiring New Comprehension</i> – <i>Growing up Green, Family Influences that Affect Individuals to be Green</i> – <i>Green eWOM</i> – <i>Green Branding not in the Evoked Set</i> – <i>Which one is Green, Reachable Desire and Limited Comprehension</i> – <i>Transparency in Green Product Life Cycle (Process, Product, Packaging)</i> – <i>Green Consumption Practices Individuals would like to Do but Don't</i> – <i>Individuals Green Work Routines</i> 	<p><i>Interpretations, Influences and Motivations from Information Sources</i></p>