



**Aalto University**  
School of Business

**Mikkeli Campus**

## THE ROLE OF SOCIAL IDENTITY IN GREEN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

A qualitative study on green consumption behaviors in the social context of young consumers in California, USA and Finland.

Senni Taavitsainen

International Business  
Bachelor's Thesis  
Supervisor: Mirjaliisa Charles  
Date of approval: 6 April 2021

Aalto University  
School of Business  
Bachelor's Program in International Business  
Mikkeli Campus



**Aalto University**  
School of Business

**Mikkeli Campus**

## THE ROLE OF SOCIAL IDENTITY IN GREEN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

A qualitative study on green consumption behaviors in the social context of young consumers in California, USA and Finland.

Senni Taavitsainen

International Business  
Bachelor's Thesis  
Supervisor: Mirjaliisa Charles  
Date of approval: 6 April 2021

Aalto University  
School of Business  
Bachelor's Program in International Business  
Mikkeli Campus

**Author:** Senni Taavitsainen

**Title of thesis:** The role of social identity in green consumer behavior

**Date:** 6 April 2021

**Degree:** Bachelor of Science in Economics and Business Administration

**Supervisor:** Mirjaliisa Charles

### **Objectives**

The main objectives of this study were to contribute to limited literature regarding factors that contribute to green consumer behavior in younger-aged consumers from a social identity perspective. This study also aimed to contribute to methods to help bridge an existing attitude-behavior gap that exists within green consumer behavior. The results of this study add to the knowledge and understanding of the influence of social identity in consumer behavior and how to more effectively encourage green consumer behavior.

### **Summary**

One-on-one interviews were conducted to divulge a deeper understanding of consumer perspectives about the influence of peers on green consumption. The sample for the interviews was divided among two location groups: young consumers in California, USA and young consumers in Finland. The focus of this study was on three elements that result from social identity: social group norms, social learning, and susceptibility to peer comparison. These elements were all considered within the context of green consumer behavior and their individual and combined role in promoting it.

### **Conclusions**

The findings of the study convey that social identity is a strong influencer of green consumer behavior. Overwhelmingly, the participants of the interviews indicated some level of pressure from their social group to perform green consumption. The basis for this influence appeared to stem from the establishment of social group norms surrounding green consumer behavior, which exerted either extrinsic or intrinsic motivations. As such, the existence of green group norms gave way to opportunities for social learning and peer

comparison influence within green consumer behavior. These findings are particularly valuable in understanding what contributes to green consumer behavior and how to more effectively promote consumption in green business.

**Key words:** Green consumer behavior, social identity, social norms, social learning, peer comparison, attitude-behavior gap

**Language:** English

**Grade:**

## Table of Contents

<b>1.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Background	1
1.2	Research Problem	2
1.3	Research Questions	3
1.4	Research Objective	3
<b>2.</b>	<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1	Introduction	3
2.2	Green consumerism as a result of environmental issues	4
2.3	Green consumerism in a social environment	5
2.4	Social group norms inducing green consumerism	6
2.5	Social learning and trust in green consumer behavior	10
2.6	Impact of susceptibility to peer comparison on green consumer behavior	12
2.7	Individual-level considerations of social identity with green consumerism	15
2.8	Conclusions	18
<b>3.</b>	<b>CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>DATA AND METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>20</b>
4.1	Data collection: One-on-one interviews	20
4.2	Sample	21
4.3	Interview design	22
4.4	Data interpretation	23
4.5	Confidentiality	24
<b>5.</b>	<b>ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS</b>	<b>24</b>
5.1	Background on participants	24
5.1.1	General concern for the environment	24
5.1.2	Degree of social identification and normality of green consumer behavior	25
5.2	Social pressures to be a green consumer	27
5.2.1	Teachers versus learners	27
5.2.2	Green consumption as a social group norm	29
5.2.3	Pressure of social sanctions and social approval in shaping green consumers	33
5.3	Reliance on peers for information about green consumer behavior	39
5.3.1	Trust in building green consumers	39
5.3.2	Learning green consumer behavior	41
5.4	Using green consumer behavior for social belonging	45
5.4.1	Being green to fit in	46
5.4.2	Being green is trendy	50
<b>6.</b>	<b>DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>54</b>
6.1	Summary of main findings	54
6.1.1	Main findings regarding the influence of social norms on green consumerism	54

6.1.2	Main findings regarding the influence of social learning on green consumerism .....	56
6.1.3	Main findings regarding the influence of peer comparison on green consumerism .....	56
6.2	Answers to research questions .....	58
6.3	Conclusions and discussion .....	59
6.4	Implications for international business.....	62
6.5	Limitations .....	62
6.6	Suggestions for further research .....	63
6.6.1	Social interactions amidst a pandemic.....	64
6.6.2	Willingness and ability to pay for green products.....	64
<b>REFERENCE LIST.....</b>		<b>65</b>
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>		<b>73</b>
Appendix A: Interview questions .....		73
Appendix B: Interview participant details .....		74

# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Background**

Green consumer behavior is a fairly new topic that has gained significant amounts of attention during the last two decades as information about the climate crisis and global warming started circling most information platforms. Green consumer behavior is a subsection of general consumer behavior, defined by a focus on consuming and purchasing products that make or exhibit environmental claims.

Consumers are aware that consumption behaviors that have become mainstream are not sustainable for themselves or the environment. With companies valuing profit over environmental consciousness for many decades, the focus more recently has turned towards the unsustainable practices of these companies. Therefore, consumption patterns have tended to reflect trends of overconsumption, embodied in the term materialism within the study of consumer behavior. As a result, more recently consumers have actively been changing their attitudes regarding environmental-friendliness and have begun to shift the focus toward green products and green consumption. However, despite this recent shift green consumer behavior is perhaps not as widespread as it appears on the surface.

A significant point of interest has been on the attitude-behavior gap that seems to exist within green consumer behavior. It has been observed that while attitudes toward green products have changed and there seems to be a general desire to be more sustainable, consumers do not purchase green products in ways that would reflect environmentally-friendly attitudes. Yet, some consumers' attitudes do line up with their purchasing behavior. Increasingly, companies that manufacture and sell green products want to know what characteristics contribute to the actual purchasing of environmentally-friendly products, so that these items could potentially be sold to a larger market of consumers.

A consumer's social identity can have major implications in consumption behaviors and decisions. Most significant to this study is the role it can play in green consumption behaviors. Peers—considered in this study as friends, family, and other individuals that are personally proximal to a certain consumer—have a strong impact on the actions of others. Notably, younger individuals seem to absorb the influence of their peers to a much greater

degree than other individuals, as they continue to develop their self-identity, which is contributed to through their social identity. The desire for belongingness may be more pronounced in younger consumers. Consequently, they are more likely to conform to and mimic the actions of those closest to them, namely friends and family, particularly if they feel they face social sanctions otherwise. Similarly, younger individuals and consumers are likely more inclined to compare themselves to their peers, through which they find cues for certain behaviors.

As such, this study on the role of social identity in green consumer behavior is conducted using participants between the ages of 18-27 from both Finland and California in the United States. The two different social environments offer a unique opportunity to also consider any potential differences between how individuals have socialized.

## **1.2 Research Problem**

Green consumer behavior and the factors that increase or decrease the level of green purchasing behaviors consumers partake in is a heavily researched area. Most studies have considered the role of cultural factors and individual consumer characteristics, for example, demographics. However, little research has been done on how social influence affects green purchasing behaviors among consumers.

Another area within the realm of green consumer behavior that has been heavily studied is the role of self-identity. In combination with research focused on the individual alone, there exists a research gap due to limited research focused on the individual in a social environment. Purchases are often made in public and social environments wherein social identity is likely to play a significant role.

Moreover, green products are becoming more and more widespread and easily available for consumers to purchase, and younger consumers growing up in a time plagued by the present environmental crisis are entering the marketplace as more prominent consumers. The change towards permanent green consumer behavior likely lies with the younger generations that may embody the role of a green consumer due to increased awareness about the environment and the overall impact consumers have had on it. Consequently, this study is conducted on young university-level consumers.



Similarly, there exist few studies regarding green consumer behavior in Finland, and ones that compare demographics of young consumers in Finland and California. As such, these two geographic regions will occupy a large focus within this study.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How does a consumer's social identity contribute to consumers' level of green consumption?
2. To what degree do social norms, social learning, and susceptibility to peer comparison among consumers play a role in green consumer behaviors?
3. To what extent do the effects of social identity on green consumer behavior compare between demographics of consumers in Finland and California, USA?

These research questions give way to attempt to close the aforementioned research-gap in the literature related to green consumer behavior.

### **1.4 Research Objective**

The main objective of this study is to contribute to the understanding of the factors that affect young consumers' level of environmentally-friendly purchasing behaviors. As such this should aid in strengthening marketing strategies targeted at increasing the amount of green purchasing. Furthermore, this study should provide greater insights into what motivates green consumer behavior.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The effects of the social environment on consumer behavior have been widely studied and thus it is generally accepted that an individual's social environment plays a significant role in their consumer behaviors. Green consumer behavior is a newer area of study within consumers' social environment due to increasing amounts of concern for the natural environment and the climate. Individuals are increasingly more aware and concerned about the degradation the environment is facing after decades of human activity. This has

ultimately pushed forth a trend toward more sustainable behavior among individuals. More specifically, this trend can be seen embodied in the concept of green consumer behavior, wherein consumers are changing their consumption behaviors to reflect ideas such as environmentally-friendly, eco-friendly, and green.

Despite the increased awareness regarding the environment and climate change, being green seems to be increasingly adapted into popular culture, wherein the behaviors of buying and acting green are more so considered “trendy”. What research has largely disregarded is that trends such like this arise from social interactions and in turn social interactions influence others to adopt these trends. Furthermore, the lack of consideration toward this concept illustrates how prior research has disagreed on the degree to which social environments and social identification influence green consumerism. In general, previously it has been understated to a significant degree. Therefore, on the basis of the literature review, this study will argue that social identification plays a more pronounced role among the factors that have been stated as influential to encouraging green consumerism in individuals.

## **2.2 Green consumerism as a result of environmental issues**

Green consumerism, which is also synonymously referred to as green consumer behavior, is a multifarious concept. Therefore, the term is essential to be defined within the context of this literature review and study.

As concern for the condition of the natural environment has increased among individuals more research has been devoted to the topic of green consumer behavior in an attempt to understand what factors play a role in its existence among consumers (Peattie, 2010). As the term green indicates, green consumerism tends to be used to describe consumer behaviors that attempt to aid in reversing the effects of climate change and environmental degradation caused by human behavior. In fact, green consumerism has been described by researchers as general consumption behaviors that are perceived to have a positive impact on the natural environment, as well as lessen the harmful consequences of human consumption (see Robert, 1993; Khan et al., 2020). These behaviors can include actions such as purchasing products that make environmental claims or even reducing overall consumption.

Green consumer behavior is often a term used conjointly with green marketing, wherein marketers attempt to create perceptions of a product being environmentally-friendly. However, green marketing has often been plagued with controversy in the past due to accusations of green washing—a term that is used to describe marketing of products that make false claims about the environmental aspects of the product. While green washing is not a focus of this study, it may contribute to the understanding of why some consumers appear to refuse to adopt green consumption behaviors although they are concerned for the environment, a so-called “say-do gap” (Lehmann & Sheffi, 2020: 77). This gap can have substantial consequences on the environment, and perhaps ultimately defeats the purpose of green consumerism. This conflicting discrepancy between purchase intentions and actual purchase behaviors may be resolved through a deeper understanding of how the social environment influences individuals’ green consumer behavior.

### **2.3 Green consumerism in a social environment**

The social environment, also known to be referred to as the social context by some, is defined so as to “encompass the immediate physical surroundings, social relationships, and cultural milieus within which defined groups of people function and interact” (Barnett & Casper, 2001: 465). The social environment is significant in a discussion of green consumer behavior because the social interaction present in the environment allows for social identification. Without an existing social environment social groups would be unable to form. Thus, the social environment of consumers is crucial for social identity to play a role in green consumerism. Yet, all individuals function in some form of a social environment, so the ever-present social interactions individuals take part in undoubtedly influence certain behaviors (Johnstone & Hooper, 2016).

The social environment as mentioned above often gives way to individuals forming social groups as part of their social identity. Social identity, as theorized by Tajfel (1982), expresses the way in which individuals place themselves in relevant social groups that are often reflective of their actual or desired self-identity. The formation of social groups stems largely from the need for a sense of belongingness. Therefore, generally every consumer has some form of perceived membership in a social group that results from an innate need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Peer groups, including friends and family, are generally derived from the broader defined social groups. Therein, the closer social proximity present in peer

groups are likely to be highly influential with consumers and to their purchase decisions. This may mean that consumers are inherently more likely to trust their peers to offer them the correct cues to function appropriately.

While the influence of social identity in green consumerism is multifaceted, three major factors of this influence appear most significant to green consumerism and will be the main focus of this study and the literature review. Social norms, social learning, and susceptibility to peer comparison may work in conjunction with each other, and they may also work independently. Yet, there is also a large degree of overlap between them as they are all models of behavior. They are factors that develop from social groups that to some degree exert influence to adopt certain consumer behaviors. Therein, these issues that exist in social groups are indeed agents for motivating green consumer behavior.

However, some research disagrees as to the degree that social identity within peer groups, and therefore also the aforementioned factors, play a role in green consumer behavior. In an attempt to resolve this discrepancy, the following literature review discusses the extent to which social identity has a role. In fact, it appears to have been grossly understated by some previous research.

#### **2.4 Social group norms inducing green consumerism**

Conformity within social identity can be viewed in several forms. One such way is through experiencing modelling and instructions from social group members. Individuals often adopt certain behaviors through the observation of other individuals they feel attached to in some way (see Wooten & Reed, 2004; Griskevicius et al., 2006). Unsurprisingly, consumers may feel inclined to imitate established behaviors among peers. Within green consumer behavior, many consumers rely on those around them to guide this consumption behavior (see Faiers et al., 2006; Vermier & Verbeke, 2007; Nolan et al., 2008). This position appears reasonable with consideration of the potential impact of social norms on consumer behavior. Thus, peers will model certain behavior that can influence how those around them act, which is often in accordance with that specific behavior.

As the desire to sustain and protect the environment increases in consumers, green behaviors become more normal in social groups. Attachment to these groups make consumers more likely to adhere to these social norms—also referred to as subjective norms—to reinforce a sense of belonging (Wooten & Reed, 2004). However, Gabler et al. (2013) offered a contrary explanation. In their study on green consumer behavior, they expressed that “there is a lack of subjective norms to influence individual behavior...” (ibid:166). It should be noted, however, that their study was conducted in 2013, and consumer attitudes have likely greatly evolved since the study was published. Consequently, the most notable evolution in consumer behavior is in the context of environmental protection.

While the concept of environmental protectionism has been prevalent for decades, as more information has been discovered about the trend and more consumers learn about the role they can take on, norms relating to green consumerism have developed and become widely prevalent. In fact, Gadenne et al. (2011) discovered that “general environmental beliefs do influence environmental norms on environmental actions” (p.7692). This journal article that was published two years prior to the abovementioned article, highlights the existence of norms that impact environmentally-friendly behavior. Furthermore, the power that social norms have in inducing green consumer behavior have been illustrated more recently as well (see Kim, 2017). Therefore, despite the presence of an attitude-behavior gap in green consumption behaviors, there is certainly some degree of social norms that capture how consumers act when they observe green consumerism in their peers.

Therefore, social norms that exist within a social group that are aimed at environmentally-friendly behavior can encourage and motivate other members to be engaged in green consumer behaviors. Goldstein et al. (2008) reinforced this position. Moreover, they also highlighted that “...making a meaningful social identity salient without providing descriptive normative information is not an optimal approach” (p. 479). As such, this would suggest that social norms are an essential consideration in the role social identity plays in green consumer behavior.

Social identity in consumers also offers a unique possibility to learn appropriate behaviors by observing how other members of that social group behave. Thus, if green consumption is an accepted behavior of a particular social group, though it may not be important to some

members, it is likely to be accepted by all members (see Tsarenko et al., 2013; Bartels & Reinders, 2016). This position seems reasonable in the sense that individuals may fear social sanctions if they do not adopt behaviors that are expected among peers. This would lead individuals to act in ways that reflect those they attach themselves to, which can also be the case in green consumer behavior.

In contrast, Minton and Rose (1997) claimed that personal norms held greater strength in green consumer behavior than social norms. However, this claim does not consider that personal norms are an extension of social norms. While Minton and Rose (ibid) did, in fact, extend this idea in their research, they maintained that personal norms more consequential than social norms. More recently, Vermier and Verbeke (2007), Nolan et al. (2008), Kim and Chung (2011) disagreed with the above position, as they highlighted that social norms do have a powerful effect on green behaviors, specifically green consumer behavior. Therefore, in order to fully understand the role of social identity in motivating green consumer behavior, it is necessary to consider the social norms that are prevalent in social groups, especially when they are directly related to environmental consciousness.

Some researchers have claimed that the role of social groups in modelling specific behaviors is more pronounced in collectivistic individuals, who are generally more likely to act for the benefit of the group (Rizwan et al., 2017). However, Nolan et al (2008) found the effects of social norms in influencing environmentally-friendly behavior to be present in the state of California in the United States, an area that is thought to contain a highly individualistic population. Similarly, Kalafatis et al. (1999), in investigating green consumer behavior in the United Kingdom and Greece, found that social norms were "...the only determinant associated with a significant direct effect on intention [to purchase green product]" (p. 453), while in Greece the determinants were less obvious. Despite more recent research disclaiming this view, it would not be appropriate to express that the influence of social norms is limited only to collectivistic demographics, especially as views toward the environmental crisis become more drastic and pessimistic.

Social identities' and social groups' role as models and instructions of certain behaviors stem from their apparent power regarding social persuasion. Social groups have the ability to reinforce and punish the actions of members in a way to accomplish desired behaviors (Lin & Hsu, 2015). Social groups can offer indications of appropriate behavior through the

establishment of social norms. Consequently, consumption behaviors toward a general preservation of the environment may be considered a social norm that members of the group are expected to adhere to in order to enforce their social identity in that social group (see Vermier & Verbeke, 2007; Goldstein et al., 2008; Clark et al., 2018).

However, Minton and Rose (1997) proposed that personal moral obligations within consumers hold greater power in encouraging green consumer behavior. It should be noted that their study was conducted over two decades ago, and therefore, it is relatively safe to assume that these observations may show discrepancies in present young consumers. Moreover, in a more recent review produced by Peattie (2010), the issue was expressed as follows:

“There is an assumption in much of the literature that over time environmental knowledge will increase, leading to a strengthening of environmental values and to a willingness to take some responsibility for tackling environmental problems.... [American adolescents] increasingly saw environmental responsibilities as something for government, business or an abstract notion of ‘the consumer’ rather than themselves.” (p. 208).

While this review may also not be entirely reflective of present-day views, it is improbable that these notions have drastically changed. Therefore, it is likely that other motivating factors, such as social norms, need to exist in order to further encourage green consumption behavior among consumers.

The possibility of facing social sanctions enforces and maintains specific social identities. Lin and Hsu (2015) investigated the role of social sanctions within green consumer behavior. Significantly, they found that the pressure of social sanctions does have a significant influence on the presence of green consumer behavior within an individual. Clark et al. (2018) highlighted that, in fact, “social pressures may be the strongest motivator of behavior” (p. 184). Similarly, others have concurred that green consumer behavior is to some extent a fostered behavior when consumers want to avoid social sanctions that arise from violating social norms set by the social group (Jouzani & Esfahani, 2020). Furthermore, Bandura (1971) expressed that “people learn to evaluate their behavior partly on the basis of how others have reacted to it” (p. 28). He illustrated that these reactions are often based on norms that “constitute worthy performances” (ibid: 28), which further indicated that social

identity perhaps has an immense pressure on consumers to behave according to environmental expectations of a social group.

Therein, as developed through the above discussion, despite some researchers arguing against the presence and role of social norms in contributing to green consumer behavior it is a position that is unlikely to hold true. In fact, social group norms likely have a much greater role in green consumerism than has been observed before.

## **2.5 Social learning and trust in green consumer behavior**

The process of social learning was first theorized by Bandura (1971) as part of social identification. It is described as individuals observing behaviors from their social environment and subsequently, applying those same behaviors in their own behavior (ibid).

Consequently, the process of learning green consumer behaviors is a necessary and significant consideration in the discussion regarding the role of social identity. Much of what consumers learn regarding consumption behaviors is through observing and socializing with their peers (Bandura, 1971). Through a consumer's social identity, they are exposed to a copious amount of often more trustworthy information about consumption behaviors that they can rely on. However, while some research has been conducted on social learning, it is largely insufficient relating specifically to how it affects green consumer behavior.

There exists an abundance of information about green products that may be difficult for consumers to navigate. Increasingly, it may become difficult for consumers wishing to adopt a more environmentally-friendly attitude in their consumption behavior to find the necessary information about green products online and other less-personal platforms. As such, Vermier and Verbeke (2007) observed that consumers may begin to lose confidence in their ability to make the most appropriate consumption decisions. Thus, it is increasingly likely that they will rely on their social environment to make these choices (ibid).

Therefore, consumers increasingly rely on their social environment to learn appropriate behaviors, or in the context of shopping, to gain knowledge about products. Social groups can provide informational cues to other consumers which indicate to the consumer what products they should purchase (see Faiers et al., 2006; Salazar et al., 2013; Manca et al.,



2020). A social group could indicate that a green product is better than its non-green counterpart or alternative, influencing consumers, by relying on trust toward the social group, to buy the preferred green product. This is a view that was reflected by Manca et al. (2020), for they maintained that "... the peers' attitude is a significant explanatory variable of an individual's attitude" (p. 293), particularly in choosing between sustainable products and non-sustainable products. Thus, through the process of social learning consumers may learn to adopt a general green consumer behavior, in such a way not cited in past studies.

Accordingly, consumers can rely on their peers to learn about green consumption behaviors. Through this process, they are more likely to adopt these green consumption behaviors. Buenstorf and Cordes (2008) asserted that green consumption is a learned behavior among consumers, through what they called a "conformist bias" (p. 655). Though, they also contended that the relationship is weak to some degree, in that once green consumer behavior is learned, it is not guaranteed to remain an instilled behavior in the consumer forever. However, Grabs et al. (2016) and Salciuviene et al. (2019) also highlighted that individuals are able to learn sustainable consumption behaviors through learning processes. While this research did not consider social learning in isolation, it is safe to accept that social learning, as a key factor of social identity, can influence green consumer behaviors. Therefore, this suggests that social learning is a constant process that a consumer must engage in routinely in order to maintain green consumer behavior.

Moreover, consumers who differ in their degree of social identity, accept cues and learn behaviors in different forms. Fielding et al. (2008) asserted that individuals that tend to identify to a greater degree to social groups are more likely to observe, learn, and then mimic the behaviors of individuals that belong to their specific social group. Comparatively, individuals that identify to a lesser degree tend to observe and mirror the behaviors of other individuals that both belong to their social group and exist outside of that group. Although their study was conducted on farmers and sustainable farming methods, it appears that their findings are practical in a general sense concerning individual consumers, and thus can be extended to address these issues. Therefore, this would indicate that, generally, all consumers can learn appropriate green behaviors from observing their proximal social environment.

Although it is not a widely popular area of study, according to the above discussion social learning has a critical function in contributing to green consumer behavior. Consumers are often motivated in the product purchasing process by wanting to make the most informed and hence the best decision. Thus, consumers may prefer to depend on their peers to offer information, implicitly or explicitly, about products or other consumption behaviors, in order to make more informed consumer decisions. Most frequently, consumers will observe their peers' behaviors and take what they see into account in their own green consumer behaviors.

## **2.6 Impact of susceptibility to peer comparison on green consumer behavior**

A consumer's social identification in a social group also offers room for peer comparison—more broadly referred to as social comparison—which can aid in motivating green consumption behaviors. Most individuals and consumers, perhaps subconsciously, compare themselves to others in their social environment, but what may be overlooked is how this act of comparing impacts personal decisions, particularly in consumption matters. This relies heavily, however, on the individual's susceptibility to social comparison. Susceptibility to interpersonal influence and similarly, peer comparison, is a construct that illustrates how to some consumers, it is critical to attach themselves to others, often peers, and signal this attachment and enhance their own self-image so that their peers hold positive images of them (Bearden et al., 1989).

Bearden et al. (ibid) also emphasized that this signaling is often done through purchasing and using certain products that consumers believe will achieve this, and it often includes a degree of wanting and willingness to conform to the group. Discovering the correct behaviors to achieve, what can be described as social acceptance, is done, in part, through peer comparison, where consumers observe the expected behaviors and strive to mimic them. Bearden and Rose (1990) also highlighted the following:

“It is possible to make predictions concerning the relative importance of interpersonal antecedents of consumers' purchase intentions by measuring consumers' predisposition to act on the social cues available at the time a purchase of consumption decision is being made.” (p. 461)

This position rightly holds that consumers receive copious amounts of information from their social environment that can influence the consumer's purchase decisions. This is further substantiated by Jager et al. (2000) in that they noted that because consumers have limited mental resources to aid in decision making, they often participate in social comparison. They detailed this effect as especially relevant to motivating environmentally-conscious behaviors. However, the consumer must be paying attention to these social cues and be willing to accept them. Thus, this is an important condition that researchers have found must hold, in order for peer comparison to influence consumption behavior.

Therein, an important factor to consider in determining the role peer comparison plays in motivating green consumer behavior is the degree to which a particular consumer is susceptible to partaking in the action of comparing themselves, their behaviors, their actions, and their product decisions, to their peers. Kim et al (2014) presented their study at a conference in Orlando, Florida, in which they described that if a consumer has a higher susceptibility to peer comparison, they are more likely to make product choices that conform to their peers so as to "assimilate socially and minimize social risk" (p. 33). Therefore, the caveat in peer comparison influencing green consumer behavior is that a consumer must have a high susceptibility to peer comparison in order for it to change or maintain a specific behavior, such as green consumption (see Bearden & Rose, 1990; Aagerup & Nilsson, 2016; Kim et al., 2016; Usmani & Ejaz, 2020). Therefore, the emphasis prior to measuring the impact of peer comparison should be relating to whether or not consumers are willing and able to receive social cues that develop from susceptibility to peer comparison.

Nonetheless, social comparison, and more pertinently, peer comparison, is, in fact, a significant factor that governs green consumer behavior. Leila et al. (2016) presented this position at the AMA Marketing and Public Policy Conference, wherein they described how they found that an endorser of a product "...indirectly influences intention [to purchase] through an identification process" (p. 109). This position is further supported by Burgiel (2017), for they noted similar findings. Accordingly, with the appropriate conditions set in place, peer comparison can provide a significant indicator of a factor that influences environmentally-friendly consumption.

Peer comparison within motivating green consumer behavior offers influences in engaging in group conformity, which has also been described as a normative influence (see Bearden

et al., 1989; Clark & Goldsmith, 2006). This stems, in some part, from the presence of social pressures that drive consumers to conform. Vermier and Verbeke (2007) maintained that “consumers who experience high social pressure to buy sustainable products, have a higher behavioral intention toward purchasing these products” (p. 548). Ultimately, this conformity lends itself to social acceptance and approval from the group.

Hence, the degree of susceptibility to peer comparison in a consumer is motivated through the desire for social acceptance. This appears to suggest that individuals and consumers, particularly, wish to signal their desired social identity allowing them to be accepted and approved of in a group of peers. It is possible that through peer comparison, a consumer could learn cues about appropriate behaviors for their desired social group. Then, by mimicking similar behaviors, that consumer could, potentially, signal to the group that they belong to the group, and in turn, they would achieve social acceptance (see Griskevicius et al., 2010; Jouzdani & Esfahani, 2020). Admittedly, what research seems to ignore is this can be a high stress-inducing situation for consumers, which is cited to have consequences on their consumption behavior. Thornquist (2017) argued this view, expressing that taking a more unemotional approach to creating product attachments will allow consumers to make better product decisions. This could potentially mean that a consumer would be less likely to select a green product if they feel a greater sense of anxiety and pressure to select it. However, in contrast, anxiety in consumers more susceptible to peer comparison may motivate them to select the green product over its non-green product, as a way to avoid social sanctions that are often feared. (Lin & Hsu, 2015).

Similarly, consumers can compare themselves to others in order to observe the necessary behaviors required to signal a certain identity. Contrary to observing behavior and then mimicking it, a consumer can also observe behavior and choose to act opposite to that behavior to signal an identity, as well. This can be a particularly important consideration with environmentally-friendly products because they tend to signal to others that the consumer is, in a sense, doing their part to protect the environment. This is a view corroborated by Berger and Heath (2007), for they exhibited that consumers “...want to communicate particular social identities’ (p. 132) and they may do so through diverging from their social groups. Thus, this may be a consideration among consumers that are, perhaps, less susceptible to peer comparison in that they feel less pressure to conform, but rather, want to signal an identity distinct from their peers.

The hope to achieve social acceptance and signal a specific identity is also seen in a consumer's adherence to green consumer behavior. Researchers have found that this desire does, in fact, affect whether or not a consumer decides to purchase environmentally-friendly products (see Agerup & Nilsson, 2016; Gotlieb, 2019; Jouzdani & Esfahani, 2020). This issue of self-enhancement may be particularly significant with consumers who are more highly susceptible to peer comparison.

Higher susceptibility to peer comparison stems at least in part from lower levels of self-esteem and social anxiety (see Lennox & Wolfe, 1984; Clark & Goldsmith, 2006). Accordingly, maintaining self-enhancement is a significant way to maintain self-esteem (Taylor & Brown, 1988), so it may be likely that consumers with a higher susceptibility to peer comparison will also pursue actions that increase self-enhancement. It should be noted, however, that some have challenged that self-esteem does not play a significant role in green consumption behaviors (Usmani & Ejaz, 2020).

However, the study conducted by Usmani and Ejaz (*ibid*) was conducted on a fairly small scale and has difficulties in terms of generalization due to the population from which the sample was gathered. Therefore, their study would need to be replicated in order to confirm its cogency. Although self-esteem may not alone influence the degree of green consumerism a consumer partakes in, it can signal the extent to which a consumer pursues green consumption with regards to cues accepted from their social environment. However, self-esteem appears to be better considered as a factor resulting in a consumer's susceptibility to peer comparison.

## **2.7 Individual-level considerations of social identity with green consumerism**

Some research argues that the impact of social identification in green consumers is more pronounced for collectivistic individuals (see Chan, 2001; Khare et al., 2015; Rizwan et al., 2017). However, highly individualistic individuals, to some degree, will feel influenced by their social environment, as well. Most notably peers, such as friends, family, and other individuals that are significant to the consumer, will influence consumers regardless of their personal doctrines (Peattie, 2010). Hence, it would be reasonable to acknowledge that

consumers in all cultures are affected by their peers, and the construct is not limited to only one type of consumer.

Additionally, green consumption can be considered to be a public behavior, wherein the social environment that a consumer is shopping in has some degree of influence. Several authors support that green purchases are often made in the context of a social network as, for example, a member of a family or a group of friends (see Grønhøj, 2006; Peattie, 2010). As such, it can be myopic to consider green consumption behaviors as acts done in an individual, private context without considering the effects of the social environment. However, admittedly, personal contexts can also, in part, contribute to green consumer behavior and thus, cannot be ignored. For example, general environmental concern and knowledge are significant considerations that should be taken into account and can influence the presence of green consumption behavior in consumers (see Peattie, 2010; Sadachar et al., 2017; Uddin & Khan, 2018).

The average consumer seems to be increasingly concerned about the environment, but a general concern for the environment does not always translate into more sustainable consumer behavior (White et al., 2012). Cheah and Phau (2011) and Tsarenko et al. (2013) highlighted that while concern for the environment is important to maintain green consumption, that attitude does not push consumers to make greener decisions when they are shopping. Moreover, it is stressed that simply increasing environmental concern does not aid in changing environmentally-friendly product purchase intentions (Tsarenko et al., *ibid*). In contrast, several researchers have claimed that, in fact, interpersonal influence has a weak effect on green consumption behavior (see Sadachar et al., 2017; Uddin & Khan, 2018). Rather, they claim that environmental knowledge has a greater influence in motivating green consumption. What must be noted, however, is that the study held a focus on apparel consumption. Therefore, it may not be entirely reflective of the characteristics that play a role in overall consumer product consumption.

Moreover, as illustrated by Cheah and Phau (2011), neither factor acts alone. These views, considered jointly, rightly establish that environmental knowledge and/or concern are necessary for social identity to be an influence in green consumption behaviors. Similarly, Gadenne et al. (2011) established that “environmental drivers together with social norms and community influence are associated with environmental attitudes” (p.7692). Therefore,

it would be more appropriate to consider how environmental concerns contribute to the role social identity plays in green consumerism. Accordingly, it would be more appropriate to establish environmental attitudes and social identity as interrelated concepts.

Similarly, researchers have found that in the context of green consumer behavior, social influence plays a significant role in driving green purchase decisions (see Cheah & Phau, 2011; Dotson & Hyatt, 2011; Khare et al., 2015; Suki & Suki, 2019). While Bartels and Hoogendam (2011) and Bartels and Onwezen (2014) supported this position, they emphasized the importance of environmental consciousness being a valued aspect of the social group, as they argued that the group has a greater influence if the group is already established as environmentally conscious. Other researchers may have too broad a view of the significance of social groups in motivating green consumer behavior, which fails to specify the need for a green-focused social group in order to promote green values among members, as highlighted by Bartels and Hoogendam (2011) and others. Consequently, having environmental concerns is necessary within a group in order for there to be pressure and motivation to make purchase decisions in an environmentally-friendly manner.

It is generally agreed that consumers' consumption behavior is influenced by their social environment (see Bearden & Rose, 1990; Jackson & Smith, 1999; Burgiel, 2017). However, as previously expressed, this relationship lacks sufficient research synchronously with green consumer behavior. Individuals and consumers have certain points of reference for behaviors, and these reference points are often in the form of their peers, including friends and family members. Undoubtedly, most consumers accept certain cues from their peers to make purchase decisions. In the context of the green consumerism trend, with increasingly large amounts of information circulating new environmentally-friendly products and their non-green counterparts, consumers may find it difficult to navigate the information to make sound decisions about consumption behaviors. Therefore, it is increasingly likely that consumers will rely on their social environment in order to make choices about buying green versus non-green products (Vermier & Verbeke, 2007). Moreover, social identity in consumers may even influence a trend towards greener consumer behavior, if it is a valued behavior within that social group (see Bartels & Hoogendam, 2011; Bartels & Onwezen, 2014).

Furthermore, the idea that consumers can help in the fight against environmental degradation may not reach the average consumer to the same extent that it may an environmental activist. Thus, green consumer behavior, while a growing trend, may still feel somewhat far away and, perhaps, insignificant to most consumers (Gabler et al., 2013). Some consumers may perceive that their efforts will not have a substantial effect so they cease to put significant efforts into the matter. However, being an environmentally-friendly consumer may feel increasingly worthwhile if there is participation from a proximal social group. This would appropriately suggest that green consumerism is a consistently expected behavior in the group.

## **2.8 Conclusions**

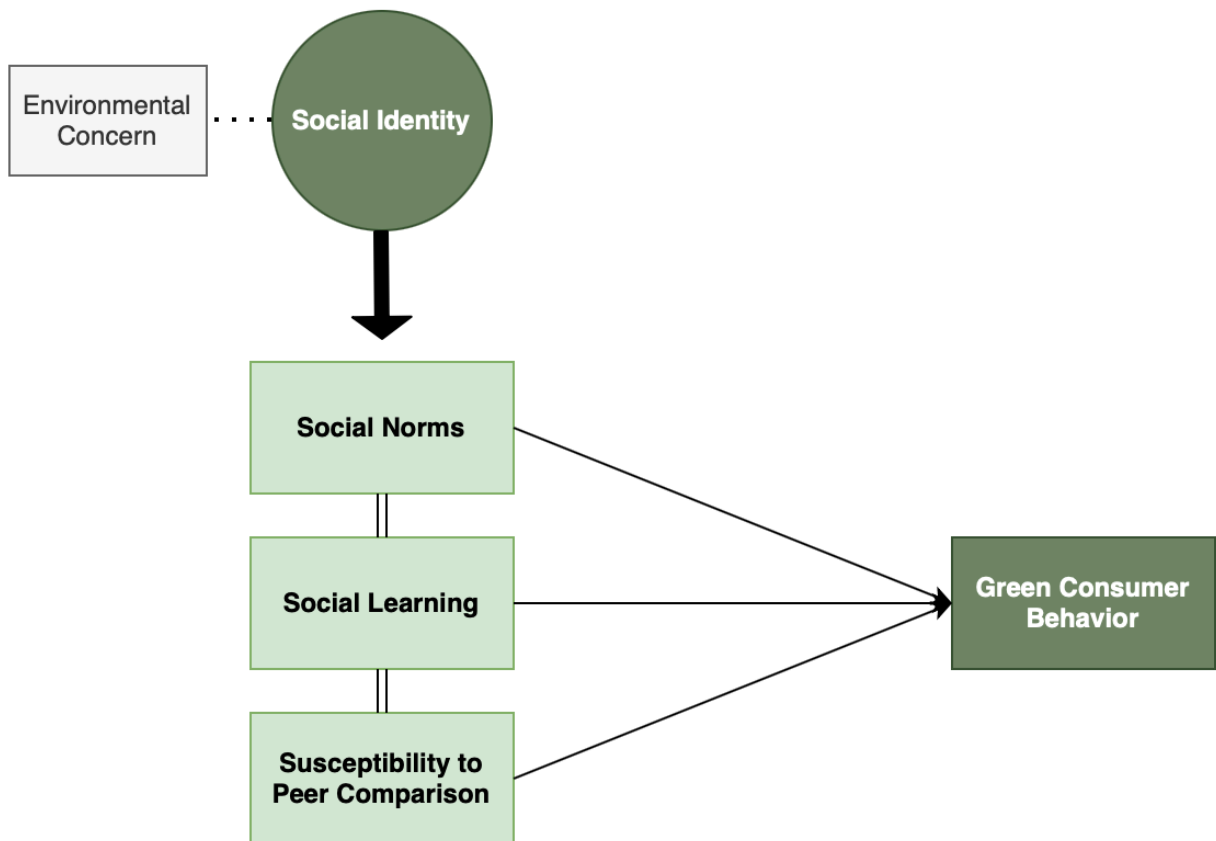
The review of existing literature establishes that consumers' social identity plays a notable role in motivating green consumer behaviors despite the apparent disaccord relating to the issue. Moreover, the considerations attached to a consumer's social identity—social norms, social learning, and susceptibility to peer comparison—have crucial implications for the potential motivation toward green consumption behavior in that consumer. While the influence of social identity in green consumer behavior has not received as much attention as perhaps some other factors, social identity is a major indicator of whether or not a consumer will be inclined to adopt green consumer behaviors. Overall, the main trends visible through the literature concerning green consumerism view social identity and susceptibility to peer comparison as the salient contributors in activating environmentally-friendly consumption behaviors in consumers (see Bearden & Rose, 1990; Jackson & Smith, 1999; Burgiel, 2017). Specifically, the pressures that develop from social identification in a social group make consumers feel more inclined to participate in green consumer behaviors.

Furthermore, a general concern for environmental issues is an essential predeterminant of the degree of influence social identity, and its corresponding characteristics can have on encouraging green consumerism (Cheah & Phau, 2011). Therefore, this study will focus on the role of social identity in green consumer behavior under the pretense of a general environmental concern being present in the consumer. Furthermore, while there are several characteristics of social identity, social norms, social learning, and peer comparison will be the pivots of this study as they have been understated and disregarded in past research.



### 3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

From examining the existing literature on green consumer behavior and social identity, it can be seen that there exists a valuable link between social identity and green consumerism. This link is bridged by several factors related to social identity that work as actors that strengthen the link to motivating green consumer behavior. The factors, social norms, informational cues, and social approval may work conjointly or in a case where one factor is stronger than the other in encouraging green consumerism. However, this link is observed in the presence of environmental concern, which has been determined as an essential prerequisite ensuring that there truly exists a link. A general concern should exist so that green consumerism is a consideration within individuals disregarding social influences. Therefore, from the examination of literature, the following conceptual framework has arisen:



*Figure 1 Conceptual Framework*

The main pathway toward green consumer behavior follows the black lines. Environmental concern is connected to social identity with a dotted line because it is an important preexisting condition that must be present, but it is not the main consideration of this study.

Starting from the left-hand side, environmental concern is the characteristic that initiates the process. With environmental concerns in place, it is possible to consider the influence of social identity as a motivating factor of green consumerism. As depicted, social identity offers three elements that stem from the influence of peers on an individual, which then influences green consumer behaviors. The rationale behind this is that social identity leads to membership in a social group. Then, within that social group, these three elements arise as behavioral influencers. These facets, social norms, social learning, and susceptibility to peer comparison, are then taken in conjunction to determine whether they all appear as significant considerations or one rises more influential to an individual consumer than the others. Finally, the extent to which a consumer is encouraged to partake in green consumer behavior is considered based on these three factors.

#### **4. DATA AND METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative interview study approach was selected to explore and gain greater insights into the role social identity plays in green consumer behavior. Semi-structured interviews provided the opportunity to delve deeper into the reasons for the presence of green consumerism in younger-aged consumers. This approach allowed participants of this study to self-reflect and offer their views. This was deemed essential because green consumerism is multifaceted and appears differently in each consumer. Thereby, interviews should be able to better illustrate the degree and extent to which social identity influences motivating green consumer behavior.

##### **4.1 Data collection: One-on-one interviews**

As one of the goals of the research was to be able to compare interview responses among consumer demographics in Finland and California, each interview had its foundations based on a set of predeveloped questions. However, because the main challenge of fully structured interviews lies in their static nature, meaning that there are fewer opportunities to further elaborate on ideas and discussions, the interviews for this study took on a semi-structured form. This approach gave way to be able to gauge more information from participants and provided an opportunity for participants to build on their thoughts on relevant issues. Therefore, throughout the interviews, further questions may have been posed to build on a

theme or other interesting insight that was expressed in a response. This provided critical information during the interviews which would not have otherwise possible to gather. This approach proved necessary and essential to the findings of this study. However, this approach, to some degree, took away from the comparability of the findings.

While interviews were chosen to allow for a greater in-depth exploration and understanding of the human experiences embedded within this topic, the research dealt with several challenges. A challenge particularly worth noting is that these interviews focused on a somewhat sensitive topic, which may have made some participants feel reluctant to share some, perhaps, perceived controversial opinions. To partially resolve this particular issue, interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis. This provided participants with a more discrete and open environment to share their thoughts and beliefs. In general, several challenges laid in encouraging participants to share their opinions openly and creating an environment that made them feel comfortable enough to report deeper feelings and insights. Furthermore, the generalizability of the findings of this study is limited, which will be discussed in a later section.

## **4.2 Sample**

Two sample groups for one-to-one interviews were formed. One sample group consisted of young consumers, aged 18-30 from Finland, and the other consisted of young consumers, also aged 18-30, from the state of California in the United States. This age of consumers was selected for this sample because as has been studied (see Martinsons et al., 1997) younger-aged consumers have historically been more receptive to green attitudes and thus, green consumer behavior. As this was a critical consideration in the parameters of this study, the research sought to isolate this age group. California was opted for over the entirety of the United States to allow for easier comparison with the sample of consumers in Finland. This distinction was made considering the different regional cultures that exist throughout the United States (Nolan et al., 2008). Therefore, to allow for a more seamless comparison, California ensured, at least to some degree, similar values related to environmental issues, much like the singular regional culture within Finland (ibid).

Furthermore, interviewees from California were selected based on the participant residing in the state and indicating that they felt a sense of being from California. This indication

needed to be made because multitudes of consumers are not solely American, and indicated so during the interview process. Yet, having a particular sense of being from California discerns that they may share the regional values and characteristics of others in the state. Similar definitions were used for participants selected in Finland, wherein they reside in Finland and indicated that they felt a sense of being Finnish. Everything considered for gathering this study's sample, participants were selected based on a purposive sample.

Twenty-four semi-structured interviews were conducted in total during the months of January and February. Each group was evenly split with twelve interviews conducted in each group. More details are provided in Appendix B. Additionally, each interview was conducted via an online video calling platform in English.

Furthermore, it should be noted that there was an obvious imbalance of participants by gender. A majority of the participants in both location group samples identified as female. This was somewhat unsurprising as Lee (2009) highlighted that green attitudes are more pronounced in the female gender. This can provide light to why this discrepancy occurred. In addition, as delimited by the objectives of this study, gender overall was not a significant consideration.

### **4.3 Interview design**

The interviews contained approximately eighteen predetermined questions, not including general demographic questions (See Appendix A for the full list of predeveloped interview questions). These were meant to gauge consumer attitudes toward green consumer behavior and gain insights about what motivates those behaviors in an individual participant. Several interviews included follow-up questions designed to allow the participant to elaborate on their thoughts. Moreover, some questions were designed as branching questions, for which only one follow-up question was posed and the other was not answered. These questions were devised to reflect the multifaceted nature of green consumer behavior and corresponding consumer attitudes toward the topic. The study recognized that not all participants would be the same, so it was necessary to have flexible questions that allowed the research to facilitate discussion in a similar way best suited for each interview.

Each interview began with a screening question, wherein the participant was asked to share their views on environmental issues. As a development of the literature review, it was determined that a general concern for the environment and the corresponding crisis was critical to previously exist. Otherwise, without this attitude, it is not possible to measure how social identity contributes to the level of green consumer behavior in individuals. Therefore, if any participant were to indicate a lack of concern for the environment, the rest of the interview was not performed. Thereafter, if the participant indicated that they held some degree of concern the interview was continued. Importantly, each participant described concern.

Other questions of the interview dealt with several themes that arose due to the prior literature review. To assess background considerations of each participant necessary for the study included measures for the degree of social identity present in the participant and their general level of green consumer behavior. These questions were not designed to directly evaluate the role of social identity in green consumer behavior. However, participants often provided responses that indirectly offered cues related to the research questions of this study through these questions. The resulting questions, designed to provide answers to the research questions, dealt with themes of social norms, social learning, and peer comparison.

#### **4.4 Data interpretation**

After an initial analysis of all the interviews to develop key concepts that appeared consistently in the interviews, each interview was interpreted in detail and common themes were extracted. For consistency, the same terms were used to describe phenomenon that appeared to be related in the collection of interviews. One of the main goals of the interpretation of the data was to focus on individual thoughts and behaviors to understand what factors contribute to green consumer behavior. As was expressed previously, green consumer behavior, especially in the context of the social environment is multifaceted and can appear differently in different consumers. Therefore, each interview was analyzed on an individual basis. However, once key themes were extracted, the interviews were compared and contrasted on several grounds: individual, with distinctions not made based on demographic factors, and location.

#### **4.5 Confidentiality**

While topics concerned with environmental issues are more prevalent presently than historically, speaking freely about personal views and choices is still often met with hesitation. This trend was observed, though infrequently, among the interviews conducted for this study. Therefore, each participant was informed of the topic of the interview and was ensured confidentiality of their identity prior to beginning the interview. Furthermore, permission was asked and granted for recording interviews, and to maintain guarantees of confidentiality all recordings are not accessible to anyone other than the researcher. Additionally, any names and other identifying aspects have been redacted in direct quotes so that participants cannot be identified.

### **5. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

Comparisons between interviewees based on location will be made where they are observed, and will be summarized in a later section. Otherwise, the main focus will be on how the participant responses compared among each other, regardless of factors such as location or gender.

#### **5.1 Background on participants**

For purposes of interpreting the data following the interviews, it was essential to gather background information about the participants. Most of the information related to general views on the state of the natural environment, regarding topics such as climate change, general degree of social identification, and overall environmentally-friendly behaviors or lack thereof of the participants. As will be discussed further later, this information was essential for fully understanding how social identity contributes specifically to green consumer behavior.

##### **5.1.1 General concern for the environment**

As was indicated by past literature, a consumer must be concerned about the state of the environment for that consumer to consider green consumption. If a consumer does not feel a general level of concern, green consumption will not be considered a valued or necessary

behavior, perhaps even with the influence of a social group. Therefore, to be able to completely analyze and understand how social identity can influence green consumer behavior each interview began with a screening question that asked participants to describe their views on climate change.

Overwhelmingly, all participants indicated that they were concerned for the environment. For some participants, the level of concern they reported was much greater than for others, but importantly, there was at least a general concern present in all participants. Some examples of responses for this question included the following:

“I’d say I’m kind of worried about climate change and the whole crisis.” (Finnish Interviewee 9)

“I guess my views on climate change, in general, is kind of like one of concern.” (Finnish Interviewee 6)

“So, my views on climate change is that it is definitely happening.” (Californian Interviewee 6)

### **5.1.2 Degree of social identification and normality of green consumer behavior**

To determine the level of social identification that was typical for each participant and to what extent their social identity was entwined with green behaviors several questions were posed. These questions related to:

- Similarity of views on climate change
- Relationship to friends and family
- Importance of belonging to a group
- Reliance on friends and family for information

There was an interesting concurrence regarding how views on climate change compared between the participant and their friends and family. Unsurprisingly, participants expressed that their friends shared similar views of concern for the environment. The most common view was exemplified by Finnish participant 6:

“I’m pretty sure I’ve surrounded myself with people who agree with me on climate change for the most part.”

Additionally, most participants admonished that their parents, in general, did not share these concerns. To illustrate, Californian interviewee 4 captured this trend:

“I think there are some differences between age like my stepdad...I think the views differ on like, who’s responsible and how we should do it. And I know I’ll talk to him about it sometimes, and he’s like, but that’s your generation’s problem.”

This view was further supported and elaborated on by several participants who mentioned generational differences. They explained how they thought green consumer behavior and concern for the environment was more normal and expected by a younger-aged generation who have grown up with the consequences of environmental degradation. There were some exceptions to this, wherein some participants indicated that their parents were as fervent about environmental issues as they were.

Significantly, all participants in both groups indicated that they had strong social identification with their friends, in particular. Moreover, the amount of reliance on friends and family for information varied to some degree among interviewees. Finnish interviewees in large conveyed that they preferred to discuss green issues with peers after sourcing the information from the news or other similar platforms. As such, they expressed that they seldom intentionally or solely sourced information directly from their peers. In contrast, several Californian interviewees communicated that they rely heavily on their friends for this information:

“I rely on them [friends] pretty heavily because they watch the news more than me and know events so whenever something happens they tell me... they’re my first cues on information.”  
(Californian Interviewee 3)

“I don’t tend to look at the news...So, unless I hear from people I don’t really know what’s going on.” (Californian Interviewee 12)

Overall, for all participants belonging to a group was of great importance. Furthermore, most participants reported that they were close with their friends. These responses formed the basis for the subsequent part of the interviews by measuring a large degree of social identification.



## **5.2 Social pressures to be a green consumer**

The following sections will discuss the interview questions and responses directly related to the research questions established for this study.

### **5.2.1 Teachers versus learners**

During each interview, the participant was categorized into either the learning group or the teaching group depending on how pronounced green consumer behavior was for that particular participant. The interviewees that were labeled as 'learners' did not identify as green consumers. This distinction was determined when the participants shared information on their green consumption behavior. These participants were asked how they react when they observe that those around them are making more environmentally-friendly consumption choices. Whereas, on the other hand, the 'teachers', those that were more enthusiastic green consumers, were asked if they ever attempt to influence their friends and family to make greener consumption choices. This division allowed for a unique opportunity to analyze how effective social groups are in influencing the other members of the group to adopt green consumer behaviors from both perspectives. Admittedly, the reactions of the 'learners' following social group influence were the main concern for this study.

When the question was asked among the 'teachers' the most common responses revolved around how they wanted to educate other consumers about better choices, but they would never force or pressure someone to make the change. Finnish Interviewee 8 elaborated on how they have tried to influence those in their social group who are less passionate about environmental issues and green consumption:

"Sometimes I discuss like, for example, with my family, probably like last fall or something we were discussing like sustainable development because I feel like they didn't really know so much about ways that they could influence it. And then we just like had a discussion about like everyday things that they can do to kind of reduce their carbon emissions and their carbon footprint and stuff...I tried to influence them and educate them if they wish to know more about it."

The emphasis within this extract was on educating and discussing rather than posing sanctions on friends and family for not being as aware of the issues and how individuals can help. Other interviewees also indicated, to some extent, that they preferred to take on a more proactive and empathetic approach to trying to influence their less-green friends to adopt greener behaviors.

Interestingly, having these conversations appeared to be of benefit for members of the learner group to be more aware of green alternatives. This was a position repeated by several participants:

“My sister, who’s a vegetarian, she’s quite the bio-evangelist so she will try to spread it and I’ll try or like, I’ll definitely try it out probably at least once. And if I like it then I might keep buying it.” (Finnish Interviewee 9)

“I have this one friend and so like she’s all like into oh my god save the turtles and oceans and all that stuff matters...she’ll go and get stuff there [a store known for green products] and she just like posts about it and then keeps talking about it and sometimes I’m just genuinely curious or like it’s worth a shot see what all the hype is about.” (Californian Interviewee 9)

Similar sentiments were also echoed by other participants. The key takeaways from these extracts form a theme of becoming more aware of green alternatives in consumption when a member of a social group is vocal and active in the process. Perhaps, what begins as a way to appease the social group member impassioned by green consumer behavior, can become standard practice with the other social group member that was unaware of the other consumption options.

Other responses to this question also expressed taking on a more, perhaps, passive approach by indirectly trying to influence their friends and family.

“I have been sharing some of the cool sustainable brands that I find with my friends at home, to try and get them to buy stuff, not necessarily buy stuff but be like, ‘Hey this is a really cool brand if you’re looking for something, they’re here.’” (Californian Interviewee 6)

When the participants of the other group spoke about this passive practice, to some it had a significant influence. In fact, for both sides, it was comforting to know they were supplied with a wide amount of resources regarding green products. Moreover, they found it helpful that they had become more aware of green alternatives in consumption. A common theme arose in how it was convenient to have heard about green consumption behaviors from their social group, and consequently, they were able to apply those behaviors in their own lives without feeling negative pressures to do so. However, Californian Interviewee 3 conveyed the approach with disdain when they were describing a particular example:

“They [my friends] don’t directly come at me for things that they do. I know like I remember Claire [name changed] sending a Snapchat into our group chat. She was just showing us this article she found and like this graph just like if everyone just like blah blah bah like this is

what would happen. She's like, why are people like, you know, why are we doing this. Like they don't directly tell me things but they do like talk about what they believe."

As the interviewee was recounting this situation, it became increasingly clear that they did not enjoy the subtle way their friends tried to influence them. The interviewee had indicated previously that they were not a green consumer and that they often felt that while their friends never tried to force them, they very obviously felt that their behaviors were being targeted in conversations about adopting greener habits.

### **5.2.2 Green consumption as a social group norm**

To understand the degree of green behavior that was normal in a participant's social group, each interviewee was asked several questions designed to provide insights into this phenomenon. The questions dealt with the following topics:

- The extent to which the participant is able to report the normality of environmentally-conscious behavior among peers
- The relationship between the participants' views on the environment and their peers' views
- The extent to which green issues and products are discussed among peers

For this study, peers were used to encapsulate both friends and family under one common term, a distinction that was made prior to the start of the interviews. Interestingly, among all participants being concerned for the environment and being a green consumer was a prevalent attitude in their social groups. Of course, there were exceptions to this observation.

Some participants indicated that green consumer behavior was not a normal behavior among some members of their social group. However, the main focus of these questions was initially to observe how well the participant was able to report the behavior of their peers. As such, because all the participants were able to indicate that green consumerism was normal, and even go so far as to express how that normality differed among their peers, it indicated the existence of social norms regarding green consumerism. This was essential moving forward to analyzing how these social norms surrounding green consumer behavior influenced the participants' consumer behavior.

Social group norms develop where certain behaviors of consumption become habits and patterns. Over time, these behaviors become familiar and difficult to change, especially if it is a behavior that was particularly emphasized by a social group. This reflection was captured by several participants. Therefore, to uncover the extent to which social norms have influenced the participants' current consumption behaviors, the interviews included an opportunity for the participants to disclose any particular way they have observed that their peers have influenced their consumption habits. Admittedly, this particular question was designed to be an opportunity to express any realm of themes related to the study. However, some participants reflected on specifically the role of social norms as they see them. The general consensus among the responses was that individuals buy products they are familiar with, perhaps through their parents or friends. Finnish interviewee 9 aptly illustrated their view on the matter at several points during the interview:

“If it's something that my family has always done and bought, then that's kind of just like, not really wanting any change, and I do feel like I might go to that more often.”

“If there's less change it's kind of easier. So, I'll probably go with like, if my family has gotten this, I'll do the same.”

“Like I said, mainly from my family side [feel pressured to buy green products], like just buying the same thing that they are, that same thing that I'm used to that's kind of like the only kind of pressure.”

The main emphasis here was the idea that as the younger-aged generations are gaining more purchasing power and are becoming more established consumers, they tend to rely on cues that are familiar to them to make consumption decisions. This is observed in green consumer behavior, wherein if green products are the norm in a social group, consumers will perhaps be more aware of those products and select them over non-green alternatives. In essence, social group norms can have a powerful impact on consumers in terms of green consumption.

Furthermore, social groups of peers can have a similar amount of pressure through established behavioral social norms. Though participants were not asked directly, many took the opportunity to share some examples of green consumption that they partake in with their friends. Some of the examples provided included:

- Going to farmer's markets

- Going shopping at second-hand stores/thrifting
- Buying reusable grocery bags
- Using reusable to-go coffee cups when ordering coffee
- Sharing information about green brands and products
- Eating a plant-based diet

As participants were discussing these different examples, it was rather clear that generally, they would not have taken on these consumption habits if they were not an activity they did with their friends. Some participants indirectly also shared the underlying reasons for this:

“I definitely say it’s easier being green if everyone’s green. And I definitely find that I’ve become more green coming up to Davis and finding these new friends and having like, kind of a new college life outside of my San Diego. And I definitely think a big part of me being more green is because of Davis because everyone up here is kind of like that.” (Californian Interviewee 6)

“But definitely if everyone is green, I feel like that would just make it easier for people, other people who are not green to go green.” (Californian Interviewee 6)

“Obviously, when there are people who are also passionate about it [being green] it just makes things better in a way.” (Californian Interviewee 7)

The main consideration from this observation is that established social norms can force participants to adopt new behaviors, such as green consumer behaviors because the existence of those social norms makes it ‘easier’ to do so. Moreover, as was expressed in the interviews, individuals do not want to do certain things alone, so it was comforting to them to have the support of their peers. This seems to also entail green consumer behavior, wherein when it was normal behavior in their social group, participants found it more convenient to adhere to habits like those listed above. Similarly, perhaps there was some degree of social pressure from friends to act in similar ways in order to maintain social group membership. This will be discussed further in the subsequent section. However, it is worth noting that this type of social pressure also stems from feelings of not wanting to be alone. Social interactions are crucial to people. Seldom do individuals want to feel isolated from their peers. This extends so far as to contribute to perhaps why both green and non-green consumers sustain or assume green consumption behaviors when it is accepted behavior in their social group.

Similarly, an interesting revelation that also came forth was that participants reported that over time they noticed that they were becoming fairly similar to their friends, in terms of green consumption habits and behaviors of the ilk. When asked whether participants found that their peers influenced the kind of products they purchased, overwhelmingly the answer was yes. At the beginning of interviews, participants often communicated that they believed they tended to surround themselves with people that were already fairly similar to them. An idea that was repeated several times was that there was a tendency for values to be homogeneous in social groups. Therefore, it appeared natural that overtime members of social groups would converge in attitudes and behaviors.

“Just by being surrounded by the same people, I guess I kind of become similar to them a lot of times without realizing and I guess it’s about sharing the same values too.” (Finnish Interviewee 11)

“It’s hard when I’m surrounded by it, to kind of differentiate like what my views are versus what my friends are, all kind of the same.” (Californian Interviewee 8)

Therefore, the main impression from this is that green consumer behavior can be developed through established social norms. This means that if values and beliefs about the natural environment align in a social group it is more likely that all members of that social group will assume green consumption behaviors as they become more normal.

However, social norms may not always have their intended or expected effect. Contrary to the discussion above, not all participants felt this influence. In fact, a participant openly expressed how they are fully aware that the people around them are green consumers but they do not actively try to imitate these behaviors. When asked if they consciously search for more environmentally-friendly products, Californian Interviewee 10 expressed the following:

“Yeah, I don’t. I mean my mom might, but I don’t a lot of times. I don’t do my best in that field.”

This extract came after the participant had described their concern for the environment and their desire to do more to help the state of the environment. Therefore, it was somewhat surprising that this participant did not experience the influence of green social norms that appeared prevalent in their social environment. From this, it is possible to discern that

despite the apparent power of social norms in influencing green consumer behavior, that power may vary from consumer to consumer.

### **5.2.3 Pressure of social sanctions and social approval in shaping green consumers**

Membership in a social group can often influence an individual to act in adherence to the other group members to avoid internal social group conflict, where certain behaviors are expected. Naturally, this trend appeared during the interviews. During a few interviews, when asked to describe their relationship to their friends and family, the participants reflected on how green consumerism and the environment had caused conflict when a peer had differing opinions. These participants also considered the importance of having similar values among members of a social group in order to maintain group harmony. They expressed that having conflicting values may even unconsciously start to affect the relationship. Moreover, one participant conveyed that if the discrepancy between views is large enough, there lacks a foundation for a friendship. This illustrated the pressure social group members may internalize if they recognize their views differ from others.

To gauge more information about this trend each interview was asked to describe how they believe their friends and family would react if they were not environmentally-conscious, with an emphasis on wasteful consumption. Overall, the participants seemed to concur. The general response was that their peers would not be particularly outwardly unfriendly about it. There was also a large focus of thought on friends and family trying to educate the participant if they were not green. However, several participants also considered how their friends and family, if they were passionate about the environment, would try and change their habits.

Following this question, participants were asked to reflect on whether or not they have ever felt pressured to purchase green products because of their social group. Again, the most common response generally focused on the idea that the participant's social groups did not attempt to force them to change their behavior. Rather, there may have been cases where a social group member made a slight remark or, as mentioned by one participant, expressed 'silent judgment' for making a non-green consumption choice:

"I like know my friend group silently judges, and it's very obvious. If you like make a point of not being environmentally-conscious like if I said I wasn't recycling plastic, like they wouldn't say anything to my face but you would be able to tell." (Finnish Interviewee 6)

Similar, positions were carried by other participants, as well:

"I think they [my peers] would just let me do my thing, but they would also like make snarky comments for sure." (Californian Interviewee 9)

"They [my friends and family] would probably look at me like I was insane." (Finnish Interviewee 5)

Surprisingly, one participant shared an experience where members of their social group were fairly outright malicious about other members not making appropriately green choices:

"There is a little bit of judgment in some of the Facebook groups I'm in, they can get a little mean...like they'll be like 'That's not eco-friendly!' Like oh my gosh, why are you being so mean, like we're just trying to do our best, like don't be so mean about it!" (Finnish Interviewee 10)

Similarly, when asked how their peers would react if the participant themselves was not a green consumer, another participant rather boldly stated that:

"I feel like they would not be my friend." (Finnish Interviewee 2)

Following this, another participant explicitly stated that they experienced some peer pressure to be a green consumer. While they did not explicitly describe any situations wherein they felt they were forced to be green by their peers, they expressed that in situations where everyone in their social group had green consumption habits, there was also a pressure to conform. This would suggest that the threat of social sanctions is not an extrinsic motivator, but rather an intrinsic one. The participants indicated this observation several times in their responses. However, this was not a perfect case. Some deviations indicated that the threat of social sanctions was an extrinsic motivator:

"We definitely have ganged up on our friends in a loving way to be like, I know, they felt peer pressured there, like you guys all have them. So, now I feel like I have to do it too because you guys are going to give me crap if I don't." (Californian Interviewee 4)

"If I like wasn't around, I don't think it would change their [my friends] habits too much. That being said, the people who like, for example, like one of my teammates, she's like, oh yeah, I got like my reasonable bad, and I thought of you or whatever. If I wasn't around, I don't think



she would use that reusable bag. I think she got it because I kind of make fun of her.” (Californian Interviewee 8)

Therefore, some social group members within the participants’ social groups were motivated to adopt green consumer behaviors because they were faced with the threat of penalty if they did not. In the above, extracts the consumers the participants were reflecting on, perhaps, found it easier to adopt green habits than to continue to be pressured by their peers. The idea of convenience and social pressure reemerged in this consideration.

A Californian interviewee provided the opposite point of view. Rather than employing the threat of social sanctions on their social group, they felt that social sanctions had been directed at them. They contributed the following reflection of their consumption behavior in light of this:

“I don’t know that I want to be grilled for having like something that’s like blatantly bad for the environment and something like that, especially being around so many conscious people, not just like in the apartment but like as a campus as a whole, and so UCSD [University of California, San Diego] is pretty forward about the climate activism stuff.” (Californian Interviewee 11)

The above extract clearly reflects that this participant is pushed to make green consumption choices because they are aware that if they do not, they will likely face some form of social penalty. Furthermore, it appeared that this participant found it easier to simply adhere to the behaviors of their social group than to go against it and subsequently face the consequences.

There were exceptions to the responses to the aforementioned question. It is worth noting that during one interview with Californian participant 9, the interviewee, almost exasperatedly, spoke about how their peers try to target them to change their consumption behaviors, but the participant continues to feel indifferent toward these attempts. Several other participants from both location groups communicated that they do not feel influenced or pressured by their peers to change their behaviors. In three cases, the participants conveyed that they were their ‘own person’, citing that to be the reason why they have not felt pressured to make green consumption choices. To the researcher, this indicated the first cue of low susceptibility to peer comparison in these participants, which will be discussed in

a later section. Yet, this cue gave a significant indication as to why this anomaly seemed to exist.

Interestingly, the influence of these social sanctions appeared to be more pronounced in public settings. The common setting was in the case of shopping with someone else. Two such situations extracted from two separate interviews included the following:

“Okay, if I was, hypothetically, in a store and somebody said like, if you buy this is equivalent to like you melting like five polar ice caps or something then I would be like okay I definitely can’t buy this anymore.” (Finnish Interviewee 7)

“I started thinking like if I was at the store with my friends and they would buy green products and I would need to buy the same thing but there is an option that’s not so green. Maybe, in that case, I would buy the same product that my friends are buying like the green product. So, if they are seeing me buying it. Then, if no one knows what I’m buying, then I guess no.” (Finnish Interviewee 3)

The key takeaway from these extracts is that the participants do, to some extent, fear social sanctions. Both the two participants who explicitly spoke of this trend had stated prior that they did not consistently purchase green products. Therefore, the fact that they expressed they would feel pressured to buy the green alternative if they were in a public setting illustrates that experience social pressure from their peers. This is illuminated by the fact that the participants expressed they would only make the green choice in the presence of an external force.

Furthermore, during several interviews, the topic of guilt emerged. When asked if participants felt guilt for not purchasing green products, perhaps not surprisingly, the general answer was that they did feel some degree of guilt for not purchasing the green product. Some examples of responses during this discussion are as follow:

“I definitely feel guilty when I don’t buy a green product...I feel so bad for the animals and also I would feel so bad for the other vegans I know like I feel like I’m letting them down.” (Finnish Interviewee 10)

“I just had to buy textbooks and I’m like, I have to buy textbooks, I have to buy them online. There’s no other way to do it, and so I know that it’s not great, but I also know that I’m taking a lot of other steps, like, I know that buying those textbooks online and from Amazon wasn’t that great for the environment but I also know that I’m not buying a lot from Amazon.” (Californian Interviewee 5)

“I feel bad going to Costco and buying things from Costco because there’s just so much packaging, and I’ve been trying to reduce that.” (Californian Interviewee 6)

These expressions of guilt, as seen in the above extracts, indicate that social sanctions have, whether self-imposed or otherwise, been placed on non-green consumption behaviors. As was conveyed by the participants, the existence of guilt has a significant pressure on the participants to maintain green consumer behaviors. A notable contribution to this discussion was when a participant expressed they felt as though they were betraying members of their social group, specifically defined as “other vegans” (extract above). This suggests the presence of social pressures that prevented the participant from changing their behavior, despite indications that they have considered doing so.

Participants also expressed that they had tendencies to use social sanctions to influence their friends and family to be greener consumers. While the focus of attempting to influence social group members to make more environmentally-friendly consumption choices was on educating and sharing products without being forceful, this discussion goes to show that doing so can be experienced as a threat of social disapproval.

“I definitely got my dad to reduce buying things with a lot of packaging. And he feels bad if he buys stuff with all the packaging now.” (Californian Interviewee 6)

This extract illustrates the emergence of the concept of social group approval. From the above case, it appears that the guilt felt is twofold. The, perhaps, more obvious reason for experiencing guilt stems from the fact that the consumer was made aware of the consequences of excess packaging. Assuming that this consumer has the same values and views as the participant, it is possible to deduce that they felt guilty because they were concerned for the environment and recognized that they were harming it by purchasing products with excess packaging. On the other hand, this consumer will also feel a sense of guilt for disappointing a member of their social group. The concept of social disapproval becomes apparent here, in the sense that the participant established that excess packaging is harmful and a consumption choice that should be avoided. Therein, their father, being made aware of this, will recognize that the participant would not approve of the behavior, and consequently will have felt guilty for consuming the product.

Social group membership offers consumers a sense of belonging. Therefore, naturally, consumers will desire some degree of acceptance and approval from the social group they attach themselves to. In order to gauge the general need for belonging in this study’s participants, each interviewee was asked to report how important it is to them to belong to

a group. Overwhelmingly, yet not surprisingly, all the participants responded, in some form, that it was important to them to belong to a group. The participants took particular care to describe that their friendships were particularly important to them.

“I think everyone wants to feel like they have like, a place among their friends.” (Californian Interviewee 8)

“As much as I’d like to feel like oh no I’m totally independent, I think I’m at a point in my life where I realized that kind of belonging to a group not only helps but reinforces like how I see myself in the world, for better or worse.” (Californian Interviewee 5)

When participants explained their desires for belonging, a common theme emerged dealing with mimicking common behaviors to reinforce membership. Several participants shared how being green, like their friends or family, allowed them to connect better with those social group members:

“You could be excited about the same things that your friends are excited about, understand where they’re coming from to be closer because you know their point of view a little bit better.” (Californian Interviewee 7)

“It kind of just adds something more to talk about if I am environmentally friendly. Then we’ll talk about that every now and then, But if I’m not, then that’s like kind of one less talking point.” (Finnish Interviewee 9)

“That [seeing a friend using a green product] would probably open the door to a really cool conversation about single-use or sustainability or environmental causes and be able to have more of a sense of community.” (Californian Interviewee 5)

Similarly, Finnish interviewee 11 was shockingly forthright in expressing that they would quickly adopt a green consumer outlook if it promised a sense of belonging to a social group:

“If I didn’t have any friends and I was really desperate, I would definitely do anything to make friends.”

Furthermore, one Californian interviewee shared several situations where members of their social group came to them seeking social approval for making a green consumption choice. This participant reflected on how many of their friends will make a point of showing them their recent green purchases. From the researcher’s perspective, this suggested a level of desire for social approval within that particular social group, wherein the members made certain consumption choices in an effort to be accepted in that group.

This trend may also flow in both directions, meaning that social group members do not only go to one individual but perhaps rather the social group members desire approval from all other members and vice versa. Finnish participant 1 briefly communicated this:

“When we [my friends and I] buy something that’s environmentally friendly or something we really boast about it because we’re like oh I found this, I like this. But then if it’s like fast fashion, we do tell about it, but we probably don’t boast about it that much.”

This excerpt illustrated that members of this social group seek social approval from the group when they make green consumption choices. This observation is obvious considering that their behaviors differ greatly when the consumption choice is less environmentally-friendly, and they do not want to showcase that kind of purchasing behavior.

The main takeaway from this discussion is that the desire to belong influenced several participants to take part in green consumer behavior. Participants viewed it as a fairly simple way to connect with their peers, which was further fortified by how important a sense of community was to each participant. As was indicated by interviewee responses these behaviors emanated as a consequence of their social identity and subsequently social group norms revolving around green consumer behavior.

### **5.3 Reliance on peers for information about green consumer behavior**

In this section, findings will be discussed in the realm of how participants use their social groups to learn green consumer behaviors. The theme of social learning in green consumer behavior, to a somewhat large extent, overlaps with social norms, but it will be discussed as a separate entity due to certain key differences. For that reason, findings will be focused on themes of trust and observing and imitating green consumption from peers, also known as social learning.

#### **5.3.1 Trust in building green consumers**

Trust was deemed an important factor in facilitating successful social learning around green consumer behavior. Therein, participants were asked to what degree they trust their peers and conversely, how much they believe their peers trust them to provide information about green consumer behaviors. As expected, responses varied to some degree, the general

trend indicated that all participants trusted their peers. To illustrate this variety of responses, below are some specific examples:

“If I know that they have read up on the issue, then I’d say I’m quite trusting of them like, for example, more trusting of them than just like any stranger.” (Finnish Interviewee 8)

“I’d say I trust my family more than my friends and it also, it kind of just depends on their enthusiasm about green products.” (Finnish Interviewee 9)

“I wouldn’t take them [my peers] 100% certain.” (Finnish Interviewee 7)

“I trust that what my friends are telling me in that I believe that they think they’re telling me the correct thing but I don’t always know like how accurate the information is.” (Californian Interviewee 8)

These extracts indicate that while there is an overall tendency of trust toward friends and family, there is also some degree of skepticism. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the common theme appeared to be that peers were a more trustworthy source than unfamiliar social group members or other individuals that are completely unknown to the participant.

Conversely, participants were also asked to self-report the degree to which their peers trust them to provide information about green consumer behavior. This question was only posed to the various members of the ‘teachers’ group as indicated in a prior section. In essence, during several interviews, it became abundantly clear that some participants were the social group members their peers came to for information about green consumer behavior. Californian Interviewee 4 illustrated this when asked how much they believe their friends and family trust them for green consumption information:

“They [my friends and family] expect me to be the source of all things green.”

For these particular interviews, the participants seemed to all align in that they were perhaps less trusting of their peers. However, as they had established a status of being a green consumer they enjoyed great levels of trust from their social group on green matters. Therefore, this provided two perspectives on the issue of social learning as it relates to green consumer behavior.

### **5.3.2 Learning green consumer behavior**

The following discussion is related to issues of participants willingly accepting and seeking out information on green consumption from their social group members. The key difference in this discussion from the previous section is the idea that the consumer providing information on green consumer behavior is not doing so intentionally as an attempt to influence behavior. Another key consideration is how consumers observe green consumer behavior in their social group and subsequently apply those behaviors to their consumption. This topic from the interviews is divided into three main categories of ways social groups promoted social learning in other members.

#### **1. Recommending**

Discussions about social group trust frequently gave way to conversations about recommendations. Participants seemed to contend that the best way to get them to try green products was through personal recommendations from peers. Several of these participants had indicated previously that they did not actively search for green products. Yet, interestingly, they expressed that they trusted product recommendations from their peers and found themselves to be more willing to try these green products in these types of circumstances:

“Especially if it’s like a green product that my friend recommends then I’m quite sure that it’s like trustworthy and good for the environment.” (Finnish Interviewee 8)

“I think it’s the age of the review right like you read the reviews on everything and the best review is word of mouth so like someone that I like generally trust tells me that something is good or bad and I’ll go along with it for the most part.” (Finnish Interviewee 6)

“I have a lot of friends that are really good about buying like environmentally-friendly products and green products and living this lifestyle, being environmentally conscious. So, like I would say that they have really good recommendations and I could always ask for their help, and I could trust the information that they have about green products.” (Finnish Interviewee 1)

However, this trend did not apply to all participants. This was reflected in one participant’s discussion about receiving recommendations from peers for green products:

“I don’t consider them [my friends] as experts so like on that issue [green products] so I feel like if they talked or told me about some product and it’s like environmental friendliness I feel like that would just be an opinion.” (Finnish Interviewee 3)

In this extract, the participant did not find value in receiving recommendations from their peers, which appeared to contradict the discussions held by other participants. Furthermore, some participants floated in the center of this spectrum, in the sense that recommendations about green products were valued for the convenience they provided. To illustrate this further, one Californian participant described this attitude:

“I mean if they [my friends] like find something and they recommend it because they say it’s good. Like if I need something I’ll just like, go ahead and try it because I’m not motivated to research it myself so I’ll take what they have.”

Therein, considering the variety of responses concerning recommendations for green products, it is possible to observe that green consumer behavior is more likely to be adopted when the participant trusts the social group member offering the information and subsequently the recommendation.

There were no questions that directly revolved around the topic of green product recommendations. However, interestingly, it was a topic that naturally came up in most interviews. The overall consensus appears to be that recommendations are valued by participants, especially when they are provided by social group members. Of course, if the social group member making the recommendation is not viewed as someone with sufficient knowledge or generally is not trusted, neither is the recommendation. In those cases, the social learning process is stanchied, and there is no distinct change in behavior observed.

## **2. Observing**

When asked how they would react if they saw a member of their social group using an unfamiliar green product, participants offered considerations that often dealt with a general desire to try out the product or in the least, ask about it. The explanation for this behavior provided by most participants was that the ability to see the product in use, combined with the fact that a trusted member of their social group had bought it, convinced participants that the product is of value and worth purchasing. It is possible to observe some degree of uncertainty related to green products due to their novelty and generally mixed attitudes towards these products. Several participants seemed to



convey that this hesitancy to adopt green behaviors can be overcome through the observation of green behaviors among trusted peers.

“I think if someone close to me started buying them [green products] I’d definitely be interested in the product. I’m not sure if I would buy it, it would take further information. But, yes it probably would inspire me to start using it or buying it.” (Californian Interviewee 12)

“I’ll see them [my friends] buy it [a green product], I’d be like, oh wait, I’ll buy that next time or something like that.” (Californian Interviewee 11)

“In my head, it’s like an option for me more because I see someone else using it, and I feel like it’s like, it’s not about pressure or anything, but it’s just that like I might like notice it on the shelves more easily.” (Finnish Interviewee 3)

“If someone has an item and you’re like, oh I like that, I will go buy it. It’s kind of like you know what you’re buying.” (Californian Interviewee 6)

For another participant, the act of observing green consumer behavior in their peers served as a reminder that they should act similarly:

“I think I just needed like almost like a visual to remind me because otherwise I don’t necessarily think about it.” (Californian Interviewee 10)

The main takeaway from this section extends again into the idea of intrinsic motivation prompting green consumer behavior. By observing green consumer behavior in proximal social group members, the participants become more aware of appropriate consumer behaviors and find it easier to adopt them. Similarly, this extends into the need for the behavior to be a group behavior, wherein all members of the social group are partaking in it, increasing the pressure on other members to do so as well.

Therefore, through the process of observing these green consumer behaviors, as indicated by the participants, they are more likely to observe similar changes to their consumption habits. This section also highlighted the need for the observations to be consistent to serve as a reminder for appropriate behaviors. While there were exceptions to this form of social learning, it was apparent that observing behaviors held more power because this action lacks any external social pressures that prompt feelings of disdain and undermine the participants’ individuality.

### 3. Informing

Participants also expressed that they exercise their social group for general information, generally relying on members to provide them with the appropriate resources related to consumption. When asked, several participants communicated that their main source for information about green products most frequently was their peers.

“My main source would just be friends.” (Californian Interviewee 12)

“They [my friends] like know a lot more about topics you know that means that if I trust them, I will take, I definitely like to take into consideration, especially since like I’m a big pushover and listen, and I’m really indecisive so I listen. I like gain a lot of what I think based on what other people think.” (Californian Interviewee 3)

A similar question was used to directly gauge to what degree participants relied on their friends and family for information about green products. Unsurprisingly, most of the participants that indicated that they had an established position as the source of information among their social group, conveyed that they only relied on their peers to the extent that they discussed environmental issues, having found the information from other sources. On the other hand, some participants, without this status, considered their peers their only source for matters of the environment.

“I think I heavily rely on like the people around me for information, I don’t tend to look at the news, except like obviously through social media...So, unless I hear from people, I don’t really know what’s going on.” (Californian Interviewee 12)

“I think I rely on them [my peers] quite much.” (Finnish Interviewee 3)

As mentioned previously, some participants held a position as their social groups’ informant on green consumption behaviors. In some cases, these participants reflected on how their peers would approach them to discuss these topics. Finnish interviewee 2 encapsulated a majority of these discussions:

“Like if it’s a friend or family member who maybe doesn’t really see why I’m like so concerned about the environment, then it might be more like they are asking or they’re kind of like second questioning what you’re doing and then like you might need to like explain like why you are not using certain products or why you will choose one over another.”

Furthermore, it appeared critical that the participants were open to learning for consumption behavior changes to take place.

“I really like having the like knowledge...it’s really nice to like learn.” (Finnish Interviewee 12)

“I think it goes both ways like it’s pretty equal, and that sometimes I’ll learning something from them [my peers] and then they’ll learn something from me.” (Finnish Interviewee 5)

As it stands, these discussions suggested that social groups are a rich resource for learning and promoting green consumer behavior. Therefore, this emphasizes the general impact social identity can have on green consumption. Though not without its caveats, social learning in these forms appears to motivate participants to conform to green norms set up within their social groups.

#### **5.4 Using green consumer behavior for social belonging**

Several questions in the interviews focused on understanding the need for belonging and fitting in and how green consumer behavior generated this belong. Again, this overlapped with findings related to social norms, but this section acts as further elaboration on the theme as well as a somewhat alternative perspective. The main theme of these questions focused on the susceptibility to peer comparison, which was subsequently divided into two situations: using green consumer behavior to fit in and green consumer behavior as a trend.

Integral to this discussion was measuring each participant’s susceptibility to peer comparison. To assist in this task, several questions considered themes such as:

- The importance of fitting in;
- The need to belong to a social group; and
- The tendency to purchase products that peers have.

A somewhat shocking anomaly existed throughout many interviews. Where it was expected that participants would maintain a consistent response to these questions, several participants expressed low susceptibility to peer comparison at first and later indicated a higher susceptibility to peer comparison. This suggested that these participants were reluctant to share attitudes that reflected that their sense of self was reliant on their peers. Alongside these anomalies, other participants maintained a consistent indication of their susceptibility to peer comparison. Despite the apparent anomaly, the findings in the following

sections will be discussed with indication to the level of susceptibility measured for each participant.

Some responses that indicated high susceptibility to peer comparison included:

“It’s important to feel like you are part of the group.” (Finnish Interviewee 8)

“It’s nice to belong to at least one group, otherwise that’s kind of sad.” (Finnish Interviewee 6)

“Without having a group of friends, I definitely feel kind of lost.” (Californian Interviewee 6)

“I think everyone wants to feel like they have a place among their friends.” (Californian Interviewee 8)

“If I don’t fit in, or like I feel like I don’t fit in, then I’m like uncomfortable and I have to remove myself from that situation.” (Finnish Interviewee 4)

On the other hand, low susceptibility to peer comparison was indicated with responses such as:

“I feel like as a kid you’re a lot like oh, I need to fit in with my friends. That’s a big thing, but at some point, you kind of just hopefully should stop caring.” (Finnish Interviewee 9)

“I really like to be alone so it’s not really that big of a deal if like I don’t feel like I belong like 100%.” (Finnish Interviewee 7)

“I’m like my own person and I kind of just do whatever I’m feeling and if it’s not what they’re [my peers] doing that’s chill with me.” (Californian Interviewee 9)

#### **5.4.1 Being green to fit in**

In conjunction with asking participants if fitting in was important to them, they were asked to consider if they would purchase green products to fit in with their social group. Some participants humorously expressed that they would, especially if they did not have friends and felt desperate for that type of connection. Other participants, after some thought, admitted that they likely would, though they were fairly nonchalant about this. Finally, some participants were more adamant that they absolutely would not be a green consumer for the purpose of fitting in. Interestingly, if a participant reported that fitting was not important to them, they may have indicated the opposite when asked about adopting green consumer behavior for this reason.

One participant made a relevant point in response to this question:

“Obviously, if it’s [green consumption] some sort of group thing then, yeah, I might join. But if it’s like just the individuals buying the same product, like independent of each other then, I guess I would probably subconsciously buy it.” (Finnish Interviewee 12)

This participant had indicated a fairly consistent higher susceptibility to peer comparison based on their answers to the question themes stated in the above section. Therefore, their overall response was consistent with this observation. However, significantly, this participant made the connection with adopting green consumer behavior to fit in only in the case of it being an obvious group behavior. In this situation, the prevalence of the behavior in a group setting made this participant more aware of the difference in the act of comparing their behaviors against the members of the group, which would account for a more conscious effort to change the behavior.

Furthermore, when participants were asked to detail the extent to which they found that they purchased products they observed their peers purchased, exceptionally a majority of the participants revealed that this was a common behavior to them. Notably, some participants had expressed that they did not feel influenced by their peers to purchase similar products, such as green products, but when asked this question they communicated that often they consumed products that they knew their peers did as well. An interesting point was brought up in one interview, where the participant expressed that they found that over time their behaviors converged with those of their friends. This participant explained that they believed this had to do, in large, due to shared values. Thus, over time their consumption behaviors also became similar.

Through the observation of other consumers’ behavior, the participants reported that that sparked a conscious change in their behavior. Several participants provided specific cases where they had noticed this:

“My brother at one point had this very vegan phase where he would buy like a lot of vegan food and I’ve only tried a lot of vegan food because of him, so he’s been a big influence.” (Finnish Interviewee 11)

“I probably got this Patagonia jacket because I knew other people who liked Patagonia and so I just I’m like it’s a trusted brand like stuff like that. And then again same with like the Hydroflask.” (Californian Interviewee 10)

“And then she [my roommate] had reusable straws so I started getting reusable straws too. And just like kind of rubbing off on each other like things like that was kind of fun. And then she went vegetarian and then I went vegetarian.” (Californian Interviewee 2)

These participants had portrayed high susceptibility to peer comparison, and therein, it is expected that their behaviors would be reflective of what they observed to be appropriate in their social group. Notably, these extracts evince that through monitoring peers’ behavior, participants may experience a greater inclination to mimic these behaviors that otherwise would not be present.

Some participants proposed that they knew their peers would mimic their green behaviors if they were to observe them. This appeared to be easier to report on over having to describe if or how their behaviors would change were the roles reversed.

“I feel like they [my peers] might buy green products because I bought them.” (Finnish Interviewee 4)

“When I bring lunches to school, or wherever I’m going, I’ll bring like reusable silverware in like a little pack, and so one of my friends who cares but doesn’t take a ton of action, she was like, that’s so easy. And I’m like it’s \$5 and I throw it in a backpack. And she’s like, oh I should do that.” (Californian Interviewee 5)

Indications of signaling social status were not widespread in the interviews. However, a few interviewees expressed certain behaviors that suggested that to some degree they would purchase products their peers had if those products were valued to a larger extent. To illustrate, one participant was asked how they would react if they noticed their peers were buying green products, and in response, the participant conveyed the following:

“I would just keep buying what I want to buy unless they [my peers] have like a really like nice product that I want to try out then I might.” (Finnish Interviewee 11)

Therein, this extract demonstrates that green consumer behavior can potentially be adopted in a situation where the green product is seen as a status symbol, which encouraged the participant to follow in the behaviors of their social group to establish a similar social status. However, similar discussions were limited.

Interestingly, peer comparison may have had an opposite reaction in the participants. One such Finnish participant talked about how they had observed unsustainable consumption

behaviors in their friends so they 'try to stay away from that'. Notably, this participant had indicated a higher susceptibility to peer comparison. Therefore, in this case, it is possible that the desire to be a green consumer had priority over fitting in or mimicking group behaviors.

Conversely, most of the discussions related to using green consumer behavior to fit in suggested that when green consumer behavior was observed in the social group, the participant felt encouraged to change their behavior:

"If people do it [are green consumers] because it's like a better thing to do, I start to think like, 'Oh, should I change?'" (Finnish Interviewee 3)

"It would encourage me to do better also because then I'm like, 'Oh, they are doing better like if they can do it, I can too.'" (Finnish Interviewee 1)

"You know maybe I would jump on the bandwagon be like what is this, I'll try it." (Californian Interviewee 2)

To further illustrate this position, below is a portion of an interview with Finnish interviewee 1 that captured the main theme of this section:

Interviewer: Is it important to you to feel like you fit in with your peers?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Why do you feel that is?

Interviewee: I don't want to feel left out.

Interviewer: So, would you buy green products to avoid feeling left out in your friend group?

Interviewee: Probably yes, yes. I feel like I've done it, and I feel like I'm- also like my food choices have changed because of my friends.

Similarly, other participants expressed the following:

"I'm probably like the epitome of like a pack animal so like if somebody else has something nice. Then I'll probably want it too because I want to be part of the group." (Finnish Interviewee 6)

"That [fitting in] probably had to do with how it [green consumer behavior] started. It was like, well everyone else is getting straws, now I have to get straws to fit in with everybody." (Californian Interviewee 5)

While brief, these conversations further demonstrated that the desire to belong can have a profound effect on a participant to adopt green consumer behavior. The idea of being a 'pack animal' highlighted that participants may adopt certain behaviors for the reason that all or a majority of the members in a social group behave in that fashion.

There were obvious exceptions to these observations, particularly with participants that indicated a lower susceptibility to peer comparison.

"The biggest appeal for me is that it [being a green consumer] saves me money and then saving the planet." (Californian Interviewee 1)

"I don't think to fit in, but I feel like if they were more conscientious about it [green consumer behavior] I would be a lot more intrigued and concerned." (Californian Interviewee 9)

"If I see just like offhand somebody's buying like these things, it wouldn't make me want to go buy it." (Finnish Interviewee 7)

The main takeaway from this section is that if a consumer presents higher susceptibility to peer comparison they are more likely to feel inclined to become a green consumer if they see it as a common behavior in their social group. On the other hand, this effect will be less pronounced in consumers that present a lower susceptibility to peer comparison. However, in both situations, there are various ways for which the participants felt or did not feel influenced. Yet, the general sense appeared to be that the main objective was to reinforce a sense of belonging by adopting green consumer behaviors.

#### **5.4.2 Being green is trendy**

One of the most obvious discrepancies between participants in Finland versus in the state of California was during discussions or rather lack thereof, concerning the trendiness of green consumer behavior. A key theme that developed during the interviews with the Californian participants included how being green has become a large part of popular culture. A shocking contribution to this was when a participant described how their sister had a greater tendency to post content on social media platforms signaling green consumer behavior, but, according to the participant, her consumption behavior seldom reflected her social media content:

"When it comes to my sister like she's a little bit hypocritical because she'll post stuff about it [being green] on Instagram and be like, climate change is real like it's happening, but she won't do anything like she's like fairly wasteful."



Another participant reflected on a similar observation while sharing their views on climate change and the state of the environment:

“Everyone is trying to be like an activist, well not an activist but everyone is trying to like talk about it over social media and a lot of people do it for the trend too and they’re not super into it.” (Californian Interviewee 9)

These extracts seemed to reflect a trend toward green consumer behavior trending towards an identity that consumers want to portray to their social groups, but perhaps neglect to achieve. This also highlights that signaling a green consumer identity is highly desirable.

However, despite these observations and what appears to indicate that consumers that portray a green consumer identity externally but do little to change their consumption, this was not the only situation. Several participants expressed that the onset of green consumer behavior as a trend enabled them to be more aware and, in some cases, even inspired them to become greener consumers.

“I think the culture around it [green consumer behavior] is becoming so mainstream. Gen Z, Millennials, those generations have become so much more aware, and there was so much change over their lifetime that they’re realizing that is a much closer problem than what was once thought.” (Californian Interviewee 5)

A large group of observations explained the reasons why green consumer behavior became more prevalent in the younger-aged consumers. Participants largely focused on these behaviors being considered ‘cool’.

“No one used to carry around water, and then suddenly Hydroflasks were cool. And reusable lunchboxes were cool, and everyone was doing it because it was cool, not because it was environmentally-friendly like necessarily. Same with like straws, like straws became really-metal straws were like really cool.” (Californian Interviewee 4)

“I feel like it’s [being green] being trendy like the little Insta-stories, I feel like it’s turning into a trend... and I think some things like global awareness- how many people actually try to do things, but it’s definitely a trend. Like reusable straws, save the turtles, that was a whole trend.” (Californian Interviewee 1)

While the topic of trendiness was more pronounced in Californian participants, it was mentioned by select Finnish Participants as well. However, these participants merely

mentioned how they have observed green consumerism turning into a trend among younger-aged generations.

“It’s almost well kind of a trend to be environmentally friendly.” (Finnish Interviewee 9)

Interestingly, when the topic of green consumerism being a popular trend, Finnish participants seemed to feel less inclined to be green consumers because it is considered a trend:

“If I see somebody buying like you know like current trends if I see like all these clothes and everybody’s like wearing the same thing, I wouldn’t feel like it necessary for me to go out and buy the same thing.” (Finnish Interviewee 7)

Comparing this to the main group of responses from the Californian interviewees, this group of participants was more likely to accept trends and shift their behaviors to reflect popular trends. In fact, when asked if peers influenced their purchasing behavior, one Californian participant commented the following:

“I would say no unless it’s like a new trendy kind of thing if that makes sense like Hydroflask like everyone got a Hydroflask. But like grocery products or like nontrendy things I guess not really.”

Interestingly, during this participant’s interview, trendiness ran as a common theme frequently throughout their responses. A key consideration from this interview included a conversation that shifted toward shopping secondhand as green consumer behavior and proceeded as follows:

Interviewee: Now that you brought up like thrifting, if that’s like part of like influenced by people, I’ve definitely been influenced by people for like thrifting because I never used to do that and I mean I still don’t do it that often but like if I had to choose somewhere to go shopping I would definitely choose a thrift store rather than going to like a department store.

Interviewer: Do you think that you’ve made that switch because other people started doing that or because of the environmental impacts of it?

Interviewee: Definitely not the environmental impacts of it. And, I mean I definitely started going there because like I think I went with a friend one time, they were like we should go do this... not because I was thinking of the environmental benefits of it.

Later during the interview, this participant commented the following when asked if they would purchase green products to fit:

“If I wanted to fit in I would, I wouldn’t do it because it’s the right thing to do.”

This was not an isolated consideration. Another Californian participant reiterated this theme. This participant made a clear distinction between the impact of a large group and a small group on changing consumption behaviors. They confirmed previous points by expressing that if only one social group member started buying green products they would only be interested in the product, but they did not believe they would feel inclined to change their consumption behaviors completely. However, when asked if this behavior would be different in a situation where more members were shifting toward green consumerism, the participant made the following comment:

“Yeah definitely. But I think that’s just because like it’s either a bandwagon or just like a trend-setting kind of thing, not more of me wanting to use it [a green product] because of the environment. Because it’s like what’s in, I guess.”

Surprisingly, both these participants had portrayed lower susceptibility to peer comparison, though somewhat inconsistently. This would seem to suggest that the desire to conform to current trends transcends peer comparison considerations. Being in line with current trends appeared to be a fairly important identity for several participants to the point that it encouraged them to change their consumption patterns in ways that perhaps they would not have otherwise considered. The idea of trend-setting green consumer behavior and the bandwagon are key contributions from this section.

Furthermore, the participant from the initial extract continued to reflect on this revelation. They thoughtfully expressed how that was a behavior they saw as somewhat normal in many teenagers. They acknowledged that these younger-aged generations will not change their behaviors unless they seek to gain something from it in return for the behavior change. They went on to clarify that they believe that teenagers will only adopt green consumer behaviors if it will increase their social status or maintain their membership in their respective social groups.

These sentiments were reflected by another Californian participant, who stated the following:

“I always say like the best way to get everyone to change is to make it cool to be environmentally friendly.”

## **6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

This study aimed to add to the understanding of what factors can influence green consumer behavior in the realm of a social environment. In contributing to this understanding, relevant literature was reviewed, and then perspectives about social group forces as they impact green consumer behavior were compared between individuals. In the following sections, the main findings of this study are discussed in conjunction with how participants specifically compared across location groups.

### **6.1 Summary of main findings**

The role of social identity and its factors can, in part, be categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Intrinsic motivators within this study can be defined more aptly as a participant taking on green consumer behaviors when they believe they may face scrutiny from their peers if they do not. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation leads itself to be defined as known social group consequences promoting green consumption in a participant. As such, an individual will perceive pressures that are not explicitly present from their social group or the individual will be faced with direct, outward pressures from their social group, respectively.

As this pertains to the main findings of this study, the subsequent summary will be organized into discussions related to social norms, social learning, and susceptibility to peer comparison, and the degree to which each of the aforementioned factors influences green consumer behavior within social groups.

#### **6.1.1 Main findings regarding the influence of social norms on green consumerism**

The main findings pertaining to the role of social norms in influencing green consumer behavior revolved around how green consumption developed as a norm within the participants' social groups. Importantly, it was found that norms regarding green consumer

behaviors did indeed exist among the participants. It was the social identity of each participant that allowed conversations and actions to occur that reinforced green consumer behavior as a social group norm and consequently made green consumption more prevalent in a social group. Similarly, the fact that green consumer behavior was a social group norm made it easier to adopt under a pretense of participants not wanting to make such a significant change alone. As such, greater motivations were found when there was support in some form from the group.

Interestingly, social pressures were portrayed as intrinsic motivators. Participants expressed trepidation toward the reactions of social group members if the participant disregarded green consumer behaviors, along the lines of social sanctions. There were several instances where participants described undesirable behaviors from their social group members that motivated them to maintain green consumer behaviors. Similarly, according to participants, green consumer behavior became more pronounced in public settings where purchases could be observed by other social group members, yet these same behaviors were disregarded when consuming in private. This truly emphasized the presence of social pressures as a result of expected adherence to social norms and their power to influence green consumer behavior.

Alongside the discussion on social pressures emerged a theme dealing with guilt and how participants often experienced guilt when they made non-green consumption decisions. The overall attitude as described by the participants was that they were 'letting down' or disappointing their other green social group members when they made these choices.

Adhering to social norms reinforced a sense of belonging and social approval among participants. On the other hand, this pressure was used by the participants to influence their peers to adhere to green consumer behavior social norms. As expressed by several participants, there was a desire to feel like a member of their social group and this was often achieved by mimicking the accepted behaviors of that group, namely green consumer behavior as was the emphasis in the interviews.

### **6.1.2 Main findings regarding the influence of social learning on green consumerism**

In summary, social learning occurred in three ways:

- receiving product recommendations from social group members
- observing green consumer behaviors in social group members
- asking for and receiving information about green consumption from social group members

However, the key to these findings was the presence of trust toward the social group member offering these cues. It was discovered to be essential that the participant either trusted or was trusted for social learning to occur within the participant or in a specific social group member. Notably, social learning was not successful in influencing green consumer behavior if trust was not established.

In these three cases, social learning was an intrinsic motivator, though rather more positive than the motivation that stemmed from fearing social sanctions. Therein, there was a desire to learn and adopt green consumer behaviors. Similarly, there was an overall more positive attitude toward this process because participants were able to maintain a degree of individuality and did not feel dictated by others. Participants indicated an appreciation for the autonomy to choose to adopt green consumer behaviors.

On the other hand, some participants took on roles as behavioral models of green consumer behavior. It was generally agreed by these participants that a passive approach, such as modeling green behaviors or providing information only when a social group member explicitly asks for it, can be more effective in observing shifts toward greener consumption. This seemed to contribute to a trend of trying to change behaviors through less forceful means, such as educating and gifting as discussed in the previous section.

### **6.1.3 Main findings regarding the influence of peer comparison on green consumerism**

While this study did not find linkages to the traditional understanding of susceptibility to peer comparison, regarding levels of self-esteem and confidence, with the idea of peer

comparison that trended in this study, two interesting situations arose that hinted at peer comparison issues. The desire to fit in and following trends link closely to the ideas and foundations of peer comparison as discussed in the literature review. Due to the overlapping nature of the factors that have been identified throughout this study, fitting in and the trendiness of green consumption appear to have emerged from social norms surrounding green consumer behavior.

In certain participants, the desire to fit in and take part in current popular culture trends was a shockingly large influence on adopting green consumer behaviors. However, this differed with the degree of susceptibility to peer comparison that was determined in each participant. If a participant had conveyed a lower susceptibility to peer comparison it was less likely that they would communicate that they would use green consumer behavior to fit in with their social group. This general theme extended into participants comparing their consumption patterns against their peers to acquire cues as to what products to purchase. This trend pertained heavily to a desire to fit in and therefore, purchasing products that participants observed their social group members owned.

Participants expressed that being green was a trend that was especially pronounced in younger-aged generations. They stated that many young consumers want to portray an identity as being a green consumer, which has resulted in many participants adopting green consumer behavior for the same reasons. There was an overall sentiment toward not wanting to feel disjointed from the social group, which further pushed these behavior changes.

These two situations were established as intrinsic motivators of green consumer behavior. As such, participants experienced internalized pressures to reinforce their status in their social groups by taking on green consumer behaviors that have been established as 'cool' or 'in', as described by participants.

It was in these discussions that a difference in location groups emerged. Shifting towards greener consumption habits as a means to take part in current trends was more pronounced in the Californian participants compared to the Finnish participants. The topic of green consumer behavior being part of popular culture was naturally brought up in interviews with Californian participants. Furthermore, participants readily communicated that they actively

became greener consumers because of the onset of this trend. In fact, some credited it for the reason they are presently green consumers and advocate these behaviors within their social groups. These types of discussion did not appear in interviews with the Finnish participants.

## **6.2 Answers to research questions**

The aim of this study was to answer the following questions:

1. How does a consumer's social identity contribute to consumers' level of green consumption?
2. To what degree do social norms, social learning, and susceptibility to peer comparison among consumers play a role in green consumer behaviors?
3. To what extent do the effects of social identity on green consumer behavior compare between demographics of consumers in Finland and California, USA?

After the conducted research for this study the answers to these questions are as follow:

1. Social identity requires membership in a social group. As such, three of the most prevalent factors of influence appear in these social groups which work to shape desired behaviors. In the realm of this study, a participant's social identity induces either intrinsic or extrinsic motivations to adopt or maintain green consumer behaviors. Moreover, the level of green consumer behavior will largely depend on the extent to which it is a prevalent behavior in that participant's social group.
2. Social norms, social learning, and susceptibility to peer comparison to a fairly large degree influence green consumer behavior under the pretense of a consumer's social identity. Perhaps, social norms have the largest effect because green consumer behavior as a social norm in a social group exerts the greatest pressure on other members to take on similar behaviors, and it largely acts as the basis for social learning and peer comparison. However, all three factors can be effective in encouraging green consumer behavior when they act as intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Still, not all participants were equally influenced by these factors.



3. The effects of social identity on green consumer behavior are fairly similar among consumers in the state of California as well as in Finland. However, consumers in California appear to be more willing to take part in green consumer behavior as a trend in popular culture, perhaps as a way to reinforce their social identity and maintain some social status. Similarly, the topic of green consumer behavior is more politically charged in California, as participants from that group expressed attitudes related to political views as justifications for their observations related to the environment. Comparatively, among the Finnish participants, popular culture and political views were not expressed as widely in conjunction with green consumer behavior and environmental concerns.

### **6.3 Conclusions and discussion**

The findings of this study reflect previous studies wherein it has been observed that consumers will accept cues from their social groups to guide their green consumption behaviors (see Faiers et al., 2006; Vermier & Verbeke, 2007; Nolan et al., 2008). The main conclusion that can be made based on this study is that to better influence green consumer behavior among the participants it should be a group behavior. Peers, including friends and family members, due to their emotionally proximal nature, form a more influential group to affect green behaviors. The social links in these peer groups hold greater authority over the consumers and tend to exert a greater pressure to conform to expected consumption behaviors. With this in consideration, if green consumer behavior is established as a social group norm among peers, it may be easier to observe subsequent shifts toward green consumer behavior among social group members. As was indicated by the participants of this study, they are more likely to change their behaviors if they see that it is prevalent behavior among a larger group of their peers, as dictated by their social identity. The key consideration in these circumstances is how this perceived normality of green consumer behavior makes it easier and more convenient to conform.

There must be at least one established green consumer in a social group. This member acts as a catalyst for the other members to trend toward green consumer behavior. However, the reaction is more powerful as the number of these members increases, exerting more pressure on other members to conform. This confirms Bartels and Hoogendam (2011) and Bartels and Onwezen (2014) findings that green consumer behavior is more likely to spread

to other social group members in a situation where it is a pronounced behavior in the group presently. As was illustrated by Goldstein et al. (2008) social identity in a social group does little to influence green consumer behavior without social norms. As explored throughout this study, social norms play a generous role in the presence of green consumer behavior within consumers.

Trust is a major link in the role of social identity in green consumer behavior. As explained by Vermier and Verbeke (2007) consumers can rely on their peers for information about green consumer behavior. This is, in part, possible through the existence of trust. This can be explained through how the study's participants trusted their peers to a greater extent than they do outside sources. This suggests that transferring information about green products will likely be better accepted and will achieve its purpose when the transmission is consumer to consumer rather than business to consumer.

Social group interactions include both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators to adopt green consumer behaviors. However, among the highly individualistic participants, intrinsic motivators are greater influencers of behavior. As was indicated by some participants, direct pressures to change consumption habits were not well received and therefore, were not successful in inducing green consumption. Contrarily, in a situation where a participant exerts the pressure on themselves, it is more likely that their behavior will change. This means that if the consumer observes green consumer behaviors in their social group and believes that if they do not adopt similar behaviors they will be sanctioned, the consumer will do what they believe will allow them to maintain their social identity. To summarize, social pressures are more internalized by the consumer, wherein they may not want to lose that sense of belonging they feel in a group because they think their peers will disapprove of non-green choices.

As explored and established by Maslow (1943) the need to belong is a strong motivator in behavior. Therefore, in line with this finding, the participants of this study often assumed green consumer behavior to achieve a greater sense of belonging. This was heavily reflected throughout this study.

Similarly, Bearden and Rose (1990) emphasized that it is possible to gauge how social interactions will influence individual consumer behaviors by how a specific individual reacts

to cues that are observed in that interaction. This study highlighted that conformity within a group is a substantial reason for adopting green consumer behaviors. As such, maintaining status and identity in a social group can lead to consumers embracing new behaviors. To achieve this, it would be critical to 'make being green cool' as was expressed by a Californian participant. This foundation ultimately made the participants more willing to make greener choices in consumption. While susceptibility to peer comparison can be difficult to measure and report, the desire to be accepted and approved of within a social group appears to transcend what has been traditionally thought of in the realm of peer comparison.

Furthermore, based on the data collected in this study, there is perhaps a greater pressure to 'fit in' among consumers who are located in California. This pressure to follow current popular culture trends, related to peer comparison, appeared to have a much larger impact on the California-located consumers than on those in Finland. As was expressed during interviews, this pressure can, in fact, be attributed to the onset of green consumer behavior in several participants.

These findings contributed an elaboration on peer comparison and what drives these behaviors. As was conveyed in previous literature, high susceptibility to peer comparison is a consequence of low self-esteem, among other factors (see Lennox & Wolfe, 1984; Clark & Goldsmith, 2006). However, the findings of this study reflect a consistent desire for a sense of community and belonging, which did not necessarily have to be attributed to low levels of self-esteem or social confidence.

This study sheds light on important considerations within the attitude-behavior gap that plagues widespread green consumer behavior. Without a deeper understanding of consumers social identity, it is difficult to place how green consumer behaviors play a role within a specific consumer. Social identity, particularly among peers, can provide immense insights into how the participants behaved. As such, an intrinsic motivator created by social identity may have the power to shrink the attitude-behavior gap. As was stated by one participant, even simply the process of the interview made them more willing to adopt greener consumption habits because they did not enjoy feeling like they are being hypocritical. This knowledge largely acknowledges how crucial the social environment and social identity are in studying green consumer behavior.

#### **6.4 Implications for international business**

While this study did not seek to unveil better promotional practices for green products, with consideration toward ever-changing consumer wants and needs, it is imperative to understand how consumer behavior can be influenced. Similarly, pertaining to an increasing global trend toward green consumption and concern for the natural environment, the findings of this study can be applied to understanding green consumer behavior. More importantly, the attitude-behavior gap in green consumer behavior has frequently been cited as a problem. As such, perhaps a closer study into social interactions and social identities can unveil the problems that keep this gap open.

Therefore, understanding how a consumer's social environment and therefore, their social identity can either staunch or encourage green consumer behavior can offer greater insights into how best to promote green products to increase purchase behavior rather than simply intentions. Arguably, green consumer behavior will become ever more important as international focus turns toward climate change and how to achieve goals set to reverse the effects of climate change. Thus, it will become increasingly important to understand how to influence consumer behavior in light of this focus.

#### **6.5 Limitations**

Perhaps the greatest limitation to this study is the lack of comparison within social groups. For a true picture of how social identity impacts green consumer behavior, a consideration within a complete social group should have taken place. The authentic interactions that would have been gauged from a social group could have provided greater insights into each of the three factors that have run a consistent theme in this study. As it stands, most participants reflected on the behavior of their social group members, but as each interview was one-on-one, it was not possible to confirm these observations from the social group member that was being discussed.

Furthermore, in itself, the overarching topic of the interviews dealt with a somewhat sensitive topic. Some participants expressed that the topic of climate change is not something that is commonly discussed in their social groups due to its sensitive nature. Therefore, it would be fair to consider that some of the information provided by participants may have been limited in its candor. Some participants, despite the guarantee of confidentiality, may have not felt

comfortable enough to openly share their views. This means that the findings may not be complete, in that some participants may have withheld certain parts of their answers suggesting that the entire picture may not have been fully formed. As such, critical information may be missing, which could potentially skew the findings of this study.

Additionally, due to the semi-structured form of the interviews, not all participants were asked the same questions. In this sense, some questions were posed concerning topics the participant discussed. Thus, some of these so-called in-the-moment questions were only asked for one participant. Therefore, it is possible that the differences observed between California and Finland location groups were due to this structure. As such, this study found that trend following was more pronounced in participants from California, and it was not a topic frequently covered by Finnish participants. This theme was not directly covered in the predeveloped questions, which could potentially indicate that it could have been more pronounced in the Finnish group as well had questions about trendiness been posed for all participants.

Furthermore, as with most qualitative studies, this study suffers limitations in the form of generalizability. As discussed in a previous section, the choice to conduct interviews was based on their advantage in being able to gauge a deeper understanding of each participant's views toward the topic. Similarly, it allowed for a more personal connection between the researcher and the participants, which allowed for a safer and more comfortable environment for the participants to share their opinions. However, the method of how participants were gathered for this study limits how transferable the findings are on a larger scale. However, with a larger sample size, the generalizability increases subsequently.

## **6.6 Suggestions for further research**

Since the role of social identity in green consumer behavior is not heavily researched presently, this area of study could greatly benefit from further research. As such, despite a general increase in research, this area could also benefit from research regarding two specific situations as described below. The themes for these two suggestions appeared during this study and could be of great interest in increasing the understanding of what factors contribute to green consumer behavior.

### **6.6.1 Social interactions amidst a pandemic**

During the interviews, several participants commented on the COVID-19 situation and how that has affected their social environment and their overall consumption behaviors. Therefore, considering the lasting impacts the pandemic will have on social interactions, further research could consider how the role of social identity in green consumerism has changed due to the effects of the pandemic and the consequences of any changes. This could prove to be an interesting area of study as the effects of the pandemic on social interactions become clearer and demand for green products and action against climate change continue to increase.

### **6.6.2 Willingness and ability to pay for green products**

Future research could study willingness and ability to pay for green products to determine its role in staunching green consumerism in the social environment. Green products tend to be costlier than their non-green counterparts, which can make inducing green purchasing a challenge for marketers (Berger, 2019). Tsen et al. (2006) highlighted that the willingness to pay for green products is greater when consumers are aware "...of the severity of environmental problems" (p. 45). While it should be noted that these findings were extracted from a sample of consumers from Malaysia, other researchers seem to have concurred with this position (see Michaud & Llerena, 2011, Gregory-Smith et al., 2015).

Similarly, Berger (2019) expressed that the issue of a lack of willingness to pay could potentially be overcome by marketing green products as status symbols making them more obviously green. Within a social environment, consumers would be able to signal their green attitudes to a greater extent making them more willing to pay a premium price (ibid). This position appears relatively appropriate in consideration of the different factors apparent in the social environment. However, not all consumers have the ability to pay for more expensive green products and that can prevent the adoption of green consumer behaviors. Thus, willingness and ability to pay may be significant factors that can have a role in green consumer behavior. In fact, it was hinted at by several participants during the study, which would further prove a need to explore willingness and ability to pay for green products.

## REFERENCE LIST

Aagerup, U. & Nilsson, J. (2016) 'Green consumer behavior: being good or seeming good?' *Journal of Product & Brand Management*; 25(3): 274-284. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 14 November 2020].

Bandura, A. (1971) *Social Learning Theory*. New York City, USA: General Learning Corporation. pp. 1-46.

Barnett, E. & Casper, M. (2001) 'A Definition of "Social Environment."' *American Journal of Public Health*; 91(3): 465.

Bartels, J. & Hoogendam, K. (2011) 'The role of social identity and attitudes toward sustainability brands in buying behaviors for organic products.' *Journal of Brand Management*; 18(9): 697-708. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 28 November 2020].

Bartels, J. & Onwezen, M.C. (2014) 'Consumers' willingness to buy products with environmental and ethical claims: the roles of social representations and social identity.' *International Journal of Consumer Studies*; 38: 82-89. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 27 November 2020].

Bartels, J. & Reinders, M.J. (2016) 'Consuming apart, together: the role of multiple identities in sustainable behavior.' *International Journal of Consumer Studies*; 40: 444-452. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 27 November 2020].

Baumeister, R.F. & Leary, M.R. (1995) 'The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation.' *Psychological Bulletin*; 117(3): 497-529.

Bearden, W.O., Netemeyer, R.G., & Teel, J.E. (1989) 'Measurement of Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence.' *Journal of Consumer Research*; 15: 473-480. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 3 January 2021].

Bearden, W.O. & Rose, R.L. (1990) 'Attention to Social Comparison Information: An Individual Difference Factor Affecting Consumer Conformity.' *Journal of Consumer Research*; 16(4): 461-471. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 27 November 2020].

Berger, J. (2019) 'Signaling can increase consumers' willingness to pay for green products. Theoretical model and experimental evidence.' *Journal of Consumer Behavior*; 18: 233-246. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 24 January 2021].

Berger, J. & Heath, C. (2007) 'Where Consumers Diverge from Others: Identity Signaling and Product Domains.' *Journal of Consumer Research*; 34: 121-133.

Buenstorf, G. & Cordes, C. (2008) 'Can sustainable consumption be learned? A model of cultural evolution.' *Ecological Economics*; 67: 646-657. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 4 January 2021].

Burgiel, A. (2017) 'Social Comparison and Their Role in Shaping Contemporary Consumers' Behaviors.' *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska, Sectio H Oeconomia*; 2: 47-56.

Chan, R.Y.K. (2001) 'Determinants of Chinese Consumers' Green Purchase Behavior.' *Psychology & Marketing*; 18(4): 389-413.

Cheah, I. & Phau, I. (2011) 'Attitudes towards environmentally friendly products: The influence of ecoliteracy, interpersonal influence and value orientation.' *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*; 29(5): 452-472.

Clark, R.A. & Goldsmith, R.E. (2006) 'Global innovativeness and consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence.' *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*; 14(4): 275-285. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 1 January 2021].

Clark, R.A., Haytko, D.L., Hermans, C.M., & Simmers, C.S. (2018) 'Social influence on Green Consumerism: Country and Gender Comparisons between China and the United States.' *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*; 31(3): 177-190.

Dotson, M.J. & Hyatt, E.M. (2000) 'A comparison of parents' and children's knowledge of brands and advertising slogans in the United States: implications for consumer socialization.' *Journal Marketing Communication*; 6: 219-230.



Faiers, A., Cook, M., & Neame, C. (2006) 'Towards a contemporary approach for understanding consumer behaviour in the context of domestic energy use.' *Energy Policy*; 35: 4381-4390.

Fielding, K.S., Terry, D.J., Masser, B.M., & Hogg, M.A. (2008) 'Integrating social identity theory and the theory of planned behavior to explain decision to engage in sustainable agricultural practices.' *British Journal of Social Psychology*; 47: 23-48.

Gabler, C.B., Butler, T.D., & Adams, F.G. (2013) 'The environment belief-behaviour gap: Exploring barriers to green consumerism.' *Journal of Customer Behaviour*; 12(2-3): 159-176. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 1 January 2021].

Gadenne, D., Sharma, B., Kerr, D., & Smith, T. (2011) 'The influence of consumers' environmental beliefs and attitudes on energy saving behaviours.' *Energy Policy*; 39: 7684-7694.

Goldstein, N.J., Cialdini, R.B., & Griskevicius, V. (2008) 'A Room with a Viewpoint: Using Social Norms to Motivate Environmental Conservation in Hotels.' *Journal of Consumer Research*; 35: 472-480.

Gotlieb, M. (2019) 'Environmental Action at the Checkout Line: A Functional Approach to Green Consumer Behavior.' *Sage Social Marketing Quarterly*; 25(2): 160-175. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 14 November 2020].

Gregory-Smith, D., Demirel, P., & Manika, D. (2015) 'European Union Consumers' Willingness to Pay for Green Products: An Investigation into the Effects of Country, Gender, Age, and Type of Region.' In: *AMA Winter Educators' Proceedings*; San Antonio, TX, USA: 13-15 February. United States: AMA. p. L-7.

Grabs, J., Langen, N., Maschkowski, G., & Schöpke (2016) 'Understanding role models for change: a multilevel analysis of success factors of grassroots initiatives for sustainable consumption.' *Journal of Cleaner Production*; 134: 98-111.

Griskevicius, V., Goldstein, N.J., Mortensen, C.R., Cialdini, R.B., & Kenrick, D.T. (2006) 'Going Along Versus Going Alone: When Fundamental Motives Facilitate Strategic (Non)Conformity.' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*; 91(2): 281-294. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 29 December 2020].

Griskevicius, V., Tybur, J.M., & Van den Bergh, B. (2010) 'Going Green to Be Seen: Status, Reputation, and Conspicuous Conservation.' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*; 98(3): 392-404.

Grønhøj, A. (2006) 'Communication about consumption: a family process perspective on 'green' consumer practices.' *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*; 5: 491-503. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 29 December 2020].

Jackson, J.W. & Smith, E.R. (1999) 'Conceptualizing Social Identity: A New Framework and Evidence for the Impact of Different Dimension' *PSPB*; 25(1): 120-135. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 30 November 2020].

Jager, W., Janssen, M.A., De Vries, H.J.M, De Greef, J., & Vlek, C.A.J. (2000) 'Behaviour in common dilemmas: Homo economicus and Homo psychologicus in an ecological-economic model.' *Ecological Economics*; 35: 357-379.

Johnstone, M. & Hooper, S. (2016) 'Social influence and green consumption behavior: a need for greater government involvement.' *Journal of Marketing Management*; 32 (9-10): 827-855. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 3 February 2021].

Jouzani, M. & Esfahani, A.N. (2020) 'The investigation of factors affecting the purchasing decisions of consumers of green products.' *Brazilian Journal of Operations & Production Management*; 17(2): 1-13.

Kalafatis, S.P., Pollard, M., East, R., & Tsogas, M.H. (1999) 'Green marketing and Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour: a cross-market examination.' *Journal of Consumer Marketing*; 16(5): 441-460.

Khan, M.S., Saengon, P., Alganad, A.M.N., Chongcharoen, D., & Farrukh, M. (2020) 'Consumer green behavior: An approach towards environmental sustainability.' *Sustainable Development*; 28: 1168-1180.

Khare, A., Mukerjee, S. & Goyal, T. (2015) 'Social influence and green marketing: An exploratory study on Indian consumers.' *Journal of Customer Behavior*; 12(4): 361-381. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 27 November 2020].

Kim, J. (2017) 'An Empirical Comparison of Alternative Models of Consumers' Environmental Attitudes and Eco-friendly Product Purchase Intentions.' *Seoul Journal of Business*; 23(1): 91-114.

Kim, H.Y. & Chung, J. (2011) 'Consumer purchase intention for organic personal care products.' *Journal of Consumer Marketing*; 28(1): 40-47. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 14 December 2020].

Kim, E., Ratneshwar, S., Roesler, E., & Chowdhury, T.G. (2016) 'Attention to social comparison information and brand avoidance behaviors' *Mark Lett*; 27: 259-271. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 6 December 2020].

Kim, E., Ratneshwar, S., Roesler, E., & Chowdhury, T.G. (2014) 'Attention to social comparison information and brand avoidance behaviors' In: *AMA Winter Educators' Proceedings*; Orlando, FL, USA: 23-24 February. Chicago, IL, USA. P. 33.

Lee, K. (2009) 'Gender differences in Hong Kong adolescent consumers' green purchasing behavior.' *Journal of Consumer Marketing*; 26(2): 87-96.

Lehmann, J. & Sheffi, Y. (2020) 'Consumers' (Not So) Green Purchase Behavior.' *Journal of Marketing Development and Competitiveness*; 14(4): 76-100. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 3 February 2021].

Leila, E., Elisa, M., & Fanny, R. (2016) "' Do as I Do": Effect of Descriptive Social Norm and Endorsement on Ad Credibility and intention to Purchase Non-Overpackaged Products' In:

AMA Marketing & Public Policy Academic Conference Proceedings; 26, Chicago, IL, USA. p. 109-110.

Lennox, R.D. & Wolfe, R.N. (1984) 'Revision of the Self-Monitoring Scale.' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*; 46(6): 1349-1364. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 20 December 2020].

Lin, H. & Hsu, M. (2015) 'Using Social Cognitive Theory to Investigate Green Consumer Behavior.' *Business Strategy and the Environment*; 24: 326-343.

Manca, F., Sivakumar, A., Daina, N., Aksen, J., & Polak, J.W. (2020) 'Modelling the influence of peers' attitudes on choice behavior: Theory and empirical application on electric vehicle preferences.' *Transportation Research Part A*; 140: 278-298.

Martinsons, M.G., So, S.K.K., Tin, C., & Wing, D. (1997) 'Hong Kong and China: emerging markets for environmental products and technologies.' *Long Range Planning*; 30(2): 277-290.

Maslow, A. (1943) 'A theory of human motivation.' *Psychological Review*; 50(4): 370-396.

Michaud, C. & Llerena, D. (2011) 'Green Consumer Behaviour: an Experimental Analysis of Willingness to Pay for remanufactured Products.' *Business Strategy and the Environment*; 20: 408-420. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 24 January 2021].

Minton, A.P., & Rose, R.L. (1997) 'The Effects of Environmental Concern on Environmentally Friendly Consumer Behavior: An Exploratory Study.' *Journal of Business Research*; 40: 37-48.

Nolan, J.M., Schultz, P.W., Cialdini, R.B., Goldstein, N.J., & Griskevicius, V. (2008) 'Normative Social Influence is Underdetected.' *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*; 34(7): 913-923.

Peattie, K. (2010) 'Green Consumption: Behavior and Norms.' *The Annual Review of Environment and Resources*; 35: 195-228.

Rizwan, M., Hassan, M., Danish, R.Q., & Ali, A.R. (2017) 'Consumer' Characteristics and Social Influence Factors on Green Purchasing Intentions.' *Pakistan Journal of Life and Social Sciences*; 15(1): 1-9. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 6 December 2020].

Roberts. J.A. (1993) 'Sex Differences in Socially Responsible Consumers' Behavior.' *Psychological Reports*; 73(1): 139-148.

Sadachar, A., Khare, A., & Manchiraju, S. (2016) 'The Role of Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence in Predicting Green Apparel Consumption Behavior of American Youth.' *Atlantic Marketing Journal*; 5(1): 1-12.

Salazar, H.A., Oerlemans, L., & van Stroe-Biezen, S. (2013) 'Social influence on sustainable consumption: evidence from a behavioural experiment.' *International Journal of Consumer Studies*; 37: 172-180. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 28 November 2020].

Salciuviene, L., Buenaventura, V.C., & Lee, K. (2019) 'Employee Proactiveness to Engage in Sustainable Consumption Leading to Societal Benefits.' *Inzinerin Ekonomika-Engineering Economics*; 30(1): 112-120. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 29 December 2020].

Suki, N.M. & Suki, N.M. (2019) 'Examination of peer influence as a moderator and predictor explaining green purchase behavior in a developing country.' *Journal of Cleaner Production*; 228: 833-844.

Tajfel, H. (1982) 'Social psychology of intergroup relations.' *Annual Review of Psychology*; 33: 1-39. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 2 January 2021].

Taylor, S.E. & Brown, J.D. (1988) 'Illusion and well-being: A social psychological perspective on mental health.' *Psychological Bulletin*; 103: 193-210.

Thornquist, C. (2017) 'Unemotional Design: An Alternative Approach to Sustainable Design.' *Design Issues*; 33(4): 83-91. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 6 December 2020].

Tsarenko, Y., Ferraro, C., Sands, S., & McLeod, C. (2013) 'Environmentally conscious consumption: The role of retailers and peers as external influences.' *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*; 20: 302-310.

Tsen, C., Phang, G., Hasan, H., & Buncha, M.R. (2006) 'Going green: A study of consumers' willingness to pay for green products in Kota Kinabalu.' *International Journal of Business and Society*; 7(2): 40-54.

Uddin, S.M.F. & Khan, M.N. (2018) 'Young Consumer's Green Purchasing Behavior: Opportunities for Green Marketing.' *Journal of Global Marketing*; 31(4): 270-281. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 27 November 2020].

Usmani, S. & Ejaz, A. (2020) 'Consumer Buying Attitudes toward Counterfeit and Green Products: Application of Social Comparison Theory and Materialism.' *South Asian Journal of Management Sciences*; 14(1): 82-103. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 21 November 2020].

Vermier, I. & Verbeke, W. (2007) 'Sustainable food consumption among young adults in Belgium: Theory of planned behaviour and the role of confidence and values.' *Ecological Economics*; 64: 542-553.

White, K., MacDonnell, R., & Ellard, J.H. (2012) 'Belief in a Just World: Consumer Intentions and Behaviors Toward Ethical Products.' *Journal of Marketing*; 76: 103-118. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 15 January 2021].

Wooten, D.B. & Reed A. (2004) 'Playing It Safe: Susceptibility to Normative Influence and Protective Self-Presentation.' *Journal of Consumer Research*; 31: 551-555. Retrieved from: EBSCO [Accessed on 6 January 2021].

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Interview questions

Below are listed the predeveloped set of questions that were most frequently used during the interviews for this study in the order they were typically asked. It should be noted that the subsequent lists includes branching questions, wherein one question may have been posed over another relevant to what the participant had communicated prior.

1. Could you explain your views on climate change and the environmental crisis?
2. Where do you think your friends and family line up with regards do your views, i.e. are their views the same or different?
3. Can you describe your relationship to your friends and family?
4. How important is it for you to belong to a group of friends?
  - a. How much do you think you rely on your peers for things like information about current events, for example?
5. To what extent do you discuss environmental issues and products with your friends?
6. What would you say is your main source of information about environmental issues and products?
7. Could you describe any certain requirements you have when you buy products?
8. Do you think you consciously search for more environmentally friendly products? Why?
9. How often do you consider the environmental aspect or sustainability of a product when you want to buy something?
10. Do you purchase 'green' products?
  - a. Do you try to get your friends and family to buy more environmentally-friendly products? If yes, are you able to get them to actually buy them? Can you give an example?
  - b. If, for example, your friends started buying green products, how do you think that would influence your own purchasing?
11. Would you say that in general, your friends, family, and other people around you influenced the kind of products you buy? Why?
12. How much do you trust your friends and family to give you information about green products and being sustainable?
  - a. How much do you think your friends would trust you?

13. How do you think your friends would react if you were not environmentally-conscious?
  - a. Do you ever feel pressured to buy certain kinds of green products because of your friends?
14. Do you tend to notice if your friends and family buy and use green products?
  - a. Can you describe how you tend to react if you see a friend using a new kind of product?
15. Do you find that you buy things your friends and family have?
16. Is it important to you to feel like you fit in with your peers? Why?
17. Would you buy green products to feel like you fit in with your peers?
18. Would you say it's quite normal for your peers to be environmentally-conscious?
  - a. Do you find that that affects your own thoughts and behavior?

## Appendix B: Interview participant details

The following table provides the details of each interview for participants in Finland:

Participant	Date & time of interview	Length of interview	Age	Gender
Finnish Interviewee 1	1 February 2021 14.00	34 minutes	21	Female
Finnish Interviewee 2	1 February 2021 15.00	33 minutes	20	Female
Finnish Interviewee 3	2 February 2021 14.00	24 minutes	21	Female
Finnish Interviewee 4	2 February 2021 15.00	20 minutes	20	Female
Finnish Interviewee 5	26 January 2021 18.00	24 minutes	19	Female
Finnish Interviewee 6	24 January 2021 15.00	15 minutes	27	Female
Finnish Interviewee 7	24 January 2021 14.00	21 minutes	23	Female
Finnish Interviewee 8	22 January 2021 10.00	27 minutes	22	Female



Finnish Interviewee 9	23 January 2021 14.00	28 minutes	19	Male
Finnish Interviewee 10	28 January 2021 20.00	24 minutes	20	Female
Finnish Interviewee 11	3 February 2021 15.00	15 minutes	23	Male
Finnish Interviewee 12	2 February 2021 17.00	27 minutes	22	Male

Table 1: Finnish Interviewee Information

The following table details the information about interviews conducted among participants in California:

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Date &amp; time of interview</b>	<b>Length of interview</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Californian Interviewee 1	28 January 2021 20.30	22 minutes	19	Female
Californian Interviewee 2	26 January 2021 06.00	21 minutes	20	Female
Californian Interviewee 3	28 January 2021 22.15	20 minutes	19	Female
Californian Interviewee 4	25 January 2021 20.00	40 minutes	20	Female
Californian Interviewee 5	30 January 2021 17.00	25 minutes	20	Female
Californian Interviewee 6	24 January 2021 20.00	31 minutes	20	Female
Californian Interviewee 7	26 January 2021 20.00	20 minutes	20	Female
Californian Interviewee 8	26 January 2021 23.00	25 minutes	20	Female

Californian Interviewee 9	25 January 2021 21.00	20 minutes	19	Female
Californian Interviewee 10	1 February 2021 20.30	25 minutes	20	Male
Californian Interviewee 11	2 February 2021 19.30	17 minutes	20	Male
Californian Interviewee 12	2 February 2021 08.30	18 minutes	20	Male

*Table 2: Californian Interviewee Information*