



Original Article

Green Rewards as a Mechanism for Promoting Green Purchase Behaviour: A Conceptual Perspective on Sustainable Consumption

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Abstract:

The growing emphasis on sustainable consumption has increased consumer awareness of environmental issues; however, favourable green purchase intentions do not consistently translate into actual green purchase behaviour. This persistent intention-behaviour gap remains a significant challenge for sustainable marketing and highlights the need to identify mechanisms that can encourage consumers to act upon their environmental intentions. Against this background, this conceptual study examines the role of green rewards in promoting green purchase behaviour. Drawing on Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the Behavioural Activation System (BAS) perspective, the study provides a theoretical discussion of how rewards may influence consumers' evaluation and motivation in the context of environmentally responsible consumption. From a social exchange perspective, green rewards can enhance the perceived benefits associated with green purchasing and influence consumers' evaluation of the exchange. The BAS perspective further suggests that reward-related cues can stimulate approach-oriented motivation towards desired outcomes. By bringing these perspectives together, the study argues that green rewards can complement consumers' existing environmental motivations and potentially facilitate the translation of green purchase intentions into actual behaviour. The study contributes to the sustainable marketing literature by extending the discussion beyond the formation of green purchase intentions and focusing on the behavioural enactment of those intentions. It also highlights the potential of reward-based marketing interventions to enhance the value associated with environmentally responsible consumption. The study concludes by identifying implications for sustainable marketing practice and directions for future empirical research on green rewards and green purchase behaviour.

Keywords: *Green Rewards, Green Products, Green Purchase Intention, Green Purchase Behaviour, Sustainable Consumption.*

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Introduction:

Growing environmental degradation associated with unsustainable consumption and production has intensified concerns about the long-term sustainability of natural resources and ecosystems. Rapid population growth, economic development, industrialisation and increasing consumption have accelerated the exploitation of natural resources and contributed to environmental problems, including the depletion of fossil fuels, minerals and forests, water, air and land pollution, ecological degradation and associated health risks. These challenges have increasingly drawn public and scholarly attention to environmental conservation and sustainable consumption. In response, consumers are increasingly exposed to information concerning environmental problems and are becoming more aware of the environmental consequences of their consumption choices. However, increased environmental awareness does not necessarily translate into corresponding changes in purchasing behaviour. Dhir et al. (2021) observed that consumers' growing knowledge and awareness of environmental issues have not led to a widespread increase in green purchasing, highlighting the ongoing discrepancy between consumers' environmental attitudes and their actual behaviour. This phenomenon is widely recognised as the green attitude-behaviour or intention-behaviour gap phenomenon (Wijekoon & Sabri, 2021).

This gap remains an important challenge for both researchers and practitioners. Consumers may express favourable attitudes towards green products and report strong intentions to purchase them, while their actions remain inconsistent with these intentions. In their review, Sharma et al. (2022) reported that

most studies found a low-to-moderate relationship between green purchase intention and behaviour. Thus, the central challenge for green marketing is not merely to develop environmental awareness or favourable attitudes, but to understand the mechanisms through which consumers' environmental intentions can be translated into actual purchasing decisions.

There is a latent demand for green products which consumers are not acting on, i.e., the 'say-do' gap. This presents a huge market opportunity and a consumer trend that is value accretive, not just good for the planet or good for investors but good for the consumer and business" Bain & Company. Green products are clearly the platform with the biggest opportunity, where the need already exists. Brands that successfully close the say-do gap by educating consumers, ensuring sustainable alternative options and availability, driving clear communication, and improving information sources will be able to leverage the mounting opportunity to use sustainable products as a new source of growth. From this perspective, closing the say-do gap is relevant not only to environmental conservation but also to firms seeking to develop sustainable sources of consumer value and competitive advantage.

Several factors can prevent consumers from translating green intentions into actual behaviour. Among these, the high cost associated with green products is particularly important. Wiederhold and Martinez (2018) identified product price as a barrier that impedes sustainable consumption. Consumers may recognise the environmental advantages of a product and intend to purchase it, yet select a conventional alternative when faced with a higher price. Similarly, as reported in the



Business World (2022), most consumers face several barriers, including higher prices. This leads many consumers to drop out despite strong intent to shop sustainably. Consequently, this puts the entire green purchase market at risk (Ha, 2022).

This suggests that overcoming the cost barrier is necessary for turning green attitudes and intentions into green behaviour. Hence, the study seeks to identify incentives or rewards as a driver that can influence consumers' decision-making towards green products and facilitate green purchase behaviour. Within this emerging discussion, green rewards represent a potentially important but comparatively underdeveloped concept in green marketing research. A green reward is a tangible or intangible benefit provided to consumers in response to an environmentally responsible consumption-related action, such as purchasing a green product, selecting a sustainable service, recycling, returning used products, or participating in an environmental programme. Unlike conventional promotional incentives, green rewards can explicitly connect an immediate consumer benefit with an environmentally desirable action. For example, consumers may receive cashback, discounts, loyalty points, vouchers, recognition or other benefits for choosing environmentally preferable products or engaging in sustainable consumption practices. In this way, green rewards may alter the immediate value proposition surrounding a green choice and potentially facilitate the translation of environmental intentions into actual behaviour.

The importance of this mechanism is supported by emerging research on reward-based interventions. Yang and Thøgersen (2022), for example, examined monetary

rewards that could be redeemed specifically for environmentally friendly products and demonstrated that the motivational consequences of such incentives cannot be understood solely in terms of their economic value. Their findings indicate that the environmental orientation of the reward and consumers' motivational characteristics are relevant to understanding responses to reward-based interventions. It also requires strategic interventions by governments, businesses, and green marketers to address the cost-based obstacles. Nevertheless, the existing literature remains fragmented. However, comparatively limited conceptual attention has been devoted to understanding green incentives as a distinct mechanism for bridging the gap between green purchase intention and actual green purchase behaviour.

Building on previous research that explored consumers' preferences for green products and addressed the discrepancy between consumers' professed sustainability preferences and their actual behaviour in the marketplace (Kilian & Mann, 2021; Krampe et al., 2025), this study explains the role of green rewards in facilitating green purchase behaviour and in addressing the attitude and action gap. Specifically, it seeks to integrate insights from established behavioural and motivational perspectives to explain how environmental motivation can be converted into marketplace action through reward-based mechanisms.

Theoretical Foundation of Green Rewards:

Understanding why consumers respond to green rewards requires a theoretical perspective that can explain both the exchange relationship created by a reward and the behavioural response elicited by an anticipated



positive outcome. Accordingly, this paper draws on two complementary theoretical perspectives: Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the Behavioural Activation System (BAS) derived from Gray's Reinforcement Sensitivity Theory (RST). While SET explains green rewards from an exchange and reciprocity perspective, BAS provides a behavioural-motivational explanation of how anticipated rewards can stimulate approach-oriented behaviour. Together, these perspectives provide a theoretically grounded basis for conceptualising green rewards as a mechanism through which consumers may be encouraged to translate environmental intentions into actual green purchase behaviour.

Social Exchange Theory:

Social Exchange Theory, originally developed by Homans (1958) and later extended by Blau (1964), proposes that social behaviour can be understood as an exchange process in which individuals evaluate the benefits and costs of their interactions. Individuals are more likely to participate in an exchange when the perceived benefits outweigh the associated costs. Although originally developed to explain interpersonal and social relationships, SET has subsequently been applied to various consumer–organisation relationships, including loyalty programmes, relationship marketing and consumer participation.

Social exchange logic is particularly relevant to green rewards because sustainable consumption often involves a perceived sacrifice. Consumers may have to pay a higher price, invest additional effort, search for information or accept reduced convenience when choosing environmentally preferable products. At the same time, the environmental

benefits of such choices may be collective, delayed, or difficult for individual consumers to observe. Consequently, a consumer may recognise the environmental value of a green product while perceiving an imbalance between the immediate personal cost and the broader environmental benefit.

Green rewards can potentially alter this perceived exchange relationship by introducing an immediate benefit for an environmentally responsible action. When consumers purchase a green product and receive a discount, cashback, loyalty points, environmental contribution, recognition or another benefit, the exchange becomes more salient. This perspective is particularly relevant to the green intention-behaviour gap. A consumer may already possess a favourable attitude towards green products and intend to purchase them, but the perceived sacrifice associated with the purchase can prevent behavioural enactment. By providing an additional benefit, green rewards may improve the perceived balance between the costs and benefits of the green choice. Thus, green rewards can potentially create a more favourable exchange relationship in which consumers perceive that their sustainable behaviour is recognised and reciprocated.

Proposition 1: The green rewards positively influence consumers' evaluation of the exchange involved in green product purchasing.

Behavioural Activation System and Reinforcement Sensitivity Theory:

The Behavioural Activation System provides a complementary explanation for consumers' responses to rewards. Gray's Reinforcement Sensitivity Theory proposes that individual behaviour is influenced by



neuropsychological systems that respond to rewarding and punishing stimuli. In its original formulation, the Behavioural Activation System (BAS) reflects sensitivity to reward and is therefore linked to approach-oriented behaviour.

Carver and White (1994) operationalised individual differences in behavioural activation and inhibition through their widely used BIS/BAS scales, distinguishing behavioural activation responses associated with reward responsiveness. Subsequent developments of RST have further refined understanding of how sensitivity to reward and punishment influences approach and avoidance behaviour.

Within the context of green consumption, the BAS perspective helps explain why an anticipated reward may increase the likelihood that a consumer will approach a particular behavioural option. When consumers recognise that a green purchase will produce an additional positive outcome, the reward may increase the motivational attractiveness of that behaviour.

Proposition 2: The green reward increases consumers' motivation to purchase green products, thereby increasing the likelihood of green purchase behaviour.

Discussion:

Many prior studies have examined the psychological mechanisms that underlie environmentally significant decisions and behaviours. In this context, socio-demographic (e.g., education) and psychographic information (e.g., values) have also been thoroughly examined. Research indicates that psychographic information is more significant in explaining environmentally significant decisions and behaviours, despite the extensive

study of socio-demographic variables (Mahmoodi et al., 2021).

In addition to psychological approaches to the study of environmentally significant decisions and behaviours, behavioural economics has garnered increasing attention in environmental policy. This is due to the fact that it provides an alternative framework for the study of environmental decision-making and alternative tools that are often easy to implement at a large scale and at a low cost. Behavioural economics contributes to the advancement of classical economic theories and models of decision-making by offering more realistic psychological underpinnings for human decisions and behaviours. Specifically, the influence of reward on environmental behaviours and decisions has been examined.

Environmental influences such as values, awareness, and concern may generate favourable evaluations of green consumption and contribute to green purchase intentions. However, intention may not translate into action when consumers face higher prices, inconvenience, limited availability, or uncertainty about the benefits of green products. From the SET perspective, the reward can reduce the perceived imbalance between the sacrifice associated with green consumption and the benefits received by the consumer. From the BAS perspective, the anticipated reward can increase the motivational salience of the green choice and encourage approach behaviour.

Consequently, we conceptualise green rewards as a behavioural bridge rather than simply another antecedent of green purchase intention. Green rewards strengthen the translation of green purchase intention into actual green purchase behaviour by increasing perceived reciprocal value and activating



approach-oriented motivation towards the green choice. According to Mahmoodi et al. (2021), incentives are a common tool that is receiving increasing attention in the field of environmental policy. He also stated that incentive-based electricity tariffs appear to be of interest to both environmentally concerned consumers and those with little or no environmental concern.

Conclusion:

The rewards may have more complex consequences than simply increasing a product's economic attractiveness. Past research has demonstrated that incentives are effective in encouraging environmentally conscious decisions and behaviours, including recycling materials, acquiring energy-efficient appliances, and reducing domestic energy consumption. One promising approach to encourage sustainable consumption is to integrate incentives into environmentally friendly products. Rewards can complement consumers' environmental motivation by making sustainable choices easier and more valuable (Prasanna et al., 2018). Conversely, if rewards are perceived as controlling or purely transactional, they may shift the perceived reason for engaging in sustainable behaviour from environmental responsibility towards personal financial gain. Furthermore, the efficacy of incentives to encourage environmentally conscious decisions and behaviours is contingent upon a variety of variables, including the implementation of the incentives and the intended audience (Mahmoodi et al., 2021). Individual differences should be taken into account, as various incentives are attractive to different consumers. Therefore, the effectiveness of green rewards

may depend not only on the magnitude of the reward but also on its environmental relevance, perceived value, credibility, timing and congruence with consumers' environmental values. Understanding these mechanisms is particularly important for developing theoretically informed green marketing interventions.

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