Marketing Sustainability: Use of information sources and degrees of voluntary simplicity

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Abstract

The concept of voluntary simplicity is taken as a starting point to investigate consumers' use of information sources when making purchases of sustainable technological products and services. Differences in information seeking and sources consulted and trusted are investigated with a view to increasing the uptake of sustainable domestic technologies such as energy efficient fridges and washing machines over more grey alternatives. Clear patterns both in sources used and the information seeking process were found between different groups of consumers and priorities for purchase were also identified. The results suggest different strategies for marketing sustainable technologies to these different consumer groups.

Keywords

Information sources; sustainable technologies; voluntary simplifiers

Introduction

Holistic notions of sustainability have far reaching implications for every aspect of an organisation, with issues like corporate social responsibility and ethical values as key elements of brand identities (Jardine, 2006). Marketers in particular have seen the growing interest in environmental concerns as a way to segment and target new markets.

Perhaps the most prominent and visible aspect of sustainability, and the focus of most of the marketing literature to date, is consumption. Marketers generally use the term ‘green consumer’ to encapsulate the notion of a consumer who rejects grey alternatives in favour of environmentally friendly choices, for example organic food, ecover washing powder, and low energy light bulbs. Additional terms might be used interchangeably with green, for example environmental, sustainable, ethical or ecological, even though these can have varying connotations for different audiences (Peattie, 1995). Whatever term is used, however, does not extend as far as indicating a rejection of consumption altogether, as most marketers desire consumers to change brands, not consume less. For mainstream marketers, green consumption is generally used to indicate those consumers who prefer to purchase products and services which have some benefit to the environment, however that may be defined.

Green consumers, then, favour choosing so-called green products and services over grey alternatives and much work has been done by marketers and marketing academics in an endeavour to identify and target this elusive green consumer (Peattie, 1999), with mixed results. In an effort to pin down the characteristics of the typical green consumer, several studies have attempted to identify socio-demographic characteristics which might predict such green behaviour (Roberts, 1996; Straughan and Roberts, 1999; Wagner, 1997) but the results of such studies have been inconclusive and often contradictory. Other authors have taken a global approach in an attempt to find common factors in environmental behaviour across different countries, with limited success (Bhate, 2002), or have acknowledged the need to segment further the vague category of environmentally

concerned consumers (Zimmer, Stafford and Stafford, 1994). In addition to this uncertainty, consumer response in general to green marketing efforts has fallen short of marketers' expectations (Davis, 1993), with a noticeable decline in consumer interest leading to the demise of certain green brands (Thomas, 2003), although currently green issues are noticeably back on the agenda (Tiltman, 2007).

Given the pressing need to improve environmental performance and the tighter European regulations which are soon to be enforced (Vidal, 2004; Vidal and Adam, 2006), there is a very real impetus to understand more about consumers and their adoption/non-adoption of sustainability activities, including purchases. Possessing the technology to design and produce energy efficient fridges is solving only part of the problem if consumers do not choose them over grey alternatives, or do not use them and dispose of them in an environmentally friendly way. Therefore, we need to understand how consumers reach their purchase outcomes, whether they are grey or green, and as part of that process, how they source and use information.

With this aim, we have carried out research with different groups of consumers in an attempt to unpick their decision making processes and uncover their information sources with regard to sustainable technologies. The groups we have chosen can be defined in terms of different degrees of 'voluntary simplicity' (VS). This term indicates people who have chosen 'to limit expenditures on consumer goods and services, and to cultivate non-materialistic sources of satisfaction and meaning' (Etzioni, 1998, p.620) and is useful in that it defines a certain consumer who is at the extremes of sustainable living. At the

other end of the VS spectrum is the non voluntary simplifier (NVS) who does not engage in any sustainable activities. We have also extended the concept of VS and NVS to incorporate a third group we have termed beginner voluntary simplifiers (BVS) which we define as those who may be currently undertaking some features of a voluntary simplifier lifestyle, but have not fully committed or converted to it (McDonald *et al*., 2006).

Voluntary simplification

Over the past twenty years, the voluntary simplification (VS) movement has been gathering strength in the USA (Zavestoski, 2002) and Western Europe (Etzioni, 1998). The idea of privileging the non-material over the material to increase satisfaction, quality and meaning in life is not new and has resonance with many ancient philosophies and religious tenets (Kidman and Kilbourne, 1996). However, for VS there is no automatic connection between simplicity and organised religion of any denomination, although for many, spirituality is part of this lifestyle (Thoreau, 1937; Elgin, 1981). In line with much of the work in this field, we define voluntary simplifiers here as those seeking a simpler lifestyle, not for personal reasons such as stress, lack of family time, or work pressures like downshifters (Hamilton and Mail, 2003) but for societal reasons such as environmental protection, ethical concerns, green consumption, or community development (McDonald *et al.*, 2006). However, the concept of VS as defined above can be seen as an extreme position, therefore the notion of beginner voluntary simplifiers (BVS) is an important addition to the literature. It recognises that because the gap between VS and NVS is wide, those in the latter category would possibly perceive no connection between these two extremes. Bringing into account BVS, however, bridges

that gap and could make the VS concept less alien to NVS and therefore potentially more marketable. The BVS category also offers us a chance to interview consumers about purchase outcomes that have been made with a new awareness of sustainability issues as this group is still adopting aspects of VS yet remains close to its NVS origins. It is therefore a most useful and fluid group to study as it is not definable as VS or NVS but can relate to both positions and has recent experience of incorporating VS considerations into its decision making.

Although VS as defined above is not solely concerned with consumption activities (and the extreme VS would of course be anti-consumption), we are focusing on this (perhaps the most visible) aspect in order to delve into the uses of information by different categories of VS. By investigating the means by which consumers make purchase outcomes, we can use that knowledge to communicate about sustainable technologies to BVS and possibly NVS, thus extending aspects of VS to less green consumers. We can also use the experiences of BVS, currently finding their way through sustainable decision making, before their activities become at all habitual and therefore less accessible to the researcher.

Information sources

In traditional consumer behaviour studies, decision making is characterised as a five step process: problem or need definition, information search and interpretation, evaluation of alternatives, decision, and post-purchase or post-action evaluation. Emphasis on the stages and time spent on each will depend on many factors including risk, past behaviour,

and experience (Pickton and Broderick, 2001). The level of involvement will affect the time and attention given to each stage, with high involvement products such as cars generally indicating a greater degree of engagement in the consumption process than low involvement goods such as light bulbs. The type and use of information will also depend on whether the purchase situation is being undertaken for the first time, is a rebuy, or a modified rebuy (Varey, 2002). The sources of information used by consumers vary from identifiable corporate and marketing communications such as websites, television advertising, direct mail and packaging, to more intangible means like opinion leaders and word of mouth, which have the potential to be very powerful, but also less controllable (Pickton and Broderick, 2005). The fact that information sources are so numerous is both a problem for marketers in that extensive research is needed to identify them and an advantage because there are more potential brand contact points with the target audience. For the consumer, a complex information environment can complicate the decision making process, especially if that information is disorganised or incomprehensible (Hansen, 2005) or even incorrect (Ellen, 1994). Current thinking in marketing suggests adopting an integrated approach which involves (but is more than) a coherent programme of communications across all contacts with stakeholders (Kitchen, *et al*., 2004). This may be especially pertinent for the successful marketing of sustainable technologies, as committed green consumers by their very nature are more interested in environmental claims (Peattie, 1995) and could be prepared to delve more deeply into an organisation's ethical stance via various channels of information.

For a green perspective on the basic consumption process model, Peattie (1995) proposes additional considerations during the information gathering stage: product awareness, supplier awareness, and socio-environmental awareness, in which factors pertinent to sustainability are key. For example, issues such as durability, eco-performance, locality, responsibility, and corporate identity might be considered. Comprehension of the socio-environmental implications would also be relevant. The voluntary simplifier may decide to make a new green purchase outcome or to borrow, make, rent, repair, buy second-hand or defer purchase. A non voluntary or beginner simplifier has another option, which is to make a grey purchase decision. How VS, BVS and NVS reach these purchase outcomes, and the role that information sources play in those decisions, are the focus of our research, with an aim of understanding what influences different categories of consumers to choose technological products.

Method

We carried out a total of 81 in-depth, semi-structured interviews in the North of England during 2003/4, concentrating on the two large cities of Sheffield and Leeds. Our recruitment strategy included a mix of ages, gender and socio-economic groups across the sample, encompassing a range of consumers that we have classified (post interview) according to their degree of voluntary simplification. Regarding extreme voluntary simplifiers, we recognised that it would be difficult to find such people in mainstream society as the very strong VS by definition would be living an alternative lifestyle (McDonald *et al*., 2006). Thus, we defined participants as VS according to their lifestyle choices rather than categorising consumers as VS only if they explicitly identified

themselves as such. Our VS category, then, comprises consumers who displayed many elements of voluntary simplification without necessarily committing fully to the movement. Of the 81 interviewees, we categorised 50 as VS, 20 as BVS and the remaining 11 as NVS.

Interviewees were recruited in a variety of ways including posters and leaflets in charity shops, news items in relevant publications, and snowballing from initial contacts. This recruitment strategy accounts for the relatively high number of VS in our sample. In addition to interviewing individuals, in 2005 we conducted three focus groups in the Sheffield area to explore further our findings from the interviews. In the focus groups, we aimed to probe deeper into consumers' use of information sources, for example making explicit how and why certain sources were chosen, why some were trusted and not others, whether the sources consulted differed for categories of sustainable technologies and what respondents considered to be adequate information.

In both the interviews and focus groups we asked respondents to describe in great detail the purchase, disposal and lifestyle choices that they have made and the information that they have used to make these choices. Participants initially found it difficult to appreciate the 'micro' nature of this kind of research, a difficulty we have encountered previously with such a detailed approach (Oates and McDonald, 2002). Therefore, in order to focus the data and elicit rich descriptions, we made use of critical incident techniques (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 2002). Thus we began each individual interview and

focus group by concentrating on a recent decision relating to one or more technological products. For a more detailed discussion of our methods, see Young et al (forthcoming).

Analysis

Figure 1. here

Figure 1 depicts the framework that we have used for analysis which has been generated by the interview data. Briefly, the outside box represents the purchase process context and comprises any number of interdependent factors that include time of purchase, experience of using or buying other (similar or different) products or services, lifestyle, life stage, living arrangements, work patterns etc. The trapezoid represents the process of reaching a purchase outcome, as alternatives and options are eventually reduced to result in a single action (which may be a decision to purchase, defer purchase, or not to purchase at all). Constraints include criteria which are beyond the control of the consumer (e.g. product availability); strong filters involve those criteria the consumer is not willing to compromise (e.g. brand); and weak filters are those which the consumer is willing to trade (e.g. size). Any of these criteria types can be found at any of the levels in the model. For example, colour could be a constraint if only white products are available, a strong filter where a purchase must match an existing colour scheme, or a weak filter where it is considered as part of the purchase process but as a trade off with other factors such as brand. See Young et al (forthcoming) for a more detailed discussion of the filters and the model.

The final component of our model, and the one most obviously related to marketing, is the information sources. These can impact at all levels and stages, and we have found that consumers use, or are influenced by, a wide range of information sources during the purchase process. Some information sources are used as filters. In other cases, information sources have a direct or indirect influence on the choice of strong and weak filters. For example, if brand is a strong filter, this may be associated with word-of-mouth advice from a friend or neighbour. If manufacturer ethics is a weak filter, this may have been influenced by reading the *Ethical Consumer*. This is depicted on the model by the sources listed on the outside of the trapezoid adjacent to each filter. Although our model is a complex one, it gives us a language to discuss the minutiae of purchase processes. Further, it allows us to compare and contrast decision making processes for sustainable technologies across different purchase types and lifestyle choices, whilst identifying information sources as a key part of that process.

For this paper we have examined our data with the aim of surfacing patterns of information use and influence within and between different consumers, for example communications that are formal, informal, personal, general, specialist, commercial, independent, electronic, from reference groups, opinion leaders etc. We have documented all the sources identified by our three groups of interviewees as influencing purchase and present the four most frequently cited, according to whether they were seen as strong or weak influences. We also present three ‘typical’ purchase process models with different approaches to information use and discuss these in relation to our findings below.

Results

In this section, the three categories of consumers will be discussed in terms of their information seeking patterns. Before that, it is relevant to reiterate that during each interview, the participants may have discussed several recent purchases. We have experimented with drawing up these models 'per purchase' and 'per respondent'. We have uncovered significant variations in the criteria types and levels employed by the same interviewee discussing different purchases. We have therefore aggregated our data at the level of analysis of a single purchase. These data support Peattie's (1999) notion that each consumer represents a portfolio of purchases which can be approached in varying and even conflicting ways.

Non voluntary simplifiers

Results and analysis of the interviews and focus groups suggest particular patterns of information seeking amongst consumers who exhibit varying degrees of voluntary simplicity. One of the most noticeable differences was the extent of information seeking between groups. The non voluntary simplifiers frequently limited their searches for potentially sustainable technologies to a single source, for example a Littlewood's catalogue or a shop/website recommended by a friend/acquaintance/family member. For the NVS, consideration of environmental performance did not come into the purchase decision, it was a non-criteria. Rather, other criteria were identifiable, including price, size, brand name, past experience, and others' experiences.

Figure 2. here

Figure 2 illustrates a typical purchase process by a non voluntary simplifier. This consumer minimised the effort used to purchase a new tumble drier by limiting the sources actually consulted and this was signalled by his/her use of language e.g. the word 'just', and insistence on the unproblematic nature of the purchase. Brand reputation was clearly an important factor and used positively without question as a heuristic for reliability. Adherence to a particular brand meant that there was little need for this NVS consumer to question in-store sales people for further information. The model shown in Figure 2 illustrates the factors that were seen as important in this purchase outcome, particularly the reliance upon personal recommendation which was used both for the brand and the information seeking itself. One NVS interviewee summed up the importance of listening to people whom you know and trust: 'I had been told about it [shop] by the person I know who owns this big estate agency who does a lot of this business … my son and daughter-in-law bought my fridge freezer for me and we got the discount. I bought the washing machine because I went back to him and he was wonderful.' Many other NVS consumers relied on face-to-face information from salespeople in the store which was accepted uncritically and focused the information gathering on the actual retail environment at the moment of purchase. Overall, for NVS, little time was spent on active research before purchase, and across the interviews the most frequent source of information used was in-store salespeople, with all 11 interviewees mentioning this source. Nine of the 11 stated that salespeople had been a strong influence on purchase – the remaining two put this source as weak, both of which related to car purchases (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. here

Beginner voluntary simplifiers

For the beginner voluntary simplifier, decisions are made on a combination of practical considerations, like the NVS above, but also some environmental concerns. For example, the following interviewee illustrated in Figure 3 below was happy to restrict his/her retail option to a single store (Comet) but within that had actually debated factors such as energy efficiency rating which they had seen on the product information.

Figure 3. here

The consumer was aware of sources such as the *Ethical Consumer* guides but had not taken steps to consult these. However, they intended to do so for their next purchase. The main environmental information source used, energy rating, was readily available, displayed with the product in store. Unlike the NVS, personal recommendation was not mentioned and the role of branding was minimised to a fleeting reference to Bosch and Eco. Another BVS interviewee suggested that brand played a minimal role in the decision making: 'I don't think that we had a brand in mind when we first decided that we needed to buy something … we used *Which?* magazine as a starting point … we would also have looked at the energy rating, A, B, C rating.' For BVS, brands were generally seen as positive unless they had specific information to the contrary. No information implied a brand was acceptable.

As well as information in the store, other BVS used salespeople for specific green questions, but were often disappointed with the response. The following quote illustrates the deciding role salespeople could have had in influencing a purchase of garden furniture: 'We asked the staff and they weren't aware in B&Q whether it was FSC or not and in the end we didn't buy anything but that was the key factor.'

A common concern amongst BVS was a perceived lack of information from companies on ethical issues, particularly for larger purchases such as kitchens, furniture and cars. This complaint was not offered as an excuse for choosing grey alternatives, but rather as an acknowledgement that they would have to search more thoroughly before making such a purchase. One interviewee commented 'this new car they've been talking about, the Prius or something like that. But you know you just see it on TV, then you don't see it on the streets and I haven't bought a car for some time but if I did I wouldn't really know where to look, I'd have to look for it a bit harder.' Table 2 below represents the most frequently cited information sources from our BVS interviewees, illustrating that, as with NVS, the most influential source of information was in-store salespeople.

Table 2. here

Voluntary simplifiers

The third consumer group, voluntary simplifiers, relied less on brand reputation and more on independent sources such as green publications and pressure groups. The role of salespeople was combined with that of specialist information. Environmental and/or

ethical considerations took priority over other factors such as cost, although this was not ignored. One VS interviewee commented that 'money becomes a factor if it is too expensive but in fact both machines [washing machine and fridge] were roughly only about £20 more than less energy efficient ones … you recoup those costs very quickly.' Below in Figure 4 is a typical voluntary simplifier model based on the purchase of a washing machine:

Figure 4. here

Brand was used both in a negative and positive way by VS consumers. They were generally opposed to multinationals, viewing them as inherently unethical, but positive towards brands recommended by trusted sources such as *Ethical Consumer*. Once a brand was viewed in a negative light, VS were reluctant to change their opinion. Product brand was not discussed as a shortcut to enable decision making, but implicitly as a source of further environmental information from companies. VS consumers felt such information was difficult to access, but that publications such as *Ethical Consumer* had adequate company information. However, other voluntary simplifiers placed much more emphasis on companies' overall ethical activities as opposed to the environmental performance of their products, and the internet was seen as key in providing such information. Typically, voluntary simplifiers demonstrated a more complex decision making process than other consumers, and took a critical approach to certain sources that NVS and BVS continued to use such as in-store information. They were willing to search harder for information, looking behind the company name for more detailed ethical criteria and recognising that

retail outlets only carried the most basic of facts about a brand. VS were unhappy about this perceived lack of information which they felt would prevent other consumers from making an informed choice. For VS, it appears that their information seeking strategy is led by research prior to purchase, in contrast to BVS and especially NVS whose information seeking is more influenced by the actual retail context. A good example of the kinds of sources of information used by VS is given in the following quote: 'well we get *The Ecologist*, we get the Green Party's information, we get newsletters from Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth and you know, just talking to friends.' See Table 3 below for the information sources commonly mentioned by VS consumers. Unlike the other two groups, salespeople were viewed more ambivalently, as both strong and weak sources of information.

Table 3. here

Discussion

Comparison of consumers' pre-purchase information seeking for technological products and/or services has revealed patterns according to degree of voluntary simplicity and category of sustainable technology. Of course, the groups are not so fixed that there is no blurring between different factors, nor is our data completely straightforward and uncontradictory. Even within respondents' portfolios of purchases there may be apparent inconsistencies. But from our analysis, we have been able to identify differences in terms of complexity of decision making and extent and type of information use. As Peattie (1995) suggests, green consumers display additional concerns when searching for new

products such as eco-performance and corporate identity. In our study, this knowledge for VS comes from specialist sources as opposed to NVS who rely on more mainstream information. BVS consumers demonstrate behaviour which has elements of VS (looking at energy ratings which are readily available) and elements of NVS (reliance on a single High St distributor). Retailer importance also differs, from an integral part of the process for NVS to much more ambivalent for VS. Brand importance varies too – it is mentioned by consumers for different reasons and with varying acceptance. NVS use brand unquestioningly as a heuristic for quality whereas VS are much more critical and delve deeper into a brand's corporate antecedents. CSR is viewed with suspicion – one VS participant commented ' we could maybe look up the company who makes the blenders and read about their CSR which will all be a lot of waffly jargon … largely fabricated … you know what I mean'. Other VS participants agreed, citing ethical directories of companies as too political to take at face value.

The context of past experience differs, playing a larger role for NVS and BVS than for VS consumers. Personal recommendation is another factor which is viewed differently – whilst NVS and BVS rely on this to some degree from informal sources, VS also use the context of more formal environmental networks for information. Within this context, they will cite word of mouth from like-minded individuals as an important source of environmental knowledge, and regard this information as trustworthy.

The role of mainstream media was mentioned by the more green consumers, not in relation to traditional advertising channels but with reference to negative news items

about organisations such as Nestle, Nike and Shell. These were viewed as reliable sources of information because they were seen as neutral. They were also regarded as powerful, although not in terms of specific past purchases but more generally - for example, one VS interviewee suggested that 'well, we do rely on the media to keep us informed about these sorts of things and it is quite obvious that people do feel very strongly about things like that. A really strong news item about child labour used in making rugs or trainers … you do find the sales decreasing … even people who aren't into green issues are quite affected by that.' On a more positive note, another VS interviewee recalled the influence that Blue Peter (children's television programme) had on her general behaviour, citing its coverage of environmental issues as defining the moment she adopted a greener lifestyle. It was noticeable that very few of any of our interviewees mentioned mainstream advertising as part of their decision making process, although advertising in specialist green publications was infrequently noted. Some VS participants looked upon advertisers as very much part of the problem of over-consumption, seeing them as promoting technological appliances which were largely superfluous: 'particularly around Christmas there is the must have of the year and it is advertised throughout the year. Last year it was the bread makers and advertisers do push things …'. But overall, traditional marketing communications did not surface as a major issue in any of the interviews or focus groups.

With regard to trust of information sources, this varied between the interviewees according to level of voluntary simplification. The VS were the most cynical of information, preferring to trust sources within their environmental networks, either

formal ones such as magazines (e.g. *Ethical Consumer*) or informal sources such as recommendations. Dedicated green retailers such as local healthfood shops were also trusted to stock only ethical products. Although certain labelling schemes were identified as trustworthy (e.g. Fair Trade for fmcg, energy ratings for sustainable technologies) and were seen to shorten the decision making process, there was still some distrust that such labels did not tell the whole story. For example, energy ratings were seen as informing the consumer about one aspect of a technology – efficiency – but the whole picture was seen as much more complex, involving hidden factors such as the amount of energy used to manufacture the product, whether child labour was involved and how far it had travelled. Despite this cynicism, VS called for similar labelling schemes on smaller appliances, such as toasters and blenders, as any kind of green information on these items was seen as extremely sparse and difficult to find.

For BVS, the energy ratings were trusted as uncomplicated pieces of information and were used by some in decision making for sustainable technologies. NVS and BVS trusted salespeople in-store as information givers, whereas VS were more ambivalent about them: 'I don't think I would trust the sales assistants to give me the type of information I am looking for … they would know about energy efficiency … but also how efficiently it was made and how long it was going to last I am not sure' (VS participant). Put more strongly, when discussing a High St retailer, another VS participant claimed that 'salespeople are incompetent and make it difficult to make a decision'.

In terms of our model, we suggest that some of these factors discussed above will take priority for different consumers, for example for VS the ethical reputation of a company would be a strong consideration and non-negotiable. For a BVS consumer the choice to use a certain retailer might take precedence, with final product choice dependent on what is stocked by that retailer, even if energy ratings are still part of the decision making process. For NVS, other factors such as brand might be the final and strongest priority.

Conclusions

The classification of consumers into non voluntary simplifiers, beginner voluntary simplifiers, and voluntary simplifiers, has raised several differences in terms of their information seeking and purchase decisions for sustainable technologies. All the consumers we interviewed had purchased a piece of technology such as a washing machine in recent years, and indeed may all have bought an identical product, but the processes they had used to reach this common goal varied widely. The role of information seeking was present to some extent for all consumers but the sources consulted, trusted and used were diverse. The challenge for marketers, then, who desire to increase the uptake of sustainable technologies, is to employ a variety of information sources in an integrated way, as suggested by advocates of IMC, in a genuinely holistic manner which illustrates the philosophy of the organisation, exemplified by both corporate and consumer communications. There is a need to emphasise corporate social responsibility, not just in terms of aiming at the VS market, but to cross-promote good CSR practice in more mainstream communications in an attempt to reach BVS who are a much larger and thus potentially more attractive group than the VS.

Green marketers can also attempt to change the priorities of NVS and encourage the VS tendencies of BVS. For example, consumers' trust in High St retailers indicates that they are not inclined to shop around, so adequate distribution of green technologies is vital. NVS and BVS rely on retailers and trust salespeople who, if trained more intensively in sustainability issues, could play a major role in influencing sustainable purchase outcomes. VS demonstrate some cynicism for such traditional information sources and supplement these with what they see as unbiased publications. Alternatively they will make the effort to explore the more detailed context of a company's overall ethical activities prior to purchase, indicating the importance of organisations adhering to a holistic and genuine sustainable philosophy. VS also take note of mainstream media sources, especially those which report on negative practices, seeing these as influential on all consumers.

In addition to salespeople, perhaps the other most consistent information source cited by our interviewees was word of mouth, either from friends/relatives for NVS and BVS plus fellow members of environmental networks for VS. For marketers, this is a communications channel which presents the most challenges in terms of strategy, control and evaluation, yet according to our study it is an important part of the decision making process for consumers of sustainable technologies.

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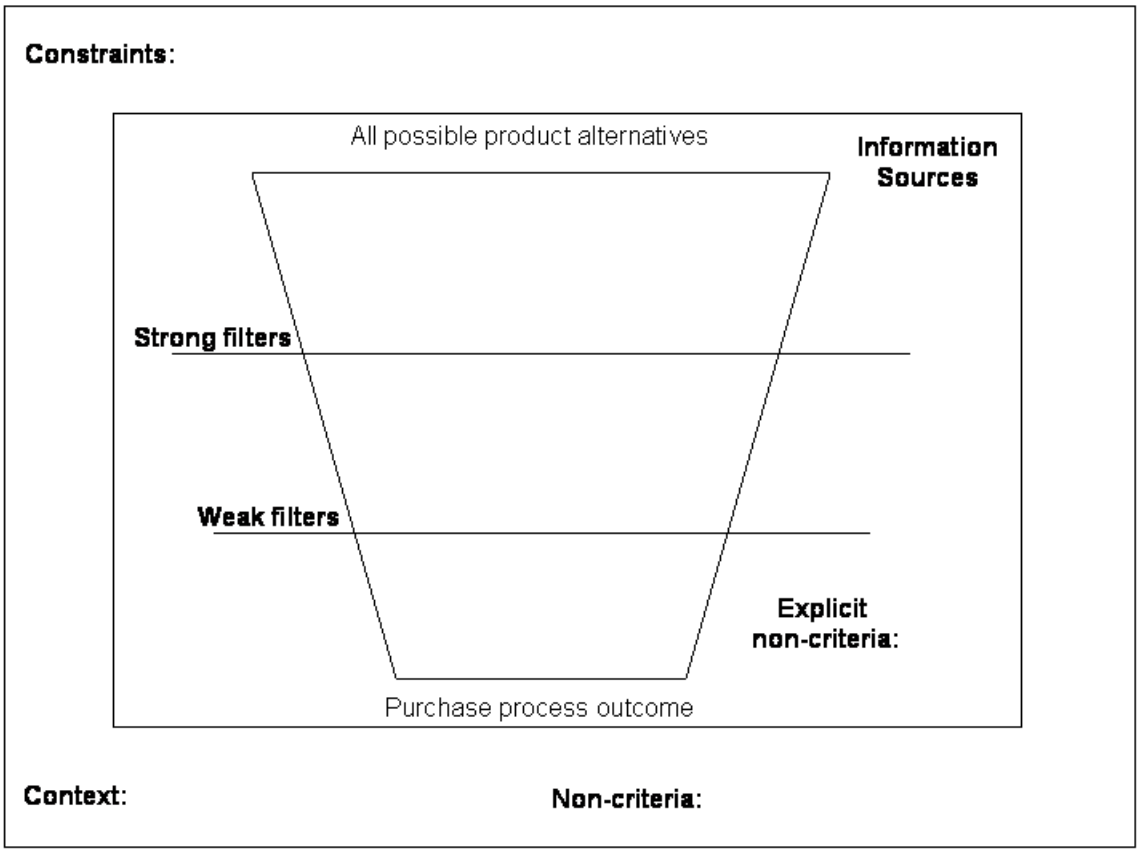

Figure 1. Blank purchase process model

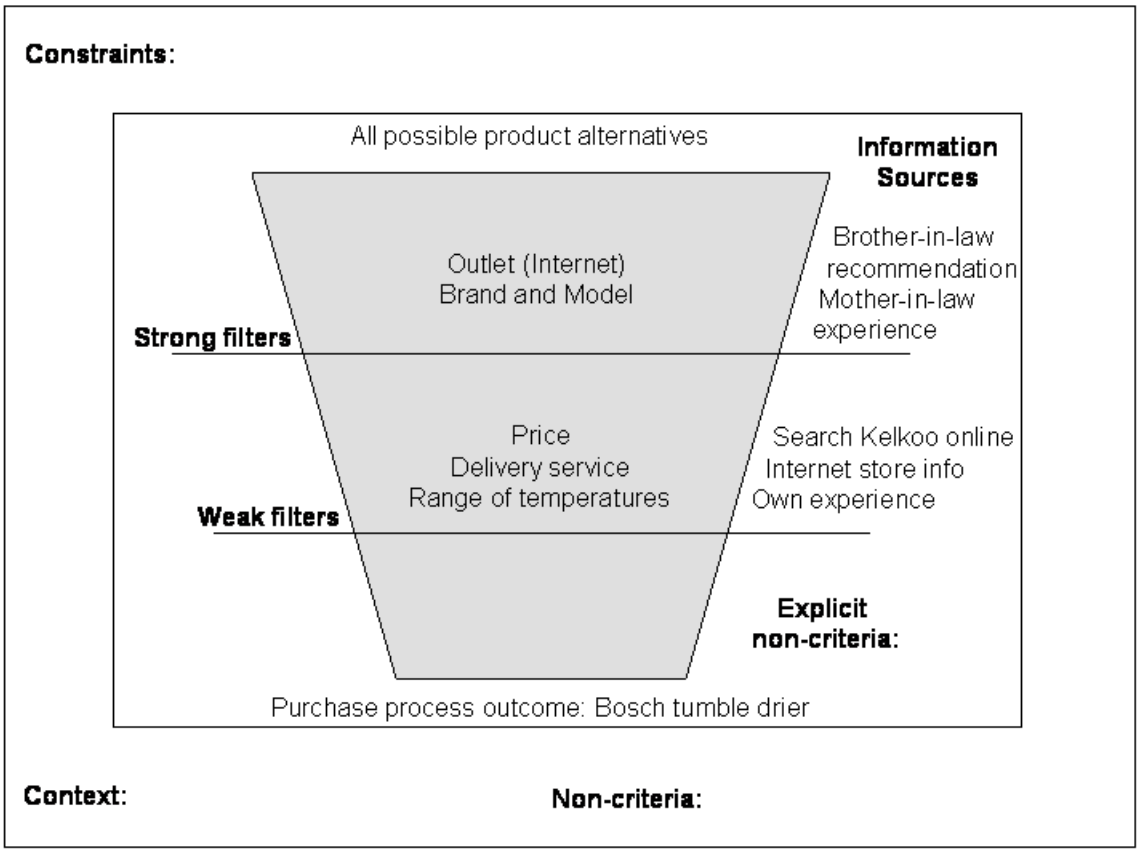

Figure 2. Example of information sources used by NVS

	Strong Influence	Weak Influence	Total
Salesperson/shop	9	2	11
Brand	7	2	9
Personal networks	3	2	5
General media e.g. *Autotrader*	3	0	3

Table 1. Information sources influencing purchase of technology products by NVS (n= 11)

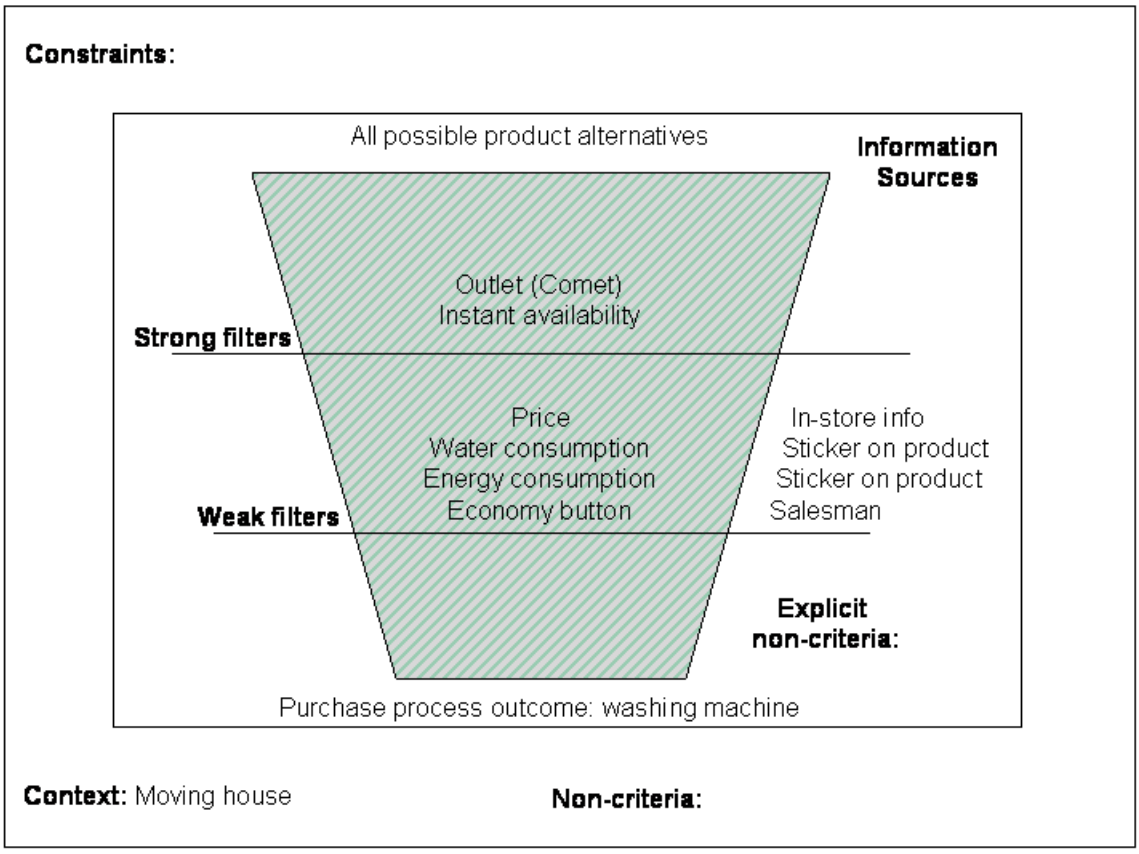

Figure 3. Example of information sources used by BVS

	Strong Influence	Weak Influence	Total
Salesperson/shop	7	5	12
Personal networks	2	5	7
Brand	4	2	6
Energy labels	4	1	5

Table 2. Information sources influencing purchase of technology products by BVS (n=20)

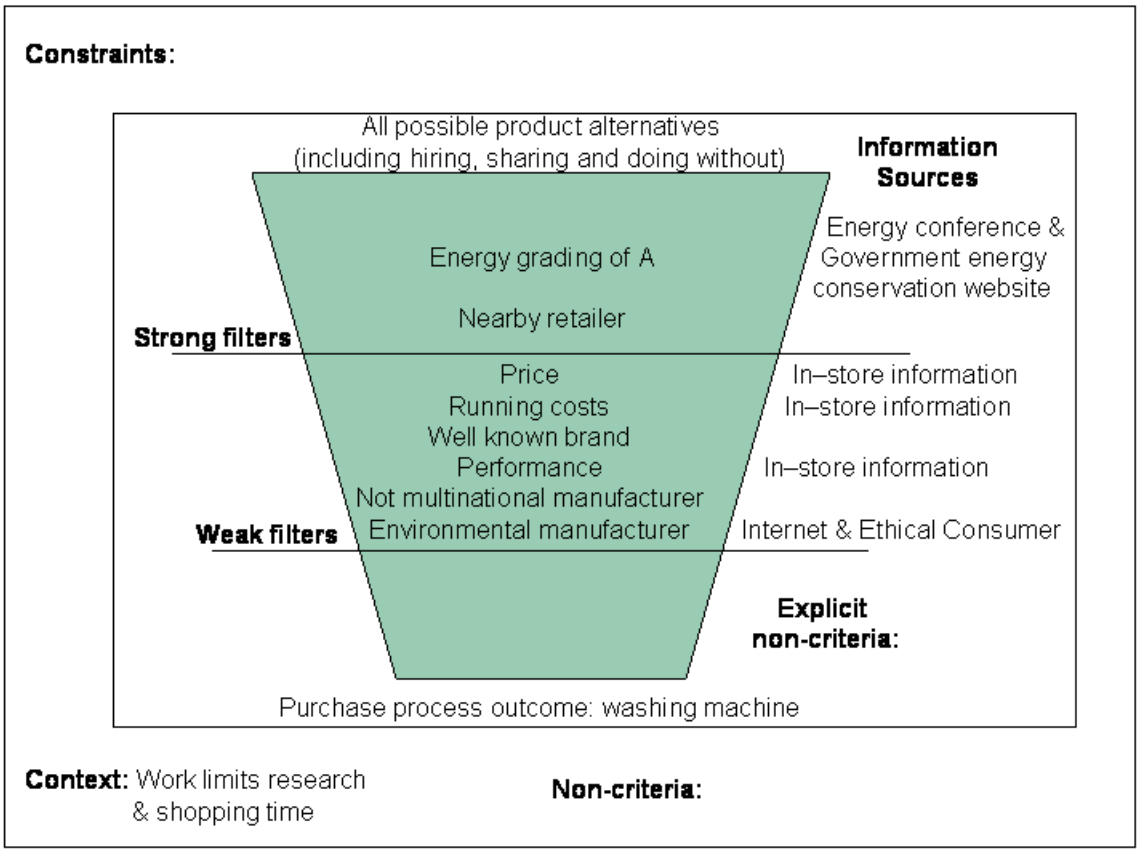

Figure 4. Example of information sources used by VS

	Strong Influence	Weak Influence	Total
Salesperson/shop	9	14	23
Environmental publications e.g. *Ethical Consumer*	12	4	16
Energy labels	10	3	13
Personal networks	7	4	11

Table 3. Information sources influencing purchase of technology products by VS (n=50)