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Beyond the New Normal: Realizing Innovations for a Sustainable and Crisis-Proactive Society

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Preferences of Filipino Consumers on Personal Hygiene Products: An Inside Look on Traditional and Sustainable Options

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Abstract: The sustainability trend in the market requires businesses to change their usual models and mechanisms of producing goods to cater to consumer preferences. These preferences mainly revolve around the product's brand, price, and accessibility, impacting consumers' choices, priorities, and decisions (Gutierrez & Seva, 2016; Rappler, 2013; Longo et al., 2019). This study investigated more in-depth factors affecting an individual's purchase and non-purchase of sustainable personal hygiene products in the market: bamboo toothbrushes and shampoo bars. For the grounded theory inquiry, participants ages 16-20 from the National Capital Region of the Philippines were recruited. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by asking about their product preferences considering the initial categories: general questions, knowledge, price, effectiveness, culture, tradition, brand, social influence, availability, and other miscellaneous questions. All 12 participants' interviews summarized the study's codes and categories. For the secondary analysis, the thematic analysis revealed two overarching themes characterizing the elements impacting one's purchase and non-purchase of sustainable personal hygiene products: (1) barriers to accessing sustainable products; and (2) factors influencing an individual's purchasing consideration of personal hygiene products. Enterprises might find it helpful to explore these themes to create business models best tailored to the market.

Keywords: sustainability; consumers' choices and decisions; personal hygiene products; NCR; ages 16 to 20

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Consumers' concern for the environment fuels the "sustainability" movement, requiring enterprises to modify their usual methods to meet these issues and appeal to the market. As a result, some businesses eliminate hazardous chemicals, incorporate organic components, or stray from traditional product materials such as plastic. These adjustments highlighted that Filipino consumers have always considered when purchasing products in the market. These considerations are the product's brand, price, and accessibility (Gutierrez & Seva, 2016; Rappler, 2013; Longo et al., 2019), which affect their priorities, shopping choices, and decisions. These findings can be further connected to why Filipino consumers choose to buy or not the sustainable counterparts of traditional hygiene products

like bamboo toothbrushes as a replacement for the usual plastic toothbrushes or shampoo bars as a replacement for bottled shampoos.

The research problems—unethical consumption behavior, inaccessibility of sustainable goods, and threatened public health can be solved through data from interviews and surveys from 12 participants from Metro Manila that consisted of two representatives from each of the age groups 16, 18, and 20, and three from 17 and 19 regarding the use of sustainable products. Although this method would not genuinely describe every Filipino consumer, it may still grant us the answer to why Filipino consumers purchase or do not purchase sustainable personal hygiene products. The data analysis may create information to help companies gain more consumers to buy sustainable products. It can help these companies figure out plans, strategies, and ideas to make sustainable product choices



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more accessible to consumers. These strategies can then decrease the unethical consumer behavior of individuals toward traditional products because more consumers are turning to sustainable products. Public health may improve everyone's well-being through these possible events because environmental concerns such as waste disposal are solved. The study will also benefit the research participants by reminding or informing them about sustainable products, which will help create a positive impact on the environment, reflecting one of Ateneo de Manila's priority areas — public health and well-being. Finally, the study may benefit future studies as this provides a basis for researchers to explore the topic further with a more extensive data set or with a different methodology.

As climate change's effects have become more apparent in the last few years, reducing its damage to our planet has been a priority. One of the efforts created in line with this concern is integrating sustainable development into the market. With this, sustainable products and sustainability in themselves have been on-trend. Although studies about the factors that affect purchasing sustainable goods have been made, none were in the Philippine context. Studies concerning the purchase behavior of Filipino consumers toward personal hygiene products have also been explored. However, these mainly focus on traditional unique hygiene products and consumers of the older age bracket. Thus, the researchers have decided to focus on the factors affecting Filipino consumers between the ages of 16 and 20 regarding purchasing sustainable personal hygiene products.

This study determines why Filipino consumers purchase or do not purchase sustainable hygiene products. The factors considered are, but are not limited to, the consumers' knowledge of sustainable products, price, effectiveness, culture and tradition, brand, social influence, and availability. The scope of the study was limited to only shampoos, shampoo bars, toothbrushes, and bamboo toothbrushes. The data collection was conducted through a semi-constructed interview online, with 12 participants from Metro Manila consisting of two representatives from each age group, 16, 18, and 20, and three each from 17 and 19. The interviews were held through Google Meet, which lasted an average of 30 to 60 minutes per participant. The researcher used grounded theory for the qualitative study and thematic analysis to interpret the data. However, the results do not generalize nor statistically represent Filipino consumers, given the limited population and location of the study.

1.2. Review of Related Literature

Environmental Concern and Sustainability Awareness of Filipinos

Gano-an (2018) discovered that Filipinos are greatly concerned about sustainability and the environment. According to his study, this concern gave birth to green marketing efforts, the process of developing and advertising products on their perceived environmental benefits, in different nations, especially in the Philippines. It was concluded that Filipinos showed a commendable understanding of environmental protection and awareness of campaigns that promote a greener lifestyle. Health and environmentally conscious consumers are more willing to embrace green marketing initiatives as they recognize the harmful effect of using plastic on the environment.

In this regard, the Philippines has been praised for having an effective legislative structure to ensure ecological sustainability. Sabio (2012) concluded that environment-oriented organizations have also gained more support since the late 1980s and 1990s. Engagement in private or household-oriented pro-environmental behavior was higher than engagement in collective or society-oriented. It was also discovered that there is a difference between the level of concern of the different social classes. People have high engagement in pre-environmental behaviors like sorting recyclables and cutting back on driving. However, the survey results showed that Filipinos engage the least in buying products considered more "green" than others.

Moreover, Punzalan (2020) conducted a study evaluating the awareness and practices of Senior High School students. Aligned with the ample evidence that the Philippines is suffering from various environmental problems and hazards, the students showed a high-level concern for the environment and good practices to ease the worsening situation of our planet. However, the data showed that students scored lowest on the theme "change," which refers to the changes in practices to ameliorate the environment, like selecting more sustainable products rather than products that harm the environment.

According to the research cited, Filipino consumers showed significant concern about sustainability and the environment. However, there was no data regarding why consumers still lack actions and efforts, especially in consuming sustainable products, despite their significant environmental and sustainability concerns. Eco-friendly practices and consumption remain just an awareness issue, but it is not a way of life as people tend to fail to make their



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words into action.

Considerations of Filipino Consumers When Buying Products

With the rise of sustainability, consumers meticulously review their product choices, highlighting the factors that affect a consumer's product choice. These preferences and considerations depend on many factors, such as brand, price, effectiveness, culture, tradition, and the like. This study will discuss the factors that affect a Filipino consumer's choice of personal hygiene products.

Gutierrez (2004) concluded that most Filipino consumers plan their purchases rather than buying on impulse. He interviewed 502 consumers from three different categories of department stores: upscale, middle-class, and down-market. The interviewees were from ages 26 to 40 only. Therefore, further studies could be done on other age groups. The findings from the study are most applicable if the consumer is buying for their household. Their family's choices may influence a consumer's product choice. He also found that Filipino consumers usually buy only frequently used products. With this, it can also be inferred that most consumers have already determined what specific products they will buy concerning the brand of the product (82.8%), especially if these are personal hygiene products. These findings prove brand loyalty in Filipino consumers, telling us that consumers do not easily switch from one brand to another. It can be considered one reason consumers buy products they usually use instead of newer and more sustainable products.

In addition, Castillo (2018) concluded that Filipinos have a distinct culture of buying discounted or on-sale items. This culture is highly influenced by trends, family, friends, and the like. Moreover, other factors affect a consumer's buying behavior, as enumerated in his study. These factors are based on Perner's model on consumer attitude (1999), where it is seen that there are three main interconnected factors affecting consumer attitude: beliefs, affect (feeling), and behavioral intentions. The first factor, belief, focuses on culture and superstitions on a consumer's product preference. For instance, a consumer may opt not to purchase a black-colored shirt as it signifies death, mourning, or bad luck. The second factor, feelings, is still associated with consumers' beliefs or traditions. For instance, a person may buy eco-friendly products knowing that these may help the environment somehow. Lastly, the third factor is what the consumer intends to do with the product. A standard resolution to this factor is looking for

alternatives in terms of quality and price, as consumers usually want high-quality products, especially if they are paying a higher price.

Adding to the abovementioned factors, a consumer's ability to purchase a product and social influence also play an essential role in how a consumer considers what to purchase. The dilemma of a consumer concerning the price of goods reiterates that the price of a product can significantly influence a consumer's choice. Due to a product's price, sachet marketing is widespread in Southeast Asian countries like the Philippines (Singh et al., 2009). Sachet marketing exists when companies sell products in smaller quantities. This marketing strategy makes the products much more affordable but environmentally unfriendly. As previously mentioned, Filipinos are easily swayed by trends, advertisements, and their family and peers' recommendations. These aspects can again be possible points that reveal the rationale behind a Filipino consumer's purchasing decisions.

Lastly, Hoyer et al.'s study on consumer behavior (2017) stated that aside from the above factors, a consumer's experience in using the products can also influence their choice. A consumer's experience using a particular product contributes to their attitude toward it. This factor, as previously mentioned, affects their choice. This attitude is characterized by favorability, accessibility, confidence, persistence, resistance, and ambivalence. Favorability is how much one likes or dislikes a product. Accessibility is how easily the consumer remembers their experience. Confidence is how strong an attitude is, while persistence is how long it lasts. Resistance is the difficulty of changing said attitude. Lastly, ambivalence is mixed emotion or judgment towards a product. The researchers concluded that because of attitude resistance, people do not usually switch from one product to another because they depend on their experience using it.

An increased focus on research and policies has been placed on sustainability due to the consumers' concern for environmental welfare. However, collective participation has remained low, implying that Filipino consumers may be concerned about the environment but lack concrete action on this subject. This phenomenon happens because of consumers' varying considerations, namely their culture and tradition, and the products' price, brand, and effectiveness. Producers should examine their claims and pricing to satisfy public concerns and assure mass involvement.



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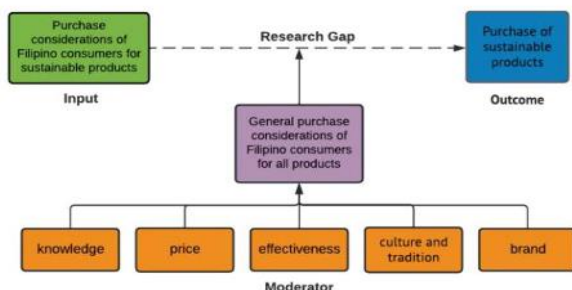
A research gap to be filled by this study is the age group of the participants, as the studies only focused on consumers ages 26 to 40. This research will answer the gap by focusing on consumers ages 16 to 20. Another gap found is the reason why Filipinos are not buying sustainable products. Although a study on the considerations of consumers in general (Singh et al., 2009) has been found, more research must be done on the reviews of consumers, specifically for sustainable personal hygiene products.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



The purchase considerations of Filipino consumers for sustainable products (input) influence their involvement in buying these sustainable products (outcome). Previous research has concluded that Filipino consumers' purchase considerations affect their product choices and decisions. On the other hand, this qualitative research focuses on Filipino consumers' reasons for purchasing or not purchasing sustainable personal hygiene products, filling the literature gap. The framework depicts how the Filipino consumers' general purchase considerations (moderator variable) add up to the specific consumers' purchase consideration for sustainable products and affect their possible purchase of sustainable goods.

As it has already been established that sustainable personal hygiene products, as they are named, are more sustainable or helpful for the environment, increased purchases of these products can translate into viable solutions to address our planet's environmental concerns. Regarding this framework, the researchers used the purchase considerations of Filipino consumers as well as other findings from previous studies to construct an interview questionnaire to delve deeper into why consumers

purchase sustainable personal hygiene products or not. This study aims to help sustainable personal hygiene brands understand their market better to build better sales and marketing strategies.

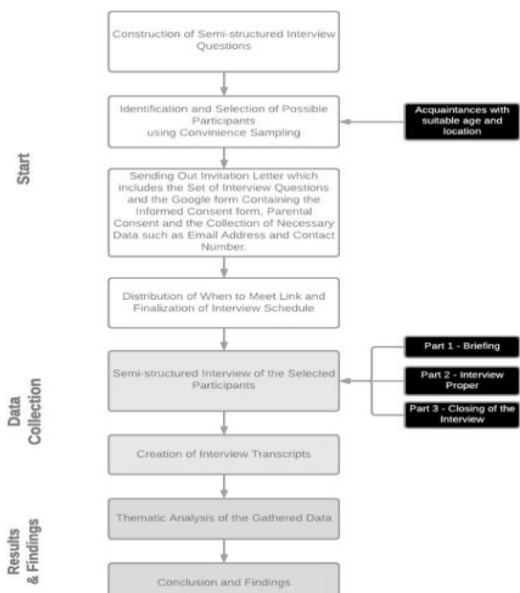
2.2. Profile of the Participants

The study participants were men and women residing in the National Capital Region (NCR), ages 16 to 20. The specific inclusion criteria for the participants filled the research gap as current studies regarding purchase decisions of consumers are only within ages 26 to 40. Given that the participants from ages 16 to 20 are reliant on adults, the researchers wanted to study this age group as individuals from this age group affect the purchasing decisions of their guardians (Gutierrez, 2004).

2.3. Implementation and Data Collection

Figure 2

Simplified Flowchart of Implementation and Data Collection



The semi-structured interview was the main instrument used in the study's data collection. The discussion focused on identifying the participants' considerations and reasoning when buying personal hygiene products.

The prepared semi-structured interview questions were asked to the 12 study participants, two



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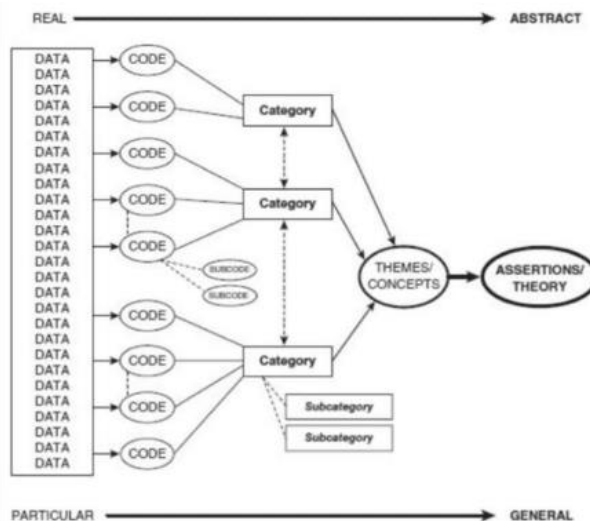
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representatives from 16, 18, and 20, and three from 17 and 19. The interview questions were arranged based on the following topics: sustainability, knowledge, price, effectiveness, culture and tradition, brand, social influence, availability, and the follow-up, open-ended questions. The participants were acquaintances of researchers selected through convenience sampling. Even if biases may arise from this, note how, either way, people will still have preferences. Such issues are irrelevant because the study used grounded theory, which focuses on individual experiences that may be tested and used as general conclusions in further quantitative research.

2.4. Data Analysis

Figure 3

Saldana's (2015) Streamlined Codes-to-theory Model For Qualitative Inquiry



The researchers used classic grounded theory as the approach for this study, along with implementing thematic analysis to analyze the data. First, the researchers adapted Saldana's (2015) streamlined codes-to-theory model for qualitative inquiry, allowing the researchers to answer the research question by forming more substantial categories with each stage compatible with classic grounded theory. Next, they reviewed and summarized the acquired data using the recordings and transcripts following the in-depth interviews. After this, the researchers further analyzed and organized the found data into codes to contain and identify the found points (Green et al., 2007). The codes were based on comparing the consumer behavior of

young adults between the ages of 16 and 20 regarding their purchase of sustainable personal hygiene products. The creation of categories about the relationships found between the codes followed. This process was done to find possible themes that answer why consumers purchase or do not purchase sustainable hygiene products. Finally, recurring themes were identified and interpreted. With each step of this process, the researchers delved deeper into the available data and eventually discovered the grounded theory (Kenny & Fourie, 2015). Finally, they developed a theory based on the analysis of the gathered data using grounded theory (Guest et al., 2021).

3. RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to determine why consumers purchase or do not purchase sustainable personal hygiene products. A qualitative approach was adopted using thematic analysis to analyze the data and grounded theory as the study's method. The research has provided insights into the consumer's considerations when purchasing personal hygiene products through the gathered data. They identified two major themes to answer the research question: (1) Barriers to accessing sustainable products and (2) Factors influencing an individual's purchasing consideration of personal hygiene products.

Two categories were set under the Barriers to accessing sustainable products. The study determined that ease of purchase and information deficiency significantly influences consumers' knowledge and acquisition of personal hygiene products. Contradicting the study of Marasigan et al. (2021), the researchers discovered that Filipino consumers still lack expertise and exposure to sustainable products, which hinders them from purchasing one.

On the other hand, there were eight critical categories set under the theme "Factors influencing an individual's purchasing consideration of personal hygiene products," which contributes to current research by providing new insight into the factors that affect Filipino consumers in the 16-20 age gap's purchase or non-purchase of sustainable products, namely: Product Composition, Product Use, Social Influences, Brand, Environmental Awareness and Action, Health and Safety, Price, and Personal Liking of a Product. These factors are varied and subjective but still equate to one conclusion. For the first factor, the respondents pointed out that they consider a product's ingredients and packaging. Although they prefer products that do not have harsh chemicals and are packaged



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well, something sustainable personal hygiene products offer, the following categories contradict this preference. This point is further supported by the Environmental Awareness and Action category and the Product use category. Aligned with the analysis made by Gano-an (2018), it was found that consumers show a great desire to change their ways to benefit the environment. However, the quality of the products they purchase still comes first. Similar to a study by Sheeran (2002), it was stated that an attitude-behavior gap exists. Filipino consumers ages 16-20 still go for traditional products that have proven their quality and reputation over time. Consumers' intentions to have a more sustainable lifestyle do not align with their actions. Coinciding with the consumer's desire to get excellent-quality products, they also choose those that satisfy their needs, hence the Personal Liking of a Product category. This category shows how consumers have physical differences, such as their hair types, skin types, or other needs, leading to their preferences concerning personal hygiene products.

Castillo's research on the buying behaviors of Filipino consumers (2018), where he referenced Perner's model on consumer attitude (1999) and stated that a consumer's common resolve is to find alternatives in terms of quality or price, was affirmed by the participant's responses in the Price category. Some prefer more affordable products or those that are cheap but still of good quality. Some do not mind a product's price but would still go for better quality products. Still, this category maintains the narrative and conclusion. Lastly, the many social influences around the consumers also impact their choices: Reviews and Recommendations, Family Habits, Relatability, Advertisements, and Political Beliefs and Loyalties. Despite their influence and impact, consumers still go by the products that suit their needs and support their considerations. Hence, the established theory and conclusion that consumers prefer traditional products over sustainable options stand. Due to the current barriers to accessing sustainable products and the factors influencing individuals' purchasing considerations, consumers ages 16-20 are still more inclined to purchase and use traditional personal hygiene products.

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