

Consumers' green commitment: indication of a postmodern lifestyle?

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Abstract

Green consumer behaviour is one of the key focuses of contemporary research on the sociology of consumption. The constant presence of environmental issues related to consumption and the changes consumer society has faced during the 20th century are presumed to reflect on present consumer behaviour. The focus of this paper is twofold: first, the postmodern elements of consumer society will be discussed; second, the study analyses to what extent these elements of postmodernism fit with the phenomenon of contemporary green consumerism. The empirical part utilizes Finnish consumer behaviour-related data from 2003, which were analysed by applying various statistical methods. In this part, the study reports of the connection between lifestyle and green commitment. Lifestyle is measured by consumption styles and green commitment by certain environment-related consumption choices. The results suggest that different lifestyles explain green commitment better than traditional socio-economic background variables. The effect of postmodernism on green consumer behaviour is, thus, discussed.

Introduction

Different explanations have been offered to illustrate the contemporary consumer society. One of the most important features concerns the shift from individual, 'microcosmic' actors towards a 'macroscopic' perspective that takes social and other contexts of consumption into account (McCracken, 1988). One of these contextual factors is the environment. In fact, public concern about environmental problems has developed rapidly since the 1960s (Dunlap and Catton, 1994). Gradually, nature has been conceptualized as something more than just an oil well or a coal mine and 'concern for the environment has become almost a cultural constant or norm in western society. Environment attitudes are now socially acceptable and desirable, but may not have much intrinsic meaning' (Derksen and Gartrell, 1993, p. 434). While the negative effects of consumption on the environment have been widely admitted (e.g. Worldwatch Institute, 2006), green consumption choices have become commonplace (Autio and Wilska, 2003, 2005).

The determinants of environmentally responsible or green behaviour vary according to the scope of research. Types of green behaviour include a wide variety of ways to act in an environmentally responsible manner. Working in environmental organizations, taking part in environmental movements or demonstrations, buying eco-labelled products, or recycling, are examples of the different types of behaviour that take environmental issues into account (Grankvist and Biel, 2001). An examination of these different approaches to the broad issue of green behaviours reveals that

environmentally responsible consumption and consumer behaviour form just one level within the field of study.

Contemporary understandings of what constitute environmentally responsible consumption or consumerism spring from different starting points. One of the main theoretical divisions is made between representations or constructions of green consumers and applied, empirical green consumer behaviour research (Heiskanen, 2005). Whatever the approach to the issues is, green consumer behaviour generally originates at least from matters of world view or values, norms, beliefs and ideologies (for a more profound review, see Stern, 2000 and McCarty and Shrum, 2001). Green consumerism determined this way includes definitions ranging from ethical orientation to political struggle (Moisander and Pesonen, 2002; Klintman, 2006). Another research stream to promote understanding of green consumer behaviour has focused on the relationship between socio-demographic factors and environmental attitudes and behaviours. Several studies have investigated the relationship between socio-demographic variables and environmental attitudes, showing mixed results with respect to the impact of these variables on environmental behaviours (e.g. Straughan and Roberts, 1999; Zelezny *et al.*, 2000; Autio and Wilska, 2003; Diamantopoulos *et al.*, 2003).

The absence of a confirmed structure of background variables in profiling green consumers is due to several reasons. According to Berger (1997), the role of structural factors such as income and education may be a complex one, and other factors, such as institutional structures, may mediate the relationship between these variables and behaviour. Environmentally responsible post-

consumption behaviour, typically recycling or sorting waste, is affected not solely by the social background variables but also by broader institutional and economical factors: more affluent living areas may have better access to recycling facilities than indigent residential areas, and a household's recycling may therefore be conditioned as much by the economic factors of the community as by that household's own income level (McCarty and Shrum, 2001; OECD, 2002). Instead of a unitary, undifferentiated class, green behaviour should be described in terms of several distinct behavioural types that are determined by different combinations of causal factors (Stern, 2000).

Another possible mediating reason is the changing consumer society. Contemporary society is characterized by rapid social, cultural and economic changes that are reflected in consumer behaviour. The changes that occurred during the last century encompass a cultural shift in social theory, leading to the use of the term 'postmodernism' (Firat *et al.*, 1994; Lyon, 1999; Miles *et al.*, 2002). In postmodern society, consumption structures are claimed to be more complicated than in modern society. Postmodern consumer society is driven by diversity and freedom of choice, emphasizing difference, which in turn leads towards fragmented and diverse forms of social identity and lifestyles (Featherstone, 1991; Miles *et al.*, 2002).

In sociology, consumption has at least two aspects: identity formation and group communication between members (Murphy, 2001; Burgess, 2003). According to the sociological literature on postmodernity, consumption and the creation of different lifestyles are the means by which personal identity and self are constructed (e.g. McCracken, 1988; Lyon, 1999; Miles, 2000; Miles *et al.*, 2002; Wilska, 2002). Postmodern conditions of consumption are created when structural elements do not provide adequate explanations for contemporary consumerism (Sanne, 2002; Räsänen, 2003). Changing lifestyles have been seen as one of the key driving forces, which have supported more individualized buying styles (Lyon, 1999; OECD, 2002). Green consumerism is an area where one could expect that identity plays an important role. Green attitudes and consumption styles can be regarded as a lifestyle-based expression of an individual consumer's concern about the state of the environment, and therefore, different lifestyle-based elements are expected to affect consumers' green attitudes and consumer behaviour.

As we are primarily interested in understanding the nature of contemporary consumer culture and its effects on green consumer commitment, one reasonable way to approach this is to examine general consumption styles, whose effect might explain, to a certain degree, green consumer behaviour. This study argues that by scrutinizing the lifestyle-related factors of consumption, a new explanation for green consumer behaviour can be proposed. The purpose of this paper is to investigate, both theoretically and empirically, the notions of postmodernism in consumer studies and its applicability to the green consumption context. The effects of both consumption styles and background variables are examined utilizing empirical data on Finnish consumer behaviour from 2003.

Postmodern, lifestyle and green consumption

In a sociological context, the concept of postmodern has been brought up in various connections to characterize contemporary

society. This is done to such an extent that criticism of its ubiquity has arisen (Beck, 1990; Firat *et al.*, 1994; Räsänen, 2003). However, it is still a valid concept, which carries much content. In a number of writings (Featherstone, 1991; Firat *et al.*, 1994; Miles *et al.*, 2002; Ritzer and Goodman, 2002), postmodernity is analysed in comparison with the modern era. During modernity, the changes that have taken place in institutions' structures (production, reproduction, consumption, infrastructure, etc.) and in the field of the economy, social life and behavioural patterns, have created the foundations of postmodernity. It has been argued that consumption is replacing production as the fundamental process in the economy and society (Bouchet, 1994; Dholakia and Firat, 1998).

Postmodernism as a sociological notion has many dimensions and meanings, and therefore the definitions given to it vary a great deal. Giving it an agreed, exhaustive meaning is thus impossible. One feature common to all the definitions is that postmodernity 'directs our attention to changes taking place in contemporary culture' (Featherstone, 1991). The postmodern era is seen in the literature as a time of individualism and changing values, manifested in freedom of choice, changes of lifestyles (consumption and leisure time) or new social movements, such as environmentally conscious consumer groups (Bauman, 1996). The claim that consumption has been fragmented emphasizes difference, and consumers deliberately seek for material goods as status symbols of their lifestyles.

Sociological definitions given to lifestyles vary a great deal from a Weberian manifestation of class membership to recognizability (Veal, 2000). According to Miles (2000), lifestyle is a material expression of identity and Veal defines it as 'the pattern of individual and social behaviour characteristic of an individual or a group', emphasizing the approach that lifestyle is primarily a matter of activities or behaviour affected by values and attitudes. Lifestyle has also become a synonym for the concept of behaviour patterns (Spaargaren and van Vliet, 2000) and refers to the degree of coherence, which can be found in an individual's behaviour (Spaargaren and van Vliet, 2000). In green consumerism research, the concept of lifestyle is connected to the process of consuming, individual choice and decision-making (see, e.g. Sanne, 2002; Southerton *et al.*, 2004), but also to the social or symbolic dimensions of consumption (Spaargaren and van Vliet, 2000).

In postmodern theories, consumption becomes a main factor behind lifestyles and culture (Miles *et al.*, 2002), and different dimensions of consumption cause consumers to cluster into new tribes (Maffesoli, 1996). For example, environmentally conscious consumers do not form a solid, homogeneous consumer segment but act in many different ways. Different new consumption activities and lifestyles arising from social ideologies represent typical postmodern structures (Bouchet, 1994). For instance, green consumption is said to express the consumer's new values – concerns for matters both environmental and related to well-being (Inglehart, 1997; Stern, 2000; Wilska, 2002). Although most green consumer behaviour connects to mainstream consumption, manifested, for example, in recycling and sorting waste, or buying environmentally friendly products (e.g. Autio and Wilska, 2005), it is worth taking into account that green consumer behaviour differs from general consumer behaviour in the level of commitment, which is an expression of taking an ideological standpoint

on consumption (Stern, 2000; for a more profound analysis of deep green consumerism, see Moisander and Pesonen, 2002). Partaking of general consumer behaviour encompasses an assessment of likely benefits and costs relevant solely to the individual consumer demonstrating the behaviour. Also, the benefits or costs of certain kinds of behaviour are most probably realized immediately or in the near future, while green consumer behaviour is unlikely to deliver instant personal benefits or pleasure, but rather a future-orientated outcome (e.g. a cleaner environment) that often benefits society as a whole (McCarty and Shrum, 2001). For example, people with low environmental concern tend to prefer free-market solutions rather than government policy, and shift the responsibility for solving environmental problems on others (Poortinga *et al.*, 2004). Moreover, green consumers are more likely to control their consumption in comparison to more traditional consumers and therefore, the environmental impact of green behaviours is direct. For example, the decision on whether or not to purchase a car tends to have much greater environmental impact than changes in the use of the same vehicle (Stern, 2000). This aspect involves the consumer's responsibility to control her/his consumption choices.

Despite the difficulty of giving a precise definition of a postmodern consumer, many elements can be found from it that aptly describe green consumerism. Social, cultural and economic factors of society are assumed to set the framework for green consumerism. Figure 1 shows values that typically dominate in societies where the level of affluence is high, and where individuals are no longer struggling with basic material needs, such as nutrition and basic security. The information given in this diagram is by no means exhaustive, but captures some main elements that are applicable to the purposes of this study.

The theory of postmaterialist values (e.g. Inglehart, 1997) is based on the assumption that cultural and economic factors affect individual values. Within this theory, environmentalism has been explained as being an expression of values such as quality of life, self-expression and freedom. 'Postmodernization is a shift in survival strategies. It moves from maximizing economic growth to maximizing survival and well-being through lifestyle changes' (Inglehart, 1997). Bauman argues with his notion of *ethic paradox* that, while in postmodernity strong individualization leads to freedom of choice, it also transfers the responsibility of choices to individuals. Simultaneously, when there seem to be no limits to choices, the consequences of the same choices are put on the shoulders of individuals. The ethic paradox in postmodernity is that it restores the opportunity to make moral choices and the full responsibility, but does not provide any support at the level of society (Bauman, 1996).

For instance, if we think about green consumption and purchase situations, individuals are put in trade-off situations where they

Lifestyle, identity, ideology, choice Moral, ethics, responsibility Quality of life, health issues
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Figure 1 Postmodern elements of green consumerism.

have to make choices between the environment and their own needs, wants and desires. The battle between individual needs and the environment easily leads, however, to a moral and puritanical standpoint that consumption 'is a bad thing we should do without' (Slater, 2001). In environmental debate, such standpoints come up in the context of modern consumer culture, which, on one hand, deregulates desire and, on the other hand, operates as an engine for generating an endless amount of new desires. (Slater, 2001; Autio, 2005).

The literature concerning postmodern consumption refers to possessive individualization encouraged by conspicuous consumption, which offers opportunities for the pursuit of distinction (Warde, 2002). Strong individualization, in turn, has a negative echo in environment debate, because it leads to increased consumption and acquisition of ever more goods. The puritanical position, that is, condemnation of consumption as such, may be theoretically untenable, because it requires that consumers need constantly to prioritize what is important to them in their everyday lives. However, there is evidence that green consumer behaviour is influenced by altruistic norms and motives (Stern, 2000; Grankvist and Biel, 2001). Theories of altruistic behaviour suggest that personal moral norms make people responsible for their decisions. Such behaviour involves replacing normally routine decisions with actions guided by responsible choices, evaluated by moral rather than economic standards (Heberlein, 1972; Stern, 2000). For example, awareness of the consequences that consumption has on the environment inspires altruistic behaviour and environmentally sound consumption decisions.

Green consumerism as a moral and postmodern phenomenon seeks to critically evaluate consumer identity. Research shows that the individual and his/her own identity guide behaviour at a general level (Burke and Reitzes, 1981). When it comes to green identity, Stets and Biga (2003) have revealed that environment identity combined with identity theory accounts significantly for environmentally responsible behaviour and also for environment attitudes. The authors have conceptualized environment identity as a person's identity, including self-meanings and attributes that are important to a person, and represent the things he/she values. Identity is conceptualized in terms of three elements: prominence, salience and commitment. Prominence reflects how a person ideally sees him/herself and what is important to the individual while the salience of an identity focuses on a likely behaviour. The degree of commitment to an identity influences salience (Stets and Biga, 2003).

By incorporating into the analysis the environment identity, we can examine more closely the effect of lifestyles. We are not, however, interested in the identity process itself, but we bring to the analysis one component of identity, the environmental commitment. We understand here that personal identities, including environment identity, are defined in terms of personal attitudes, morality and values related to consumption, and the more one is committed to environmental issues, the more positive are the attitudes towards green consumer behaviour. Moreover, as we assume that postmodern elements characterize contemporary green consumption to a certain extent, we expect that lifestyle elements have a stronger impact than socio-economic structures on green consumer behaviour. In the next section these effects are explored empirically.

Description of the data and results of the study

In this section, the theoretical discussion of the elements of post-modern consumption in green consumerism is tested in the light of statistical data. The data for the present investigation were obtained from a Finnish data set (Myllyproject, 2003) collected by a postal survey in 2003. This survey was carried out by utilizing the random sample method among all households in Turku region (Southwest Finland comprising 11 municipalities). The total number of respondents included in the study was 1370. Because the sample of the data was not representative of the whole Finnish population (Statistics Finland, 2006), women being strongly over-represented (87%), a weighting variable was applied. The weighted percentage for women was 77% ($n = 1185$) and for men, 23% ($n = 358$).

First, a descriptive analysis of consumers' green attitudes is provided. We analyse four attitudinal items in order to form an index of consumers' environmental commitment. In the next stage, multifactor analysis is conducted using the principal component method. Last, the impacts of both lifestyle-related and socio-economic factors on green consumption decisions are evaluated by conducting an analysis of variance (ANOVA). ANOVA is a statistical method that explains the variance of selected background variables (Toivonen, 1999). This analysis method was used to assess the comparative significance of background variables. The concept of lifestyle is operationalized in this study using consumption styles, which are measured by consumption attitudes. The aim is to elucidate whether consumption attitudes (lifestyles) are connected to green consumption. Although consumption is just one expression of lifestyle, it should, according to postmodern theories, be the most dominant one (Miles, 1998) and, accordingly, green patterns of behaviour can be determined in terms of lifestyle.

The content of the survey was designed to canvas consumers' attitudes, choices and behaviour related to choice of shopping mall and purchases. Due to the focus of the present paper, only one area of the questionnaire was chosen. This section measured arguments related to consumption and shopping. Twenty-four items were included in the final analysis. The response categories were in a 5-point Likert-type format, anchored by 'totally disagree' (=1) and 'totally agree' (=5).

First, the correlations between four environment-related arguments were tested in order to make sure that interaction existed between the variables (Table 1). These arguments were 'The environmental friendliness (EF) of the product is an important choice criterion to me', 'It is all the same to me in which country the

product has been manufactured', 'I usually choose the organic food alternative even if it was more expensive than the conventional one', and 'Nowadays far too many unnecessary goods are bought'. As can be seen, statistically significant correlations – some even quite strong – do exist between all the variables except between the first and the second item. The country of origin and EF of the product did not correlate with each other. It seems that consumers do not perceive country of manufacture as an environment-related argument, while, on the other hand, there is a clear correlation with the arguments related to organic food and country of manufacture. Based on the results of the correlation analysis, the four items were accepted as relevant factors measuring consumers' commitment to environmental consumption decisions.

Figure 2 illustrates an index of the summated variables. The index was formed by calculating positive (response alternatives 4 and 5) accounts of each of the four statements presented above. The new scale measures environmental commitment, as it describes the division of respondents' attitudes towards green consumption choices. The scale indicating the level of commitment is created according to the original scale with slight changes. That is to say, the scale has been recoded so that scale item 1 indicating zero commitment to greenness (1 = totally disagree) has been incorporated into alternative 2 (disagree), and these accounts stand in the column '*low committed*'. Respectively, scale item 5 (totally agree) has been incorporated into alternative 4 (agree) and labelled as '*highly committed*' while the column '*partly committed*' shows the percentual share of those between the two counterpoints.

The highest proportion of the respondents (63%) can be defined as partly committed on green issues when making purchase decisions. Twenty-five per cent of consumers represent a clearly more environmentally committed group of consumers, and this column includes the highest committed group (1%). With these data, the share of low-committed consumers turns out to be quite minor, only 12%, including the non-committed consumer group (1%).

We have hitherto depicted a picture of the level of green commitment. As the scope of the study is to find out the effect of both postmodern lifestyles and traditional socio-economic factors on green consumer behaviour, the analysis was broadened. In the coming section, different consumption styles were first created by conducting a multivariate analysis of different consumption-related attitudes. Twenty-four scale items were analysed with principal component analysis (PCA) to identify the underlying dimensions of shopping motives (Table 2). PCA – like factor analysis – is a multivariate statistical technique that is concerned with the identification of structure within a set of observed variables. The analysis involves the study of interrelationships among

Table 1 Correlations between four green-related consumer attitudes

		The EF of the product	Country of manufacture	I usually choose organic food	Unnecessary goods are bought
The EF of the product	Pearson	1	-0.012	0.471***	0.405***
Country of manufacture	Pearson		1	-0.083**	0.153***
I usually choose organic food	Pearson			1	0.237***
Unnecessary goods are bought	Pearson				1

** $P < 0.01$; *** $P < 0.001$.

Cronbach's alpha 0.5.

EF, environmental friendliness.

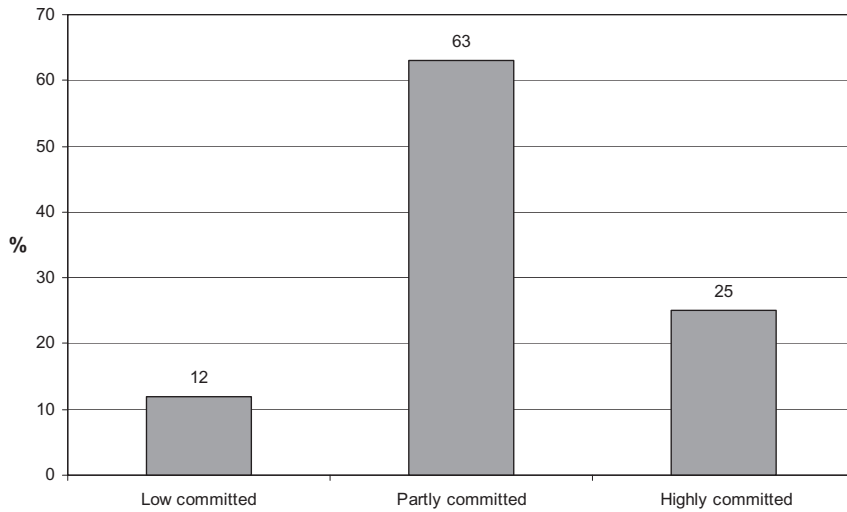


Figure 2 Level of commitment measured by green consumption attitudes (%).

Table 2 Consumer styles by principal component analysis

Variables	Standardized factor loadings						H ²
	Reluctant	Trendy	Quality	Price	Convenience	Conscious green	
Shopping is a waste of time	0.74						0.580
I avoid crowded places	0.54						0.303
I often do impulse shopping	-0.52						0.349
I am willing to make my home comfortable		0.68					0.500
I constantly look for new ideas and experiences		0.67					0.572
I am mostly a routine shopper		-0.56					0.552
I am a DIY-person		0.48					0.419
I follow time and trends		0.43					0.472
Product quality is more important than price			0.69				0.556
I appreciate personal service			0.66				0.559
Buying brands means buying quality			0.56				0.439
I regularly follow stores' advertisements				0.69			0.506
I compare prices carefully before I buy anything				0.56			0.505
Price level is more important than the service				0.52			0.524
New shopping malls are more attractive than city centres				0.52			0.416
Product demonstrations are interesting				0.51			0.428
Net store (www) is to be reckoned as an alternative to traditional shops					0.68		0.488
If I could get the goods in an alternative way I would not go shopping at all	0.576				0.59		
If the special boutiques were always open on Sundays I wouldn't shop so often in the stores					0.58		0.374
I prefer to pay for my purchases by bank/credit card	0.304				0.47		
Long distance does not matter if the store is good					0.29		0.301
I usually choose the organic food alternative even if it is more expensive than the conventional one						0.79	0.654
The EF of the product is an important choice criterion for me						0.66	0.594
It is all the same to me in which country the product has been manufactured						-0.65	0.480
Eigenvalue	2.09	1.99	1.93	1.89	1.81	1.74	
Variance explained (%)	8.7	8.3	8.1	7.9	7.5	7.3	47.7

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = 0.717; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity = 4529.155; d.f. = 276; sig. = 0.000. EF, environmental friendliness.

Table 3 Green commitment explained by parameter estimates (β) of variance model

	<i>n</i>	Main effects of the unadjusted parameters (β)	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age class					
18–24	39	–0.24	–0.26		–0.25
25–34	199	–0.18	–0.21		–0.22
35–44	248	–0.22	–0.23		–0.04
45–54	356	–0.14	–0.13		–0.08
55–64	323	–0.05	–0.10		0.13
65+	316	0 (a)	0 (a)		0 (a)
F		5.23***	3.76**		2.76*
Education					
Primary	427	–0.04	–0.14		–0.12
Secondary	424	–0.12	–0.15		–0.17
Semi-higher	343	–0.14	–0.14		–0.12
University	287	0 (a)	0 (a)		0 (a)
F		3.69*	3.75*		4.07**
Household type					
Single households	473	0.09			
Couples without children	556	0.12			
Single-parent family	85	–0.01			
Couples with children	293	0 (a)			
F		3.08*	ns		ns
Consumer style: reluctant	F	93.58***		97.78***	73.43***
Consumer style: trendy		30.65***		33.55***	35.76***
Consumer style: quality		ns		ni	ni
Consumer style: price		6.76**		7.54**	4.04*
Consumer style: convenience		18.04***		19.94***	23.75***
<i>R</i> ²			2.7	11.0	13.9

* $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$; *** $P < 0.001$.

0 (a) = redundant.

ni, not included; ns, not significant.

variables and the purpose is to find new variables fewer in number than the original variables. PCA is a data reduction technique and it aims at establishing dimensions that the original variables illustrate as hidden (Stewart, 1981).

A few items were excluded from the analysis because their communalities were under 30. Using the PCA method, six quite distinct factor dimensions were produced. These were labelled as 'Reluctant' (factor 1), 'Trendy' (factor 2), 'Quality' (factor 3), 'Price' (factor 4), 'Convenience' (factor 5) and 'Conscious green' (factor 6). The factors together explained 47.7% of the variance. The first factor, *reluctant*, refers to unwillingness to shop and consume since shopping is seen as a waste of time. The questions concerning trends, fashion and interior decoration were loaded into the second factor, *trendy*, and the third factor, *quality*, was composed around questions related to product quality and personal service. The fourth factor, *price*, was formed of five items representing consumers for whom buying cheap products and saving money is essential. This factor also contained arguments concerning shopping as an attractive activity. The factor, *convenience*, covered items such as shopping on the Internet and the preference of paying by credit card. These and the other three questions referred mostly to the ease and convenience of shopping. The sixth factor labelled as *conscious green* represents consumption guided by environmental and ethical aspects. All the variables of this factor clearly emphasized this dimension of consumption.

In the last phase, the study explored the dependencies that explain green commitment. This was done through the ANOVA.¹ Table 3 presents the results of ANOVA. In addition to the socio-economic variables, five consumption style-related explanatory items – factors 1–5 from the PCA analysis – were tested. The last factor, *conscious green*, was excluded from the model because it partly contained the same items as the dependent variable, level of commitment. The factor loadings were saved as factor scores and the explanation power of these dimensions was tested on the variance of the level of green commitment formed and described above in Fig. 2 and Table 2. The differences in effects between subjects were measured by a comparison of parameter estimates (β). At the bottom of the table, the shares of the total variances (100R²) are presented. Type of household and age were transformed into categorical variables in order to provide more information about the influence of each level.

Only three socio-economic variables turned out to be statistically significant in the final model: age, education and type of household, although the effect of other available variables, gender, monthly income and marital status was also tested. In the first column, the main effects of unadjusted parameter estimates are

¹ANOVA was conducted using the univariate technique of General Linear Model as an analysis method.

shown. Each item was tested separately. Then the model was built so that first, in model 1, the effect of socio-economic background variables was tested, next, in model 2, the effect of consumer styles was examined, and last, in model 3, all the independent variables were analysed together.

The most important observation that emerges from the ANOVA is that consumption/lifestyle variables explain very well green consumer commitment while socio-economic factors do not. In the first model, both age and education explained the level of greenness quite well, while type of household had no effect. Commitment to greenness decreases within younger age groups. Consumers less than 45 years of age are clearly less committed than the middle-aged, and, according to the analysis, it is the elderly consumers who appreciate greenness the most. According to Roberts (1996), elderly consumers were more committed to green issues and, in mid-life, the personal and social responsibilities peak. Middle-aged people are also more willing to give donations to charities, as their sense of commitment and responsibility increases. The level of education effects green attitudes in a similar manner to that reported in previous studies and a positive relationship exists between higher education and environmental concern.

Compared with models 2 and 3, the social background variables only moderately explained the variance of the first model, with just a 2.7% share. This is considerably less than the explanatory share of the second model where the effect of factors indicating consumer lifestyles is tested. These factors explained 11% of the variance; however, the third factor, *quality*, did not have any effect on the green involvement in the first main effect analysis, and therefore it was not included in model 2. On the other hand, the other factors had a statistically high significance level. When all the explanants are placed in the same model, the explained variance increases to 13.9%. The effect of education strengthens while age has only a minor effect. This can be interpreted as education having a stronger effect on green concern than age. In the case of consumer styles, reluctant, trendy and convenience styles were all statistically very significant explanants. The effect of factor four, *price*, had reduced slightly.

An important finding of this analysis is that consumption styles strongly affect the level of green commitment, although socio-economic background also had some effect on it. As a result, we can conclude that consumer styles in general seem to correspond with green consumer attitudes.

Discussion and conclusions

In this study, theories of postmodern consumer culture and green consumer behaviour have been discussed, and the effect of both socio-economic and different consumption styles have been analysed in the light of statistical data.

In the first part of the paper, we have pondered the question of what actually constitutes a green lifestyle, and how it should be brought into theoretical and empirical analysis. The attention of the theoretical discussion was focused on the applicability of postmodern consumption theories in a green consumption context. The aim was to discuss the environment–consumption relationship in the postmodern consumption sphere, and to investigate the role of lifestyles in the explanation of green behaviour.

Much of the sociological literature concerning consumer culture refers to the features of postmodernity, which emphasizes the expression of individuality via consumption. This is reflected, on the one hand, in the concept of choice and individual identity construction, and, on the other hand, in the concept of lifestyle. In Western societies and for Western consumers, the possibility of making choices is self-evident. However, it is worth keeping in mind that not all consumers have equal levels of consumption, nor do they have uniform capabilities and possibilities to make choices (Wilska, 2002; Mustonen and Honkanen, 2005). Lifestyle is thus not only influenced by choice but also connected to socio-economic factors, such as economic resources (Wilska, 2002). It can also be asked how 'free' the choices actually are, because social setting sets the framework for every choice.

On the basis of this research, it seems, however, that consumption styles representing lifestyle have a notable effect on green commitment, which was measured in this study by certain consumption-related attitudes. According to the empirical analysis, greenness is characterized by postmodern lifestyle features, because those elements had more influence on green commitment than socio-economic variables. Adapting Maffesoli's thoughts on new consumer tribes, it could be suggested that green consumer behaviour can be explained in a uniform set of consumption patterns (Maffesoli, 1996). In other words, green consumption decisions can be understood as striving for a green lifestyle, which is stable only in terms of a set of consumption styles. We cannot, however, ignore that consumption is a combination of different lifestyles, and other issues, such as demographic and social structures and material conditions, play an important role in determining it. The influence of both traditional background variables and lifestyle elements were thus examined using data that allowed the analysis of both factors.

It appeared that lifestyle-based factors were best able to explain the variance in green commitment measures of environmental behaviour. As expected, consumption styles had a major effect on green behaviour, while traditional measures of respondents' backgrounds did not clarify so well green purchase choices or consumption. This means that when it comes to green issues, individual consumption choices are influenced not only by socio-economic factors, but also by many other forces striving to affect consumers. Nonetheless, it is important to note that social background factors could explain a significant, if minor, amount of green commitment. It is worth keeping in mind also, that lifestyles and identity formation are not only a matter of choice or identity construction. For example, Wilska (2002) in her study has suggested that consumers do not always consciously create their identity via consumption, but factors other than consumption-based ones may lie in the background. Such factors are typically socio-economic and demographic variables. She also found evidence of the strong effect of socio-economic and demographic background variables on lifestyles.

One must also bear in mind that consumption choices are 'buried in the social goings-on of everyday life' (Lutzhiser, 2002). Although many of the consumers of Western societies are aware of environmental problems and the impact that their own behaviour has on the environment, favouring green products at an attitudinal level is often an expression of going along with social norms, which govern the appropriate and expected ways in which things ought to be done in a culture.

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