

Environmental Buyer Behaviour Theory And It's Transferability To Mexico

*Teoría ambiental de la conducta del comprador y
su transferabilidad a México*

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RESUMEN

Se muestra que algunos aspectos de una teoría y modelo ambiental de la conducta del comprador investigada en Australia son transferibles a los consumidores mexicanos. Aparte de las percepciones, se necesita incluir otros factores en cualquier determinación de la conducta ambiental del comprador. Los consumidores mexicanos exageran la preocupación ambiental en relación a su consideración previa a la compra. Varios tipos de riesgo afectan la conducta del consumidor, siendo el riesgo físico el más importante y los efectos ambientales adversos en otros países los menos importantes. La familia y los niños afectan las decisiones de consumo, y los consumidores mexicanos están dispuestos a pagar más por productos ambientales seguros.

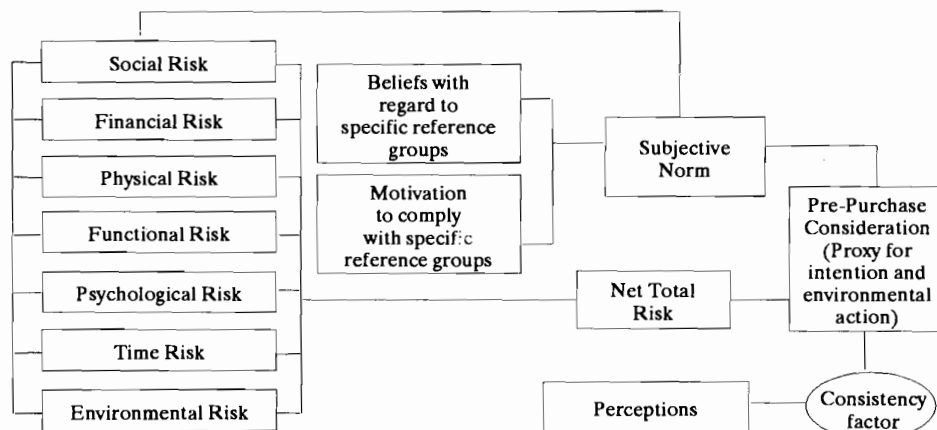
Abstract

Aspects of an environmental buyer behaviour theory and model that was investigated in Australia are shown to be transferable to Mexican consumers. Other factors, apart from perceptions, need to be included in any determination of environmental buyer behaviour. Mexican consumers overstate environmental concern in relation to their pre-purchase consideration. Various types of risk affects consumer's behaviour, with physical risk being the most important and adverse environmental effects on other countries being the least important. Family and children affect consumption decisions, Mexican consumers are willing to pay more for environmentally safe products.

Mexico has suffered serious environmental deterioration and since the early eighties the Mexican government has been committed to improving environmental quality. The topic of ecology occupied center stage in the negotiation process with regard to the North American free trade agreement between Canada, the United States and Mexico. Mexico refuses entry to investments or manufacturing processes rejected by the United States and Canada as environmentally harmful and accepts only productive activities that maintain the environment and the quality of air and water. However, it has been stated that, with regard to its inhabitants and companies being ecologically competitive, "Mexico still has a lot of catching up to do." (Toledano, 1992). The urgency of its environmental problems and the North American Free Trade Agreement have led to the passage of key statutes. The country operates under a general ecology law passed in 1988, which covers all types of pollution as well as protection and preservation of its natural resources. Companies operating in Mexico have illustrated that they are environmentally concerned, for example, Volkswagen, Mexico has been working on producing motor vehicles that are ecologically friendly and are extending the life of vehicles. Because of these developments, environmental marketing in Mexico should constitute an interesting research area. The present authors were however, unable to find anything in the literature that details environmental marketing in Mexico.

The purpose of the present paper is to expand on knowledge regarding the perceptions of Mexican consumers with regard to environmental marketing and to attempt to ascertain whether certain aspects of an environmental buyer behaviour theory first tested in Australia, apply in Mexico.

In 1991 a theory of environmental buyer behaviour was posited by Australian researchers (Suchard, H.T. and Polonsky, M., 1991). This theory is illustrated below:



The diagram illustrates that perceptions of environmental consciousness, risk and the subjective norm all have an effect on the buyers behaviour. The subjective norm will also play some part in shaping perceptions of social risk. It was suggested that, only if consumers are consistent with regard to their environmental consciousness and their environmental actions could either of these be used as a sole proxy to predict the other. If consumers are consistent to a certain extent, then the level of consistency can be determined in terms of a consistency factor. This factor is derived by dividing perceptions of detrimental impact on the environment by amount of pre-purchase consideration. In the study, the maximum and minimum scores that could be reached are 5 and .2 respectively as a Likert scale of 1 to 5 was used. Only if the consistency factor was close to either of these extremes would perceptions be completely discarded as a factor determining environmental buyer behaviour. If the consistency factor is greater than 1 then perceptions are stronger than actions but still influence these actions. If the consistency factor is less than 1 then perceptions are weaker than actions but still influence these actions. The closer the consistency factor is to 1 the closer the correspondence between perceptions and actions. It was realised that environmental consciousness, net total risk and subjective norms are not the only factors that need be considered. It was assumed that there are also other factors which must be considered when trying to "forecast" consumer behaviour. Although an allowance is made for these other factors, no attempt was made to specify them in this study.

For each individual, the environmental action-behaviour model was depicted by the following equation:

$$E_{(beh)} = \sum_{i=1}^n (E_{pi} * C_{pi} + S_{pi} + O_{pi})$$

- $E_{(beh)}$ = Is total environmental behaviour of a person.
 E = Is the environmental consciousness.
 C = Is the consistency factor.
 R = Is the net risk factor.
 S = Is the subjective societal norm.
 O = Other factors.
 pi = is the i'th product group.

THE MEXICAN STUDY

The Mexican researchers followed the same procedure as the Australian researchers. Hypotheses were formulated and methodology and data analysis were identical.

HYPOTHESES FORMULATION

Certain aspects of the model are investigated by hypothesis formulation and testing. Further research would be needed to establish the entire validity of the model. The following hypotheses were formulated with regard to Mexican consumers:—

1. Mexican consumers, in terms of their buyer behaviour, exhibit a consistency factor greater than 1 with reference to their perceptions and actions.
2.
 - a. Mexican consumers believe that certain reference groups effect their purchase of environmentally safe products.
 - b. Mexican consumers believe that family and children are the most important reference groups affecting their purchasing behaviour.

OTHER ELEMENTS OF THE MODEL

Certain aspects of the risk components of the model are looked at. Factors that consumers take into consideration before purchasing products are considered as well as the additional amounts that consumers are prepared to pay for environmental products.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted using personal interviews in retail shopping centres that contained a supermarket. This was carried out in Mexico City. The relevant sample was considered to be individuals in households who do the household shopping. MBA marketing students were used as interviewers for the survey. They were given a very controlled Likert type questionnaire which was pretested twice. The students were instructed on what additional information to give consumers.

Consumers were approached as they entered the supermarket or retail centre. Interviewers were instructed to go to a variety of shopping centres which would be utilised by a range of income groups. Surveys were conducted 6 days a week, though a majority (53%) of the surveys were conducted on Satur-

day. Of the 11 shopping centres visited, no one shopping centre contributed more than 10% of the respondents. Surveys were conducted at all hours of the day. Approximately 20% were conducted between 9-12, 70% between 12 and 5, and 10% after 5 pm. In total 222 useable surveys were collected.

It is realised that there may be non-response bias and a level of bias due to the method of collection. It was felt that the amount of bias would not distort the results and therefore no attempts at correction were made.

SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

Table 1 describes the sample characteristics. The sample is not significantly different from the overall population of the region where the survey was conducted, except where occupation is concerned as there was an over-representation of white-collar workers (who tend to buy at supermarkets rather than local produce markets). The analysis provided in this paper is therefore more representative of the white-collar Mexican consumer than blue-collar Mexican consumer. The segmentation variables of importance to the researchers were not the usual demographic variables, but the attitude itself.

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	221			
SEX	Male 51	Female 49		
AGE	Under 29 53.5	30-49 36.0	50-64 10.0	65+ .5
Relationship	Couples 53.0	Single 47.0		
Education	HSC or less 43.5	More than HSC 56.5		
Occupation	White Collar 78.0	Blue Collar 1.0	Not in the Workforce 21.0	Other —
HouseHold Size	1 17.0	2-3 43.0	4-5 31.0	6+ 9
Children at Home	0 51.0	1-3 36.0	4+ 13.0	
Political Support	Major Party 75	Socialist Party 8.0	Green Party 1.0	Other 16
Household Income	Less than US\$6000 18.0	\$6000-20000 46.0	360000 18.0	\$21000-360000+ 18.0
Median Income	\$6000-\$20000 Range Exch. Rate Pesos/U.S.\$ \$3100 x 1			

DATA ANALYSIS

Environmental Consciousness and Environmental Action

Consumers are considered to be consistent if their perceptions of environmental impact and their level of pre-purchase consideration are the same. One might expect that this could be possible if social consciousness extends into shaping the decision process.

To determine consistency each respondent was asked to respond to two questions. The first question related to perceptions of environmental impact and was stated as: "Rate the following products in terms of their detrimental effect on the environment." As stated previously, a Likert rating scale was used, with 1 for very little effect and 5 for very high effect. There were 14 products or classes of products listed.

To determine pre-purchase consideration (which was considered by the researchers to be a proxy for behaviour) the second question was asked in the following form: "When you buy the following products how much consideration do you give to their environmental safety?" a five point Likert scale was used with 1 being very little and 5 being very much.

	Useable Cases	Detrimental Impact on Environment (Mean)	Amount of pre- Purchase Consideration (Mean)	Consistency Factor	Paried T Value	2 Tail Prob.
Wood for Building	222	3.13	2.78	1.13	3.19	.00
Pesticides	222	4.16	3.50	1.19	7.05	.00
Plastics Including Packaging	222	3.26	2.05	1.59	1.96	.05
Cosmetics	222	3.31	2.86	1.16	4.73	.00
Aerosols	222	4.41	3.11	1.42	7.28	.00
Petrol	222	3.88	2.93	1.32	7.46	.00
Power generation & use	222	3.00	2.56	1.17	4.36	.00
Paper Products Including Newspapers	222	3.13	2.57	1.22	5.36	.00
Household Cleaning Agents	222	3.59	3.06	1.17	4.20	.00
Laundry Liquids & Powders	222	3.51	3.59	0.98	-0.64	.50
TOTAL	222	3.53	2.90	1.21		

Table 2 shows the consistency between environmental consciousness and pre-purchase consideration. As can be seen the mean response for the perceived detrimental impact on the environment of various product groups (column 2) indicates that consumers believe that all the products have a detrimental impact on the environment. All products except for power, which has an average detrimental impact are perceived to have a higher than average detrimental impact (a mean of greater than 3). Products perceived to have a high detrimental impact were pesticides and aerosols. The total perceived impact for all products was in the moderate range, with an average mean response of 3.86.

Pre-purchase consideration given to the environmental impact of products may not actually be reflected in the perceptions of environmental impact on the environment. Column 3 of Table 2 gives the mean response for the amount of pre-purchase consideration given to the environmental impact of products. As can be seen little pre-purchase consideration (a mean value of less than 3) was given to the environmental impact of wood (for building), plastics, petrol, power and paper products. Products which consumers spent a moderate amount of pre-purchase consideration based on the environmental impact (mean value of between 3 and 4) were pesticides, aerosols, household cleaning agents and laundry liquids and powders. None of the products warranted a great amount (a mean value greater than 4) of pre-purchase consideration of the environmental impact.

In some cases there are few alternative choices and therefore the consumer may not consider the impact of buying the product, though they may change their behaviour so that they will not consume as much of the good. An example of this is petrol, once a consumer purchases a car the purchase of petrol is obligatory. The environment may be taken into consideration when the decision to buy a car is made, for there are other forms of transportation and individuals can also alter their decisions as to the type of car they purchase and what it is fuelled by. To some extent, this may be seen as a trade off between types of risk, with consumers being more concerned with functional, financial, social and psychological risk types and discounting environmental risk.

Do consumers purchasing activities equally match and reflect their perceptions of the detrimental impact of products on the environment? The present research was concerned with the likelihood or tendency that an individual will undertake a specific action or behave in a particular way with regard to the attitude-object. In marketing and consumer behaviour, the conative component is often measured in terms of the consumers intention to buy. To examine this, each consumers rating of detrimental impact was com-

pared to their consideration prior to purchase. As discussed earlier, if consumers rank the product the same for both impact and pre-purchase consideration, their perceptions of environmental awareness should exactly match (equal) their actions, therefore the consistency factor (impact/pre-purchase consideration) would be one. If they ranked the impact of the product to be higher (lower) than for pre-purchase consideration then their actions did not follow their perceptions. In the "more"("less") case their pre-purchase decisions underestimate (overestimate) their perceptions, therefore the consistency factor would be greater (less than) one. Column 4 of Table 2 gives all consistency factors for the product categories examined. There is no product for which consumers are consistent (o.e. have a score of 1) in their perception of environmental impact and pre-purchase consideration.

In fact, all means between the two areas of impact and pre-purchase consideration are always statistically different. The only product category which is an exception and where the means are closely related is laundry liquids which have a consistency factor of 0.98 and a t value of 0.64 with a two-tail probability of -0.5. In this case, they are not statistically different.

If it is assumed that the population is normal, then it is possible that individuals may not always be inconsistent in the same direction, i.e. for some goods pre-purchase consideration is greater than the perceived environmental impact and vice-versa. However, overall consumers should exhibit an average consistency factor greater than 1 if the hypothesis is valid. In fact the average consistency factor is 1.21. On average, consumers are inconsistent and in the hypothesised direction.

Table 3 indicates the breakdown of the consistency factor for the various products. It clearly indicates that on average, for all products, except laundry liquids and powders, consumers consistently perceive the environmental impact of a good to be greater than the amount of pre-purchase consideration given to the environmental impact of their purchase. Except in the case of laundry liquids and powders, where the reverse is true, there are a greater proportion of consumers who have a consistency factor greater than one rather than less than one.

A generalisation from the Table 3 is that consumers purchasing activities usually underestimate their perceptions of the detrimental impact of products on the environment and that therefore environmental perceptions, while having some predictive effect on buying behaviour, do not have a one to one relationship with purchasing activity. Support is therefore produced for Hypothesis 1.

Table 3 shows that in the case of plastics, aerosols and petrol, over half of the consumers rated the perceptions of the environmental impact greater

than the amount of pre-purchase consideration given to those products. However, in the case of wood, pesticides, cosmetics, power paper products and household cleaning agents, more than half the population were consistent in their perceptions and consideration. The total response was overwhelmingly weighted towards the perceptions of the environmental impact. There was a massive 68 percent of the population who, overall, perceived the environmental impact of products to be greater than their pre-purchase consideration. No attempt was made to measure the level of information possessed by the respondents i.e. their actual level of environmental awareness.

Table 3
BREAKDOWN OF THE CONSISTENCY FACTOR FOR THE VARIOUS PRODUCTS

	Number of Valid Cases	Percentage Less than One	Percentage One	Percentage Greater than one
Wood (for building)	222	10%	64%	26%
Pesticides	222	9%	65%	26%
Plastics including Packaging	222	4%	20%	76%
Cosmetics	222	10%	66%	24%
Aerosols	222	9%	21%	70%
Petrol	222	10%	22%	68%
Power Generation & Use	222	10%	66%	24%
Paper products Including newspapers	222	6%	68%	26%
Household cleaning agents	222	10%	66%	24%
Laundry liquids and Powders	222	76%	20%	4%
TOTAL	222	10%	22%	68%

A generalisation is that consumers purchasing activities usually underestimate their perceptions of the detrimental impact of products on the environment and that therefore environmental perceptions, while having some predictive effect on buying behaviour, do not have a one to one relationship with purchasing activity.

There could be a number of reasons for this seeming lack of consistency, for example, financial and time risk could influence the consumers pre-purchase decisions as could predisposition towards buying long established brands. (This predisposition would itself affect the different kinds of risk). Some of the general environmental factors taken into consideration in this study and which involved pre-purchasing behaviour were impact on the en-

vironment through production or disposal, use of energy, recyclability, biodegradability, harmful to health, impact on animals, or harm other countries. It appeared that majority of respondents took all of these factors into account in their pre-purchase behaviour.

Table 4 gives the correlations between the two areas, perceived environmental impact and pre-purchase consideration. It provides further support for the use of perceived environmental impact as a partial proxy for pre-purchase consideration.

Table 4 CORRELATION AND R-SQUARED OF PERCEPTIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT AND PRE-PURCHASE CONSIDERATION			
	Number of Valid Cases	Correlation Coefficient*	R-Squared
Wood (for building)	222	0.394	0.1552
Pesticides	222	0.309	0.0953
Plastics including Packaging	222	0.254	0.0666
Cosmetics	222	0.500	0.2502
Aerosols	222	0.351	0.1235
Petrol	222	0.354	0.1252
Power	222	0.079	0.0063
Pape products Including newspapers	222	0.310	0.0961
Household cleaning Agents	222	0.326	0.1065
Laundry liquids and Powders	222	0.244	0.0599
Total	222	0.312	0.1524

As can be seen, there is a positive correlation between to the questions for all product groups and the correlation is significantly different from zero. Using the R-squared, the amount of variance that is explained varies from 0.0063 (for power) to 0.2502 (for cosmetics). On average (summing the responses for all products, ie total) 15.2 percent of the variation of pre-purchase consideration is explained due to the perceptions of the detrimental impact products have on the environment. This leaves a large proportion of the over-all variation still unexplained. Consumers perceptions of the environmental impact of products examined is a useful indicator of behaviour, though the relationship is not unitary. It may be that the rest of the variation could be

explained by risk, subjective norm and other factors. No attempt is made here, to quantify these relationships.

With regard to the second hypothesis concerning reference groups, one of the questions that needs to be asked is who shapes the perceptions of consumers in terms of the environment. This relates, to some extent, to social risk. Reference groups that consumers relate to play some part in shaping social norms. By understanding which reference groups affect consumers purchasing decisions, marketers can better influence purchase decisions. This is extremely important given the lack of confidence consumers have in firms and their advertising on this issue. Individuals were asked to explain how much a variety of groups affected their purchase of environmentally safe goods. Table 5 give the complete breakdown.

	Effect					Mean	Rank
	Very Little		Very Much				
Group	1	2	3	4	5		
Family	3.5	8	11	24	54	4.18	2
Children	5	5	10	19	59	4.22	1
Friends	12	14	29	24	21	3.30	3
Co-Workers	15	17	29	26	14	3.08	4
Media	34.5	20	29	10	6	2.34	6
Environmental Groups	26	18	20	19	17	2.83	5
Advertisers	39.5	19	25	9	7	2.26	7
Political Parties	52.5	15	20	7	0	1.99	9
Government	50.5	16	17	7	14	2.05	8

All reference groups can be said have an effect on purchase behaviour, although political parties and government have a minimal effect. This result appears to support hypothesis 2(a) that there are certain reference groups affecting purchasing behaviour.

As hypothesised in 2 (b), those individuals who consumers have direct contact with, i.e. family and children, are the most important in consumption decisions (as these are not mutually exclusive there may be some double counting). Political parties and the government are the least important groups in effecting purchasing decisions.

OTHER ELEMENTS OF THE MODEL

Physical Risk

Consumers answered a question as to whether they considered various factors before buying products. These factors are listed in Table 6.

Table 6 PERCENT OF CONSUMERS WHO GIVE CERTAIN FACTORS PRE-PURCHASE CONSIDERATION, MEAN RESPONSE AND MEAN RANK			
Factor	%	Mean Response	Mean Rank
Harms the Environment in Manufacture and Disposal	53	2.36	6
Consumption of Energy in Use or Disposal	43	2.50	7
Biodegradability	50	2.31	5
Environmental Friendliness	57	2.22	4
Recyclable	65	2.17	3
Endangers Health	73	2.00	1
Harms Animals	62	2.14	2
Has Adverse Environmental effects on Other Countries	35	2.68	8

The first column shows the percentage of consumers who consider certain factors to be important before they purchase products. 73% of the sample considered health endangerment before purchasing products and 65% considered recyclability. Column two shows the mean response to the question asked, where 1 indicated that they strongly agree and 5 indicated that they strongly disagree that they give the listed factors pre-purchase consideration.

As can be seen, consumers were most concerned with their own well-being (physical risk) and therefore most concerned with endangering their own health.

Environmental Risk

They were least concerned with environmental impacts on other countries. It would appear that the importance of the global environment is not yet understood by the average Mexican consumer. A further interesting point is that energy use was ranked relatively low as compared to the other factors.

Apart from physical risk, the other factors examined in Table 6 can be tied to environmental risk. It is interesting to note that physical risk ("Endangers Health") was rated the most important pre-purchase factor considered. This implies that in an overall risk model, the consumers health is the overriding factor and may reduce the impact of other risk types. (This is an area that this study does not examine and is presently being further researched.)

Financial Risk

If environmentally safe products are to be priced higher than environmentally unsafe products a major concern for manufacturers must be how much more individuals are willing to pay for environmentally safe products. On a macro-marketing level this will also cause prices to rise and could add to the inflation rate of an economy.

This, willingness to pay, can be determined in a variety of ways. The simplest method is ask individuals if they were willing to pay more and, if so, how much more they would be willing to pay. In this sample, a majority (73%) of the respondents said that they would be willing to pay more for environmentally safe goods.

Table 7 gives a complete breakdown of the additional amounts individuals would pay for environmentally safe goods.

Amount	Percent	Number
0	27	60
5%	15	34
10%	30	67
15%	10	21
20%	10	19
25%	5	12
30%	5	13
35%	0.5	1
40%	2.0	4
50%+	5.0	10
Total	100	221

On average, those who would pay more for goods would be willing to pay between 5% and 10% more.

This means that consumers consider their own financial risk when considering whether to purchase environmentally safe products. Of those who said they would pay more for goods (141 people) the distribution tended to be skewed towards the lower end of the spectrum. This skewness implies that financial risk counteracts environmental risk. Consumers financial risk could be increased (the amount that they are willing to pay decreased) by the fact that they perceive that producers bear a larger responsibility than consumers vis a vis environmental costs. As shown previously, consumers perceived that producers should be more environmentally responsible than consumers.

Functional Risk

An important question that needs to be addressed, which is related to price, concerns the quality of environmentally safe products. For two products to be compared on price they must perform equally well. If this is not the case, then consumers would not be willing to pay the same amount for the products. For example, a dish washing powder brand "X" is not environmentally safe while brand "E" is. If "E" does not perform as well as brand "X" will people buy it and if so will they pay the same price as they did for "X"? (This is a relatively higher price as the quality is lower.) A question asking individuals if they would buy environmentally safe products, if they were not as good as non-environmentally safe products, revealed that only 12% of the consumers would purchase "inferior" safe products. 73% said they would not purchase them and 15% were uncertain if they would or would not. This has serious implications for producers and marketers. It may be the case that environmentally safe products are perceived as being produced using "different" ingredients which are not as effective. Thus, in order to induce environmentally conscious consumers to provide environmentally safe products, these products must be perceived as being as effective as the non-environmentally safe ones. This is the case with the present advertising of environmentally safe goods, they all emphasise the "Safety" factor and not the effectiveness of the product. This can prevent consumers from perceiving these products as viable alternatives. Functional risk therefore needs to be taken into account.

CONCLUSIONS

An environmental buyer behaviour theory and model that was posited by Australian researchers was tested in Mexico. This model is a complex inter-relationship of micro and macro-marketing factors.

An attempt was to determine certain relationships within the model. It was found that a consistency factor exists and is greater than one. This means that Mexican consumers overstate environmental concern in relation to their pre-purchase considerations. This was true for all product groups examined. This lends validity to the concept of the model developed. It indicates that other factors apart from perceptions need to be included in any determination of environmental buyer behaviour.

While environmental attitudes cannot be said to be unimportant in determining environmental action as was shown in Table 4, the individuals are to a certain extent inconsistent and the consistency factor, which will vary for different products, should be taken into account. The causality and the consistency for the products also differs. Though this study found that there is always a direct relationship between perceptions and action, neither one of these in isolation is a satisfactory proxy for the other. Environmental action-behaviour is a complex relationship.

With regard to the other factors, various types of risk would appear to be important. Seven different types of risk were considered to have an effect on consumers behaviour. With reference to these:

- a) physical risk was shown to be the most important type of risk,
- b) of the various elements of environmental risk, global risk was perceived to be the least important,
- c) financial risk and functional risk counteract environmental risk.

It was found that certain reference groups affect consumers purchasing behaviour. The most important groups affecting consumption decisions in Mexico are family and children. Environmental groups can also be important in determining behaviour. This study therefore illustrates the importance of introducing both the consistency factor and the various types of risk and reference groups into a determination of factors which influence the level of environmental action of consumers. One important macromarketing implication of this study would appear to be that resources expended on making the consumer more environmentally concerned do not appear to result in the socially desired consequences of consumer behaviour, i.e., more environmentally directed purchasing behaviour.

One should however be cautious when generalizing from the findings as there are limitations due to the lack of representativeness in the sample. For example, the sample is more representative of the white-collar Mexican consumer than the blue-collar Mexican consumer.

Further areas for research include the interrelationship of the various types of risks and the formulation of what is herein termed "other factors". This would enable a more complete understanding of the complexities of the model and enable marketing strategies to be developed. It would also be interesting to examine how the numeric values of the different elements of the model change according to product types and market segment. Additionally, attempts must be made to reach a common understanding of environmental terminology, for example, "environmentally friendly".

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