

The Green Price Paradox: How Price Sensitivity Moderates the Relationship Between Environmental Concern and Green Purchase Behaviour Among Zimbabwe Consumers

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Abstract - The growing need of sustainable consumption has strengthened scholar interest in understanding why consumers who express concern about environmental degradation do not always translate such concern into environmentally responsible purchasing behaviour. This study digs deep into the green-price paradox by examining whether price sensitivity moderates the relationship between environmental concern and green purchase behaviour among Zimbabwean consumers. Basing on the Value-Belief-Norm framework and supported by insights from the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the study proposes that environmental concern positively influences green purchase behaviour, while price sensitivity weakens this relationship. The study tries to fill to an important contextual and theoretical gap. Existing research has extensively examined environmental awareness, attitudes, social influence, perceived benefits and purchase intention, including recent research conducted in Zimbabwe, but considerably less attention has been given to the economic conditions under which environmental concern is converted into actual green purchasing behaviour. Recent Zimbabwean evidence has demonstrated positive relationships between environmental attitudes and sustainable practices, while other Zimbabwean research has focused on antecedents of green purchase intention for environmentally friendly household appliances. International evidence has also demonstrated that price sensitivity can alter the relationship between environmental consciousness and green purchasing. However, the moderating mechanism has not been sufficiently examined in the Zimbabwean consumer context. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design is proposed, targeting adult consumers in Zimbabwe. Data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, reliability and validity tests, correlation analysis and hierarchical regression/moderation analysis. The proposed study contributes to green marketing literature by positioning price sensitivity as a boundary condition rather than merely another predictor of green purchasing. The findings are expected to provide implications for Zimbabwean marketers, retailers and policymakers seeking to increase adoption of environmentally sustainable products in a price-sensitive emerging-market environment.

Keywords: environmental concern; green purchase behaviour; price sensitivity; green marketing; sustainable consumption; Zimbabwe; attitude-behaviour gap; emerging markets

INTRODUCTION

Environmental sustainability has increasingly become a significant consideration in consumer research and marketing. Most consumers are now becoming educated about climate change, depletion of resources, waste generation and environmental degradation which then creates greater demand for products and consumption practices that reduces environmental harm. However green marketing has shifted from being a niche marketing practice to an increasingly important component of consumer research and corporate strategy. However there are some contradictions consumers may express concern about environmental problems but still continue to purchase the latter products because the environmental friendly options are deemed to be more expensive , less convenient or less accessible. This then reflects the wider attitude behaviour gap in sustainable consumption. Environmental concern may be necessary for green purchasing but may not be sufficient to overcome economic constraints.

Stern's environmentally significant behaviour framework is significantly relevant because it recognizes the behaviour is shaped by multiple individual and contextual factors rather than environmental concern alone. Similarly the theory of planned behaviour argues that behaviour outcomes are shaped by attitudes , subjective norms and perceived behavioral control, while recognizing that actual behaviour may be constrained by conditions surrounding the decision. (Science Direct).The gap between what consumers say they care about and what they actually buy has become one of the most stubborn puzzles in green marketing research. Recent work continues to expose this tension. Rusyani, Lavuri and Gunardi (2021), writing in *Sustainability*, found that environmental concern does nudge consumers toward green products yet the same study underscores how hard it is to turn that concern into consistent market behaviour. The concern-to-cashier journey remains fragile. Sharma, Aswal and Paul's (2023) systematic review, published in *Business Strategy and the Environment*, drives the point home: after reviewing the breadth of the literature, they conclude that green purchase research is still fragmented across competing theories, disparate determinants and uneven geographical coverage. In other words, we know pieces of the puzzle, but the full picture remains elusive.This

fragmentation becomes especially consequential in emerging markets such as Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is not merely a "developing-country case study"; it is a distinctive setting where environmental ambition sits cheek-by-jowl with acute economic pressure. At the policy level, the country has made serious commitments, a 40% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, anchored in its updated Nationally Determined Contribution, alongside sustainable resource-management priorities that span forestry, energy and agriculture (Sithole, 2023). Yet at the household level, these national green ambitions crash into a harsher reality: limited disposable income, volatile prices and the daily arithmetic of making ends meet. Environmental preferences and financial survival are not just competing priorities; they are often locked in direct conflict. Empirical evidence is beginning to recognise Zimbabwe as a fertile, if challenging, context for green consumer research. Masengu, Chawuruka and Muchenje (2025) examined environmental attitudes, social influence and sustainable practices among Zimbabwean consumers, and their findings confirm that environmental attitudes do matter, they shape brand adoption, loyalty and advocacy. Similarly, Maziriri, Nyagadza, Chuchu and Mazuruse (2024) studied environmentally friendly household appliances among consumers in Harare, and reported that green product awareness, social influence, perceived benefits and attitudes toward green appliances all positively influenced green purchase intention. These studies are valuable, but they leave a critical question hanging: *Does environmental concern translate into green purchasing equally among consumers with different levels of price sensitivity?* This question cuts deeper than it first appears. Price is not simply another variable in the regression. It may function as a gatekeeper, a boundary condition that determines whether environmental concern is potent enough to overcome the perceived financial sacrifice attached to green products. Recent international evidence supports this interpretation. Van Hoang and Le Thanh Tung (2024) examined environmental consciousness and green purchase behaviour through the value-attitude-behaviour framework, and explicitly modeled price consciousness as a moderator; their results show that price consciousness enhances the relationship between attitude and green purchase behaviour, suggesting that price sensitivity is not merely a barrier but a lens through which environmental attitudes are filtered. Earlier research by Erdil (2018) also investigated price sensitivity as a moderator of the relationships between environmental concern, environmental attitude and green purchase intention among Generation Y consumers, finding that the interaction of environmental concern and price sensitivity significantly dampened green purchase intention. The present study therefore advances the literature in two ways. First, it transfers this theoretical question into the Zimbabwean context, where the affordability and sustainability trade-off is especially acute. Second, it shifts the focus from green purchase *intention* to green purchase *behaviour*, closing the gap between what consumers say they will do and what they actually do at the point of sale. The central proposition is straightforward but consequential: environmentally concerned consumers are more likely to engage in green purchasing, yet the strength of this relationship depends on their sensitivity to price. Where price sensitivity is low, environmental concern flows relatively freely into behaviour. Where price sensitivity is high, the same concern may be neutralized by the perceived cost of acting on it. This phenomenon — the conditional conversion of green concern into green consumption, gated by price — is termed the **green-price paradox**.

THE CONTEXTUAL GAP

While green consumerism has been studied extensively across Asia, Europe, and North America, Zimbabwe remains largely off the map. A handful of local studies have begun to sketch the landscape documenting environmental attitudes, the pull of social influence, and growing awareness of sustainable products but the picture is still fragmentary. Recent work has started to explore how Zimbabwean consumers think and feel about environmental issues, yet one crucial piece keeps slipping through the cracks: price. We know that cost matters to consumers everywhere, but we do not yet understand how price sensitivity shapes the green choices of Zimbabwean buyers specifically. That blind spot is what this study steps into.

THE THEORETICAL GAP

Most green marketing research has treated price sensitivity as just another box on the checklist of what drives purchases an independent force pushing consumers toward or away from a product. This study takes a different view. Rather than asking whether price sensitivity *causes* green purchasing on its own, it asks a subtler question: does price sensitivity change the *strength* of the link between environmental concern and actual buying behavior? In other words, when consumers care deeply about the planet, does that care translate into action regardless of price, or does a sharp eye for cost quietly weaken that connection? Reframing price sensitivity as a moderator rather than a direct predictor shifts the conversation from a simple "what matters?" model to a more nuanced "when does it matter, and for whom?" a move that better captures the reality of consumer decision-making.

3.3 The Behavioral Gap

Much of the existing literature stops at intention. Researchers ask consumers whether they *plan* to buy green, then treat those intentions as proxies for reality. But anyone who has stood in a grocery aisle knows the gap between intention and action can be wide. A shopper may arrive committed to sustainable choices, yet walk out with a conventional product because the eco-friendly option cost thirty percent more. By focusing on self-reported past behavior rather than future intention, this study closes that gap. It offers a sturdier test of the green-price paradox: the tension between wanting to do right by the environment and needing to do right by one's budget.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study seeks to:

1. Examine the relationship between environmental concern and green purchase behaviour among Zimbabwean consumers.
2. Determine the relationship between price sensitivity and green purchase behaviour.
3. Examine whether price sensitivity moderates the relationship between environmental concern and green purchase behaviour.
4. Determine whether the environmental concern–green purchase behaviour relationship differs across levels of price sensitivity.
5. Provide recommendations for marketers and policymakers seeking to increase green consumption in Zimbabwe.

Research Questions

RQ1

What is the relationship between environmental concern and green purchase behaviour among Zimbabwean consumers?

RQ2

What is the relationship between price sensitivity and green purchase behaviour among Zimbabwean consumers?

RQ3

Does price sensitivity moderate the relationship between environmental concern and green purchase behaviour?

RQ4

How does the relationship between environmental concern and green purchase behaviour differ between consumers with low and high levels of price sensitivity?

Theoretical foundation

Value-belief-norm perspective

The base theoretical foundation of the research study is Stern's framework of environmentally significant behaviour and the associated perspective. It explains the significant behaviour through the exchange of values, environmental beliefs, personal norms and the contextual influences. Stern's work specifically recognizes the importance of studying the relationship between environmental concern and environmentally significant behaviour rather than just assuming that concern automatically produces action. Green purchasing behaviour represents the behavioral expression of the concern through the purchasing pattern. However, the framework can also provide a useful basis for contextual restraints. Issues of price sensitivity can represent an underlying economic condition which then affects even the environmentally motivated consumers which then makes them act upon their environmental concerns.

Hypothesis development

Environmental concern and green purchasing behavior

Consumers that are more environmentally concerned are more likely to make purchasing decisions that accommodate their need to be environmentally conscious. There are some researches that show that environmental concern can be relevant to green product purchase behaviour, while the Zimbabwe research also demonstrates to an extent the importance of environmental attitude in sustainable consumer behaviour therefore the hypothesis: environmental concern has a significant positive relationship with green purchase behavior among Zimbabwe consumers.

Price sensitivity and green purchase behavior

Price sensitivity can be the extent to which the consumer can react to the changes or even the differences in the prices. Green products usually carry an economic sacrifice when the prices now exceed the conventional alternatives. This then makes a price sensitive consumer to first look at the price during their purchasing decisions. Some researchers now then identified price sensitivity as a crucial variable in green purchasing including research explicitly examining the moderating role which therefore brings the hypothesis: price sensitivity has a significant negative relationship with green purchasing behavior among Zimbabwean consumers.

METHODOLOGY

Research philosophy

It will adopt a positivist research philosophy because it aims to test theoretically derived relationships between measurable constructs.

Research approach

A deductive approach will be used. The theoretically derived propositions and hypothesis will be tested using the quantitative data

collected from Zimbabwe consumers.

Research design

A cross sectional quantitative survey design will be used. This design is appropriate as it seeks to examine the relationship between environmental concern price sensitivity and green purchasing power.

Proposed analysis

The analysis will begin with descriptive statistics to summarize the characteristics of the respondents and the main study variables. Reliability and validity checks will then be conducted for the measurement scales, followed by correlation analysis. Hierarchical regression will be used to test the main effects and the interaction between environmental concern and price sensitivity. If the interaction is statistically significant, the relationship will be examined at different levels of price sensitivity to make the moderation easier to interpret.

Expected contribution

This study is expected to contribute to the green marketing literature in 3 ways. Firstly it adds with the evidence from Zimbabwe , a context that remains less touched in green consumer research, then it treats price sensitivity as a possible boundary condition rather than another independent predictor. Then lastly it focuses on green purchase behaviour, which then helps to address between what consumers say they value to what they actually consume. The practical contribution is equally as important. If price sensitivity is found to weaken the concern-behaviour relationship, marketers may need to think beyond environmental messaging and address affordability, perceived value and product accessibility. If the moderation is weak or operates differently from the proposed direction, that result would also be useful because it would show that price sensitivity does not necessarily prevent environmentally concerned consumers from acting on their preferences. Either outcome would provide a more realistic basis for green marketing decisions in Zimbabwe.

Scope and Limitations

- The study focuses on adult consumers in Zimbabwe and therefore may not represent consumers in other countries.
- A cross-sectional survey will limit the ability to draw causal conclusions.
- Self-reported purchasing behaviour may differ from objectively observed purchasing behaviour.
- If convenience sampling is used, the findings may not be fully generalisable to the wider Zimbabwean population.
- The study examines price sensitivity as the focal moderator and does not attempt to model every possible economic, social or psychological influence on green purchasing.

CONCLUSION

The main focus of this study is straightforward: caring about the environment and being able to act upon that concern are not the same things. For somebody facing tight financial choices, the price of a green product maybe of importance as the environmental benefits. Zimbabwe offers a crucial setting in which to examine this tension because sustainable consumption takes place alongside substantial economic pressures. Therefore the study proposes to test whether price sensitivity changes the relationship between environmental concern and green purchase behaviour. The existing evidence suggests that the relationship is plausible but not predetermined. Other studies report a weakening effect , while others find that the price conscientiousness can strengthen particular attitude behaviour relationships. Testing the interaction directly in Zimbabwe can therefore make a useful contribution to both theory and practice.

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