STUDENTS AS RESPONSIBLE CONSUMERS – AGENTS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Prof Narendra Singh
Department of Commerce, Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra, Haryana
Email : profnsingh@gmail.com

Ms Karnika Gupta
Research Fellow (UGC), Department of Commerce Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra, Haryana
Email : karnikagupta7@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The study presents the findings of socially responsible consumption behaviour assessed on a regional sample of one hundred student-respondents; using Socially Responsible Consumption Behaviour (SRCB) Scale; developed from literature, modified to suit Indian conditions. In the article, statistical techniques of Mean-comparison, Regression Analysis and ANOVA are applied to find the determinants of socially responsible consumption behaviour and socially responsible consumers. The study attempts Academic Intelligence and Civic Sense as SRCB determinants; thus fills the knowledge gap in literature as no study in the past has utilized the two as behavioural determinants. The results for Place of Living, Academic Intelligence and Civic Sense are found to be significant.

Keywords : *Socially Responsible Behaviour, Sustainable Development, Globalization, Determinants*

INTRODUCTION

India, presently, the home to largest young population, is passing through a transformation phase of high economic growth. As the country is growing, the income and consumption levels consequently are increasing and straining the natural resources and environment. According to Uzzell and Rathzel (2008), individual behaviour in the form of consumer is considered as one of the main cause of environment degradation. The solution to environmental and social ills is now looked at on modifying consumer purchase behaviour (Wells, 1990). The enlightened consumers have realized that their purchasing behaviour has an impact on many environment problems and they are, therefore, adapting to this new threatening situation by considering environmental issues while shopping and purchasing (Laroche et al., 2001). Promoting sustainable consumption and production are important aspects of sustainable development, which depends on achieving long-term economic growth that is consistent with environmental and social needs (OECD, 2008). Achieving sustainability require stabilizing or reducing environment burden.

As consumer is the center of business activities, his proper understanding will unable businesses to deploy strategies for meeting competition and setting their activities on right track. In the present scenario in India, as the competition is increasing, the prices of consumer goods have either come

down or stayed low; implying a consumption boom which is becoming a key trigger of economic growth (Dubey, 2007). Consequently, consumption patterns of people are changing and many factors determine their changed behaviour. Increasing industrialization has tempted people to work in established industries in large cities and they are moving there from semi urban and rural places. Opportunities and facilities for education are increasing. Above all, the low-income households are transiting to high-income categories. As a result, living standards of people are changing. These changes may be a result of psychology of new generation, which is developing from a new perspective. Indian population is considered to be young when compared with developed world and they will take the leadership position in future. Therefore, the present paper is an attempt to explore social responsibility among students because, as the future conservers and caretakers of the society and environment they need more elaborations on their socially responsible consumption; accordingly future business practices can be positioned by corporations for sustainable development of the community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of research papers and articles provide a detailed insight about the factors that affect consumer responsible behaviour. The researches in this area provide linkages between environment, society and consumer behaviour. The findings about behavioural determinants from literature are presented below:

Schwepker and Cornwell (1991) while examining ecologically concerned consumers and their intentions to purchase ecologically packaged products found that locus of control, attitude toward litter and pollution perceptions – what they called as socio psychological determinants were significant for discriminating between consumers who had low and high purchase intentions concerning these products. According to them, those who were living in large cities were more likely to purchase ecologically packaged products. Their study also remarked that increased awareness about solid waste disposal problem might result in attitude and purchasing behaviour change.

According to Chan (2001) various psychological constructs such as affect, knowledge, verbal commitment, attitudes, and memory had been advocated as important determinants of eco friendly behaviour.

Laroche et al. (2001) investigated the demographic, psychological and behavioural profiles of consumers who were willing to pay more for environment friendly products. They found that this segment of consumers were more likely to be females, married and with atleast one child living at home. Their research found that eco literacy was not a good predictor of consumer's willingness to spend more for green products.

Shanka and Gopalan (2005) in an exploratory study of socially responsible consumer behaviour of higher

education students used mean comparison for different demographic characterstics in which only age and class levels showed statistically significant results.

Dubey (2007) while studying consumer decision making led by environmental information; found that participant's answers to questions relating to environmental surrounding, pollution and health had a tendency to vary according to their gender, age and occupation. He said to be able to make environmentally aware decisions; consumers must have both information and certain practical skills and knowledge.

Singh (2009) empirically investigated the socially responsible behaviour of Indian consumers by equal division of sample among urban and rural population. Urban residents scored high on all demographic categories. Age and Place had been found significant determinants of SRCB.

Savita and Kumar (2010) explored consumer attitude towards environment friendly products. They made comparative analysis of gender and residential status and found that male segment of consumers and urban residents have more favourable attitude than their counterparts.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In marketing literature, it is often to find that demographic characteristics of consumer's are commonly studied feature to guide stakeholders. The present paper, in addition to demography, is an endeavor to explore new dimensions of consumer behaviour relationship with social responsibility. The young consumers are the future of the nation therefore, constitute the study population; the elaboration on them is a unique feature. The study also searches for the link between Academic Intelligence, Civic Sense and SRCB.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

More specifically, the study addresses itself to the following objectives:

1. To explore consumer social responsibility among Indian students.

2. To examine the determinants of their socially responsible behaviour.

3. To analyze the socially responsible consumption behaviour across respondent's demographic profile.

4. To highlight implications and suggestions of the study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is based on primary data, collected through a standardized scale on Socially Responsible Consumption Behaviour (SRCB) developed by Antil and Bennet (1979), Antil (1984). The scale is introduced upon a sample of 100 students of Ambala District with slightly modified questions according to Indian conditions. The sample is representative of the population as the students of different, age, gender, educational and family income levels are

included in it. The responses are coded in software program SPSS (Evaluation version 11.0). Each response in the statement is coded ranging from '1' to '5' from 'never' to 'ever'. Several items are reverse scored to avoid response bias. Consistent results are found with Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.803.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

An insightful effect of demography on student's consumption behaviour is explored. The determinants are found by employing regression analysis. The effect of demography has been analysed using mean comparison between the groups. The results are presented in separate tables for mean values as per each demographic variable. The tables also show the sample division, characterstics and standard deviation. For easy observation and understanding the discussions are presented considering three important aspects, which are related to and leads to each other, these are:

| Description | Theory | Support and Contradiction |

Description – Shows the state of happening at a point of time or during a period of time.

Theory – On the other hand, attempts to develop hypotheses which explain why it happened.

Support and Contradiction – Presents, results of previous researches in the same line; which are in favour or against present findings.

DETERMINANTS OF SRCB

The determinants are implicit from the results of regression analysis, shown below in Table 1.

Table 1   Determinants of SRCB

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	b	S. E.	beta	t	sig.
(Constant)	122.56	16.025		7.65	.000
Gender	1.22	3.19	.035	.38	.703
Place of Living	-7.28	3.62	-.191	-2.01	.047
Educational Qualifications	-.38	3.37	-.013	-.112	.911
Field of Study	-3.55	2.14	-.158	-1.66	.100
Academic Intelligence	-1.17	1.82	-.061	-.65	.520
Family Size	-2.58	3.34	-.072	-.77	.441
Family Income	-1.90	2.36	-.076	-.81	.423
Age	.139	3.90	-.004	.04	.972
Civic Sense	1.62	.27	.534	6.01	.000

Table 2   Association Measures of Determinants

R	R Square	Adjusted R-Square	Std. Error of Estimate	F	Sig.
.57	.33	.26	14.68	4.841	.000

Results of regression analysis (table 1) highlight that civic sense and place of living are the two determinants which have been found statistically significant at 5% probability level. The highest beta (.534) and t (6.01) support the greatest contribution of civic sense as a determinant. The second best determinant of SRCB is place of living as shown by its t (-2.01) and beta (-.19) values. The positive sign of beta depicts direct relationship and negative sign shows inverse relationship between dependent SRCB and independent determinants. The other determinants are found not significant but further explained with regard to their mean values and Anova Exploration. Table 2 depicts that the determinants that are used in regression model have a positive correlation (.57) with SRCB and explain 33% variations in it. The significant F (4.84, .000) value shows the reliability of anticipation power of determinants.

SRCB ACROSS DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Age and SRCB: Inverse relationship has been noticed between age and SRCB. Among two age groups teenagers are found more socially responsible as compared to adults. The reason may be that now, at school level students are provided with the opportunities to read environment as a subject from primary classes. This can increase their understanding of environment better than those who have not received a chance to have environmental knowledge. These results contradict with the results of Shanka and Gopalan (2005); their study suggested the tendency of becoming conscious of societal aspects as age increases but favours them as age differences have been found statistically insignificant. The result is in line with the result of Singh (2009) as there, younger were found more socially responsible.

Table 3   SRCB Score across Age-groups

Age Groups	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
15 - 18	144.10	41	16.38
19 - 24	141.34	59	17.55
Total	142.47	100	17.05

Gender Differences and SRCB: It can be inferred from table 4 that girls are more socially responsible than boys. This may be because of liberal environment for girls as compared to past times. Now, girls also have equal opportunities to grow by higher education and their perceived level of social concern then become higher. This result supports Zelezny et al. (2000); Laroche et al. (2001); Tindall et al. (2003), Hunter et al. (2004); Alibeli and Johnson (2009); Lee (2009) and Singh (2009); all have found women more concerned about environment and society than men.

Table 4   Gender-wise SRCB Scores

Gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Boys	141.08	40	17.59
Girls	143.40	60	16.76
Total	142.47	100	17.05

Place of Residence and SRCB: The inferences suggest that those who belong to small communities or areas understand well their accountability to society than those who reside in urban areas; may be because, our civilized society is engaged in polishing and decorating the cages in which humanities and carefulness will be kept imprisoned. One of the misfortunes with urbanization is that in getting rid of false shame, people have killed off so much of the real shame as well. This result contradicts with the result of Schwepker and Cornwell (1991); they found those who live in larger cities are more concerned about pollution than those in smaller cities but the result favours them as they indicated that city size did not appear to be a significant discriminating variable. The result is also in contradiction with the result of Singh (2009) where urbanization emerged as a significant indicator of social responsibility.

Table 5   Residence-wise comparison of SRCB

Residence	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Rural	146.33	27	12.01
Urban	141.04	73	18.44
Total	142.47	100	17.05

Education and SRCB: Education wise the results are somewhat confusing. There is a slight difference of mean scores among the levels of education and negative relationship has been noticed. The result is reinforced with result of age groups. The inverse relationship is not a result of educational qualifications as a demographic variable but this may be because of fewer opportunities of environmental education and knowledge, which we often fail to realize. The insignificancy of this determinant contradicts Shanka and Gopalan (2005) where class levels emerged as a significant determinant.

Table 6   SRCB and Educational Qualifications

Education	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Up to 10+2	142.90	37	18.09
Graduation	142.25	56	16.54
PG and above	142.00	7	17.99
Total	142.47	100	17.05

Academic Intelligence[1] and SRCB: Academic Intelligence or efficiency in student's academic records is found positively correlated with SRCB. Not only education but student's intelligence can also be a factor affecting SRCB. The results can be studied from the table 7 below which shows how intelligence level affects intellectual level. These mean differences have been found statistically significant as shown by the results of ANOVA which can be studied from table 8. Post hoc multiple comparisons in table 9 emphasize that this significant mean difference is due to reliable differences between poor and excellent records. The difference of two means (20.34) is found significant at 10% level.

Table 7   SRCB and Academic Intelligence

Intelligence	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Poor	128.43	7	19.90
Fair	140.47	38	15.78
Good	144.67	42	17.61
Excellent	148.77	13	13.61
Total	142.47	100	17.05

Table 9   Post Hoc Multiple Comparison of Academic Intelligence

Academic Intelligence (A)	(B)	Mean Difference (A – B)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Poor Records	Fair records	-12.05	6.84	.38	-31.50	7.41
	Good records	-16.24	6.78	.13	-35.55	3.07
	Excellent records	-20.34	7.79	.08	-42.51	1.83
Fair Records	Poor records	12.05	6.84	.38	-7.41	31.50
	Good records	-4.19	3.72	.74	-14.78	6.40
	Excellent records	-8.29	5.34	.50	-23.49	6.90
Good Records	Poor records	16.24	6.79	.13	-3.07	35.55
	Fair records	4.19	3.72	.74	-6.40	14.78
	Excellent records	-4.10	5.28	.89	-19.11	10.91
Excellent Records	Poor records	20.34	7.79	.08	-1.83	42.51
	Fair records	8.29	5.34	.49	-6.90	23.49
	Good records	4.10	5.28	.89	-10.91	19.11

Table 8   ANOVA of Academic Intelligence

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2250.08	3	750.03	2.72	.049
Within Groups	26520.83	96	276.26		
Total	28770.91	99			

Education Wise Comparison of Intelligence: A cross study of Educational Qualifications and Academic Intelligence shows brilliant academic records in all levels of study dominantly affect one's state and sense of social responsibility. The mean scores of SRCB are high for those who have good and excellent records in their education. Thus there is a road, pass through the superior intellect, targeting a great sense of social responsibility. A big problem in our present educational system is that stupids are the cocksure and intelligents are full of doubts. Yet intelligents always try to do what they can, with what they have; doesn't matter where they are.

Table 10.   Education Wise Intelligence Measures

Educational Qualifications	Academic Intelligence	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Up to 12	Poor records	116.67	3	15.95
	Fair records	143.58	21	17.00
	Good records	147.85	13	16.06
	Total	142.89	37	18.09
Graduates	Poor records	137.67	3	23.86
	Fair records	136.65	17	13.65
	Good records	142.19	26	17.99
	Excellent records	153.30	10	10.63
	Total	142.25	56	16.54
Pg & above	Poor records	136.00	1	.
	Good records	152.33	3	23.03
	Excellent records	133.67	3	12.58
	Total	142.00	7	17.99
Total	Poor records	128.43	7	19.90
	Fair records	140.47	38	15.78
	Good records	144.67	42	17.61
	Excellent records	148.77	13	13.61
	Total	142.47	100	17.05

Field of Study and SRCB: By studying table 11 students from science and engineering are found very less socially responsible with a least mean of 137.85. On the other hand students of humanities are found highly socially responsible with highest mean of 145.17. It has rightly been said that Science and Nature cannot move simultaneously; both can be said as antonym of each other, the above result in which students of science stream are less socially responsible than their two counterparts' points out this thing. As it is true "No technical knowledge can outweigh knowledge of humanities, in the gaining of which

philosophy and history walk hand in hand." In the gaining of science which explores frontiers of knowledge perhaps the thing become out of their mind – "The essence of knowledge is, having it to apply it; not having it, to confess your ignorance." The appearance of study stream as insignificant determinant supports Shanka and Gopalan (2005).

Table 11   SRCB according to field of study

Study Field	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Commerce and Management	144.73	48	13.94
Science and Engineering	137.85	34	18.54
Humanities	145.17	18	20.56
Total	142.47	100	17.05

Family Income[2] and SRCB: The division of consumers on the basis of their paying capacity has undergone a tremendous change in the last few years. As analysed by income levels, students from low and middle class have high socially responsible consumption behaviour. The mean score is quite symmetrical but students belong to high earning group is not much concerned with least mean (140.58). The matter of less social responsibility with the rich may be uselessness; most often which results in carelessness. The result is consistent with the results of Alibeli and Johnson (2009); they found middle class has expressed good support for the preservation of environment and the conservation of natural resources. Laroche et al. (2001) is again supported as according to them the persons above average socio economic status (middle class) are socially conscious.

Table 12   SRCB according to Family Income

Family Income	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Low Income	142.78	45	16.90
Middle Income	142.67	43	17.26
High Income	140.58	12	18.20
Total	142.47	100	17.05

Family Size[3] and SRCB: Small families are more socially responsible than medium and large. The reason may be that big families most of the time are concerned only for their family members, they have less time to think and to do for society and social welfare and might be their purchase intentions and decisions are related with money benefits with big purchases, without analyzing the deterious consequences. Human can think for the society only after the family. A big family and then family problems hardly annoy people for rational thinking to do something for others or society beyond conventional.

Table 13   SRCB according to Family Size

Family Size	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Small Families	145.50	8	18.40
Medium sized Families	142.26	77	17.47
Large Families	141.93	15	14.93
Total	142.47	100	17.05

Civic Sense[4] and SRCB: Civic Sense has been categorized into three and the effect of low, medium and high civic sense on SRCB is analysed as shown by the under mentioned tables. It is obvious from table 14 that there is a direct relationship in civic sense and attainment of SRCB. With good civic sense there is increasing returns to society in the form of people high socially responsible behaviour with regard to their consumption. Civic sense and good behaviour improve one's personality and give good impressions to others in the form of socially responsible consumption behaviour. ANOVA exploration of mean differences suggests that the differences are statistically reliable. Scheffe post hoc test compares these differences in a bilateral form and shows that all two mean differences between low – medium, low – high and medium – high are statistically significant which moves the F value towards significative results.

Table 14   Effect of Civic Sense on SRCB

Civic Sense Categories	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
low civic sense	131.83	29	18.21
Medium civic sense	142.28	39	14.99
High civic sense	152.34	32	12.10
Total	142.47	100	17.047

Table 15   ANOVA of Civic Sense on SRCB

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	6405.66	2	3202.828	13.891	.000
Within Groups	22365.25	97	230.570		
Total	28770.91	99			

Table 16   Post Hoc Exploration of ANOVA Results

Categories of Civic Sense (I) Civic Sense	(J) Civic Sense	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std.Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
low civic sense	Medium civic sense	-10.45	3.72	.023	-19.71	-1.198
	High civic sense	-20.52	3.89	.000	-30.19	-10.84
Medium civic sense	low civic sense	10.45	3.72	.023	1.198	19.71
	High civic sense	-10.06	3.62	.024	-19.07	-1.06
High civic sense	low civic sense	20.52	3.89	.000	10.84	30.19
	Medium civic sense	10.06	3.62	.024	1.058	19.07

CONCLUSION

The study confirms that demographic factors influence socially responsible behaviour of students and also concludes that Place of Living and Civic Sense are the two significant determinants of their SRCB. The mean comparison of different categories confers that; teenagers, girls, residents of rural areas, students with excellent academic scores, having humanities and commerce as study background and with high civic sense are responding to be more socially responsible; whereas, those belonging to large size and high income families are less responsible in their consumption behaviour. Among these determinants, mean differences are found statistically reliable for Academic Intelligence and Civic Sense but Educational Qualifications say little about social responsibility.

SUGGESTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

As learners and future caretakers of the society there is a need to develop sense of responsibility among students and to revise the environmental education curricula as per the changing need of the time. The important implication for businesses is to tap the attractive market of young population, middle class and small sized families who are already ready to behave as responsible consumers. Efforts are required to enhance people civic sense, so that consumption behaviour can be made responsible. In this regard, media can play a significant role by providing social advertising and information. Researchers will be benefited by the inclusion and results of Academic Intelligence and Civic Sense as two new behavioural determinants for new researches on demography.

REFERENCES

Alibeli, Madalla A. and Johnson, Chris (2009), "Environmental Concern: A Cross National Analysis", Journal of International and Cross-Cultural Studies, Vol. 3, Issue 1, pp. 1 – 8.

Chan, Ricky Y. K. (2001), "Determinants of Chinese

Consumers' Green Purchase Behavior", Psychology and Marketing, Vol. 18(4), pp. 389 – 413.

Dubey, Parag (2007), "Changes in Consumer Decision Making process Led by Environmental Information", International Marketing Conference on Marketing and Society 2007, IIMK, pp. 665 – 671.

Hunter, Lori M., Hatch, Alison and Johnson, Aaron (2004), "Cross-National Gender Variation in Environmental Behaviours", Vol. 85, No. 3, pp. 677 – 694.

Laroche, Michel; Bergeron, Jasmin and Barbaro, Forleo Guido (2001), "Targetting Consumers Who are Willing to Pay More for Environmentally Friendly Products", Journal of Consumer Marketing, Vol. 18, No. 6, pp. 503 – 520.

Lee, Kaman (2009), "Gender Differences in Hong Kong adolescent consumers' green purchasing behaviour", Journal of Consumer Marketing, 26/2, pp. 87 – 96.

OECD Publications (2008), 'Promoting Sustainable Consumption: Good Practices in OECD Countries", OECD Publication, Paris, Vol. 2, p.7.

Savita, Ubba and Kumar, Naresh (2010), "Consumer Attitude Towards Environment-Friendly Products: A Comparative Analysis", The IUP Journal of Marketing Management, Vol. IX, Nos. 1 & 2, pp. 88 – 96.

Schwepker, Charles H. and Cornwell, Bettina T. (1991), "An Examination of Ecologically Concerned Consumers and Their Intention to Purchase Ecologically Packaged Products", Journal of Public Policy and Marketing, Vol. 10(20), pp. 71 – 101.

Shanka, Tekle and Gopalan, Gabriel (2005), "Socially Responsible Consumer Behavior – Higher Education Students' Perceptions", Working Paper, ANZMAC 2005 Conference: Corporate Responsibility, pp. 102 – 107.

Shrum, L.J., McCarthy, John A. and Lowrey, Tina M. (1995), "Buyer Characterstics of the green consumer and their implications for advertising strategy", Journal of advertising, Vol. XXIV, pp. 71 – 82.

Singh, Narendra (2009), "Exploring Socially Responsible Behaviour of Indian Consumers – An Empirical Investigation", Social Responsibility Journal, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 200 – 211.

Tindall, D. B., Davis, Scott and Mauboules, Celine (2003), "Activism and conservation Behaviour in an Environmental Movement: The Contradictory Effects of Gender", Society and Natural Resources, 16, pp. 909 – 932.

Uzzell, David and Rathzel, Nora (2008), "Changing Relations in Global Environmental Change", Berlin conference on the Human Dimensions of Global Environmental change, pp. 1 – 18.

Wells, Richard P. (1990), "Environmental Performance will count on the 1990s", Marketing News, Vol.19, March, p.22.

Zelezny, Lynnette C., Chua, Poh-Pheng and Aldrich, Christina (2000), "Elaborating on Gender Differences in Environmentalism", Journal of Social Issues, Vol. 56, No. 3, pp. 443 – 457.

(Footnotes)

[1] Academic intelligence is assessed with the student first division (above 60%) in the levels of his/her education. First division in one level as fair records, in two levels good records and three or more levels is termed as excellent academic records. Student's non response of first division in any of their educational level is termed as poor academic records.

[2] As students belong to non earning group, about family income is asked upon. Low income category includes students with monthly family income below 10,000. Middle class is taken asking income between 10000 to 30000 and students having monthly family income above 30000 are considered from high income class.

[3] Number of persons in the household makes up the family size. The distribution is taken up by taking

up to 3 persons – small families;

4 to 6 – medium sized families

and above 6 – large families.

[4] Civic Sense is nothing but social ethics which are the investigation into the basic concepts and fundamental principles of human conduct. People consideration for the unspoken norms of the society makes their civic sense. In order to study civic sense, some statements on social ethics are added in the questionnaire; responses are captured in a factor named civic sense. Taking a hypothesis in mind that good civic sense should work for sensible consumption behaviour, it is used as predictor of SRCB and categorized to apprehend the effect of student's civic sense on their sense of social responsibility.