

Corona virus disease and green brand purchase intentions: Case of health supplements in-store purchase in Zimbabwe supermarkets

Sinothando Tshuma ¹, Mercy Dube ², Reason Masengu ³, Chenjerai Muchenje ⁴

Abstract

The study sought to determine the new consumer purchase intentions on green branded health supplements products that emerged due the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19 pandemic). The research aimed at assessing the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on consumer green brand purchase intentions, effect of green perceived medicinal brand quality on consumer purchase intentions and the extent to which green brand positioning influence consumer purchase intentions on green health supplements products. The quantitative research used a questionnaire to collect data from two hundred (200) participants. The data was analysed using SPSS version 16 statistical software. The research concluded that COVID-19 altered consumer buying intentions and there was a positive effect of green brand medicinal perceived quality on consumer purchase intentions. Furthermore, it was established that green brand positioning influenced consumer purchase intentions on green health supplements products. The study recommended that for organisations to enjoy competitive advantage they should maintain the quality of their green products through adopting new technologies.

Keywords: Corona Virus disease, Green brands, Health supplement, Consumer purchase intentions.

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1. Introduction

The social factors always have a bearing in altering consumer behaviour patterns within a set of identifiable consumers in a market. The emergence of COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally altered everyday ways of life across the globe. Besides health implications, the pandemic also altered consumer buying patterns. These patterns still exist although the virus is drastically losing its grip on consumer health. Due to the impact of the pandemic, consumers have now ensuring that their immune system stays ready to fight any emerging life threatening diseases. This research was meant to analyse COVID-19 induced consumer buying behaviours that have remained permanent leading to new normal consumer purchase intentions. The COVID-19 pandemic altered consumer buying patterns and ravaged national economies and operations of organisations around the world. The Corona Virus disease forced many firms revisit their products lines and reengineered them to boost consumer immune systems or even fighting the virus or preventing the spread of the virus. On a different note Tuzovic and Kabadayi spell out that the COVID-19 outbreak forced many businesses to close down leading

to many disruptions in the areas of health and safety, the supply chain, cash flow, consumer demand, the work force and marketing in organisations. highlighted that the pandemic like any other disaster that affects economies brought with it a number of challenges to consumers and it altered their life styles as no consumer or industry was prepared for the virus as it was declared a pandemic. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the green brands because of their power to alleviate health mild health issues gained huge shelf space in retail outlets during and after the pandemic. ^[1]

The power of green brand positioning is usually affected by many consumer centred factors as brand position is stationed in the minds of consumers. Cordeiro and Yong Seo argue that consumer perceptions of firms' greenness does not always match the firms' sustainability practices/outcomes, leading to consumer mixed up choices during purchase decisions. The lack of close relationship between consumer perceptions and firm behaviours outweighs the importance of aligning consumer knowledge with firms' sustainability initiatives. ^[2]

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On the perspective of green brand perceived quality's influence on consumer buyer intentions, Shenet al. describe that United States customers are willing to give value to product price than the greenness of the brand and are more willing to sacrifice the opportunity of owning green brands if they do not perform to their satisfaction. Research by Green Gauge in Crispell list the American consumers as True-Blue Greens, Greenback Greens, Sprouts, Grouzers and Basic Browns. This is because these green brands have numerous environmental claims which have created numerous buying intentions in consumers during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. [3]

Many green brands have since been introduced into the market since the inception of COVID-19 pandemic, but the bigger question is 'are the green brands yielding sustainable customer satisfaction'. According to green product purchase attitudes mediate the effect of green product literacy, green product orientation, and social influence on behavioural intention. The major aim of the study is to develop a model showing the relationship between consumer purchase intentions and green health supplements during COVID-19 era. [4]

2. Research Objectives

The study is informed by the following objectives:

- To assess the significance of COVID-19 pandemic on consumer green brand purchase intentions,
- The effect of green brand perceived medicinal quality on consumer purchase intentions.
- The extent to which green brand positioning influence consumer purchase intentions on green health supplements products. [5]

3. Literature Review

3.1. Overview of the green branding concept

Green branding as a concept has drastically gained momentum due to changes that are happening in the macro environment. Carvalho et al. asserts that major uptake of green brands is climatic change based. Fuentes and Simão & Lisboa state that the uptake of green products is based on the effectiveness of the company's marketing mix elements. While Eneizan & Wahab allude that green brands is a tool for fighting competition. Masocha has a different view arguing that regardless of the definitional dilemma, demand for green products has increased leading to low consumption of non-green products. Masocha also indicate that COVID-19 pandemic has also led growth in green product sales of many SMEs in the South African supply chain. [6,7,8,9,10]

In the growing interest on green business, many firms that have a reputation of providing negative externalities to the environment have of late been abandoned by many consumers. On the same page, companies and various stakeholders are still in the dilemma of creating green brands health supplements that will be sustainable even when COVID-19 leaves consumers' social environment. According the

development of green brands that meet consumer needs and wants require huge investment leading to many green branded health supplements attracting a premium price which creates a niche market for them rather than a conventional market. Regardless of premium prices charged, many emerging green consumers need green brand that have less negative impact on their immune system. According to Wahba and Chen the future of many SMEs lies in embracing green marketing, avoiding green washing, with many firms delivering what they claim especially on products that are daily consumed. The products should not lead to daily deterioration of the consumer immune system and the environment. As a competitive strategy brands should embrace the green brand concept in all their aspects of raw material sources, production, packaging and waste disposal. While many organisations have joined the bandwagon not all of them have grasped the holistic process that prioritize the environment and the consumers. As such for profitability and products acceptance in the green branding topical issues company need to reconfigure their systems and reengineer their products to align themselves with the green business agenda. [10,11,12,13,14,15]

3.2. COVID-19 and consumer perceptions on health supplements.

Thakkaret al defines health supplements as natural products or supplements that are not chemically modified to help to alleviate some sicknesses or boost one's immune system. In the Zimbabwean context, firms are allowed to manufacture and distribute products that have health claims as long as they do not categorise them as medicines, however, these are supposed to be laboratory tested by the Zimbabwe health regulatory authority that they do not possess any harmful substances or ingredients. On a global perspective the European Medicines Agency (EMA) regard health supplements as herbal medicinal products that can only be distributed by pharmacies or medical bodies. In general, supplements do not require special licences and specialised equipment to produce. As such it was very quick to have supplements fill the gap of medicinal shortages as the world was hit by the Corona Virus disease unexpectedly. [16,17,18,19,20]

According to Hundal & Kumar (2015) consumers are changing their perceptions towards green products due to growing awareness to environmental and health issues. Promotion and adoption of green products and technologies is necessary for conservation of natural resources and the health of citizens. As a result of green products awareness campaigns, companies are increasingly using strategies for the promotion of adoption of green products and services. However highlights that the acceptability of green marketing concept is still lacking among the consumers although many customers are forced to adopt green products due to health concerns. The emergency of COVID-19 have also changed the perception about green brands

as medication was not readily available to the larger population. While there has been an increase in the consumption of green products, the recent surge is attributed to life scares from COVID-19 death toll. After unprecedented death figures and the inaccessibility of medicines from pharmaceutical companies the population relied on green products for survival. COVID-19 had a positive impact on the perception of green brands and that has led to an increase in the demand of green brands. [21,22,23,24]

3.3. Green brand perceived quality influence on consumer buying intentions.

The major characteristic that define high green brand perceived quality is the premium price attached to the brand because manufacturers use high green technology and outsource raw materials and in emerging markets these brands are highly taxed. Chen and Chang defined green perceived quality as the customer's final judgement on the brand's overall environmental excellence and superiority. Moiseet argues that consumers' now view perceived quality as the aspects of a product that claim green conservation. The researcher's idea to green brand perceived quality can be drawn from the above definitions as judgement by the user about the performance of the product based on its bias towards environmental preservation and social responsibility claims. [25,26,27,28,29,30]

Indicates that green value has significant relationship with both perceived quality and repurchase intention and highlights the importance of green value, emotional value, environment conscious, consumers' perceived quality, and repurchase intention. On the other hand posits that cognitive factors, consumer individual characteristics, and social factors are the major determinants of green purchase intention. The authors further acknowledge that green perceived value, attitude, and green trust are critical in driving intentions to purchase. The green brand indirectly influences green purchase intentions through green brand attitude and green brand associations. While companies tend to raise their customers' green purchase intentions, they need to increase their green brand affect, green brand associations, and green brand attitude. [31,32,33,34,35]

With many authors highlighting the different green brand factors affecting purchase intentions, the positive relationship between the green perceived quality and purchase intentions is inherent in the literature discussed. It then follows that perceived quality is critical in influencing purchase intentions and organisations should ensure the promotion of perceived value. Organisations should also ensure that the green products offer the assured promotion promise to continuously obtain the heart share by customers. [25]

3.4. Green brand positioning perspective

According to Keller brand positioning involves all the programs or strategies done by an organisation to ascertain a place the brand occupies in consumer

minds. In line with green products, noted an increase in attitude toward green brands and called for industries innovate their green products and rightly position them to increase purchase intentions. Brand positioning is critical in influencing consumer purchase intentions as it creates a positive image to the consumers. According to Hartmann et al the green brands should establish functional, green and emotional positioning to increase purchase intentions. [36,37,38,39]

Green brand centres on how promotion and elements that make up a brand are viewed unique in relation to competition based on their ecological elements. Functional positioning refers to the uses of brand elements as it talks of environmental attributes that benefit consumers. Aulina and Yuliati promulgate that green positioning is seen as a strategy to support a company's strategy towards creating a green marketing mix. Emotional positioning are those brand elements that create emotional attachment on the brand after use or consumption or awareness. Green brand positioning is a process where green attributes are added to a conventional brand and these attributes should be communicated to customers for differentiation from competition. The green brand attributes are then exposed to potential consumers to stimulate purchase decisions through intensive advertisement, green packaging, green seals. [40,41,42,43]

Suki postulates that green brand positioning involves environmentally friendly product attributes that consumers positively associate with when making purchase decisions. Wang further notes that when consumers have environmental centred knowledge about the greenness of the brand in their mind they tend to make increased repeat purchases towards the brand. This is also supported by Clancy and Trout who acknowledge that one of the tools of fighting competition through increased purchases is through brand positioning, Tien Chin Wang and Yen Ying Huang notes that positioning of green brands is built from a consistent green brand image which attract a consumer to buy the brand leading to green positioning. Positioning of green brands is seen in the behaviour of a customer especially when consumers get to know about uses and elements of green products and the green product satisfies the consumer's deficit of a want or need based on customer green brand experience and awareness. [44,45,46]

4. Research Hypothesis

H1: COVID-19 alters consumer buying intentions.

H2: There is a positive effect between green brand perceived medicinal quality and consumer purchase intentions

H3: Green brand positioning influence consumer purchase intentions on green health supplements products.

5. Research design and methodology

Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill research onion was

adopted by the researchers to collect data. Descriptive research best suited the research problem as it addresses key elements as eluded by Zikmund that descriptive research is used to describe attributes of people. The target population comprised of general consumers who are users of green health supplements products. To give all users of green brands within a market a chance of being selected, as agued by Greener a systematic random sampling technique was adopted by the researcher. Questionnaires were distributed in various supermarkets that sell green health supplements with some questionnaires administered on social media platforms and through Google docs. In determining sample size, Roscoe concept to sample determination was used spelling out that a sample size that ranges from 30- 500 is considered adequate for research, on that note, 200 consumers were used as a sample size for the research yielding 90% response rate. Cronbach's Alpha was adopted as a measure of reliability which stood at 0.78. Because the research is descriptive, scales from previous similar researches were adopted to ensure reliability of the scale. This involved the researcher adopting validated scales from previous similar researches to suit current research. Split half and test re-test method was used to verify scale reliability. To easily and accurately analyse data, SPSS was used as a statistical analysis tool. ^[47,48,49]

6. Results and discussion of findings

6.1. Influence of green brand perceived quality has on consumer buying intentions.

The aim of this objective was to establish green brand perceived quality influence on consumer buying intentions. To attain results multiple regression analysis was done through SPSS statistical software.

Table 1 and 2 shows relationship of perceived quality and consumer purchase intentions on different green health supplements products. H3 was accepted as data is proving a positive effect of green brand awareness on consumer purchase intentions. H0 was rejected. The association between the variables to determine the relationship was shown by a 4.175 t-tests which is above 2 and 0.00 to 0.005 p-values probability significant at 5%. Pq item 1, assessed whether green products offer the quality perceived by consumers, while pq item 2, checked on the reliability of the green supplements from a consumer perspective, with pq item 3, determining whether green brands offer consistent quality. The data indicate that consumers favour green brands of quality, reliable and consistent to claims as indicated by a strong positive effect on consumer purchase intentions on green health supplements with the entire p-values ranging from 0.000 to 0.005 at 5% insignificance level. Moise et al. argues that consumers' now view perceived quality as the aspects of a product that claim green conservation and tend to purchase more of these products. This is supported by who indicate that green value leads to repurchase based on the consumer's perceived green quality. According to green

purchase is a based on consumer cognitive factors, green brand attitude and brand associations. The findings also imply that increasing green product quality by a single unit causes an increase in consumer purchase of green brands by 88.2% level of coefficient proving a strong positive correlation exists. This is supported by Aaker who posits that the subjective evaluation of a product by a customer can lead to a purchase. This is in line with who asserts that green perceived value, attitude, and green trust are critical in driving intentions to purchase. The results also indicates that the standard error of the items is low ranging from 0.020 to 0.044 which shows that the independent variables used to estimate consumer purchase intentions (dependent variable) are low as the higher the R squared the lower the standard error. The highest predictor of consumer purchase intentions is pq item2 with the highest beta value of 0.727, which shows that consumers love green brands that have consistent quality when purchasing green health supplement products. It should also be noted that multicollinearity problem does not exist as VIF for all variables is less than 10 and also tolerance is more than 0.1

6.2. Influence of green brand positioning has on consumer buying intentions.

The objective was set to assess the extent to which green brand positioning influence consumer buying intentions.

Table 3 and table 4 shows green brand positioning and consumer purchase intentions relationship. H3 was accepted as data shows that positive correlational relationship do exists between brand positioning and consumer purchase intentions However, H0 was rejected. The association of variables showing the relationship among the variables stood at 0.000 and 0.015 p-values for two measurement instruments that were significant as they were less than 0.05. Using the item questions that have favourable p-values it should be noted that according to consumers price is vital in positioning green brands for purchase intentions and also green products that match customer needs and wants are important to ensure green positive brand purchase intentions. This is supported by Suki who says green brand positioning leads to green purchase based on customer green brand experience and awareness and Tien Chin Wang and Yen Ying Huang green brands is built from a consistent green brand image, which has a positive correlation to green positioning as consumers purchase more of green brands that match their cognitive position. The other variables do not add any substantial contribution in explaining consumer purchase intentions as the p values are above 0.05. The findings imply that an increase in green brand positioning attributes by 1 unit will cause an increase in consumer purchase of green brands by 70.7% level of coefficient proving that a strong positive correlation exists.

The results also indicates that the standard error of the items is low ranging from 0.015 to 0.081 which

shows that the independent variables used to estimate consumer purchase intentions (dependent variable) are correct as the higher the R squared the lower the standard error. The highest predictor of consumer purchase intentions is bp question item6 where consumers were asked on their preference towards environmental friendly products and the hypothesis confirmed that with the highest beta value of 0.088, which shows that

consumers prefer environmentally friendly products in their purchase decisions. There has been an increase in attitude toward green brands and called for industries to be innovative to rightly position their green products as they increase purchase intentions. It should also be noted that multicollinearity problem does not exist as VIF for all variables is less than 10 and also tolerance is more than 0.1

Table 1- Model summary

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.918a	.844	.841	.21512

a. Predictors: (Constant), pq item3, pq item1, pq item2

Table 2- Coefficients

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	.183	.044		4.175	.000		
pq item1	.142	.029	.190	4.811	.000	.626	1.597
pq item2	.614	.036	.727	17.056	.000	.535	1.869
pq item3	.057	.020	.107	2.858	.005	.691	1.448

a. Dependent Variable: brandchoice

Table 3-Model summary

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.841a	.707	.696	.22171

a. Predictors: (Constant), bp item6, bp item5, bp item1, bp item2, bp item3, bp item4

Table 4- Coefficients

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	.401	.081		4.958	.000		
bp item1	-.019	.033	-.026	-.574	.567	.919	1.089
bp item2	.681	.037	.812	18.255	.000	.938	1.066
bp item3	-.023	.032	-.033	-.707	.481	.874	1.144
bp item4	-.050	.020	-.123	-2.464	.015	.742	1.348
bp item5	-.011	.015	-.034	-.721	.472	.814	1.228
bp item6	.040	.023	.088	1.755	.081	.742	1.349

a. Dependent Variable: green purchase

Source: SPSS version 16

7. Conclusion

The study shows a strong relationship of perceived quality on consumer purchase intentions on different green health supplements products. H2 was accepted as data is proving a positive relational influence of green brand awareness on consumer purchase intentions while H0 was rejected. To determine level of association between variables 4.175 t-tests was obtained, the value being above 2 and 0.00 to 0.005 p-values significant at 5%. The findings also indicate that all items that green brands are of quality, very reliable and consistent produce a strong positive effect on consumers' purchase intentions on green health supplements as all p-values range from 0.000 to 0.005 at 5% significance level. The study showed that green brand positioning and consumer purchase intentions have a positive relationship. H3 was accepted and H0 rejected. The variables under study showed 0.000 and 0.015 p-values for two measurement instruments that were significant as they were less than 0.05. Using the items that have favourable p-values it should be noted that price is vital in positioning green brands for purchase intentions and also green products that match customer needs and wants are important to ensure green positive brand purchase intentions. The other variables do not add any substantial contribution in explaining consumer purchase intentions as the p values are above 0.05.

8. Recommendations

Companies that manufacture green products should ensure they maintain the quality of their green products for the products to remain reliable in satisfying consumer needs and wants. Companies should adopt new technologies and green their manufacturing plants as green brands when they are of quality lead to positive consumer purchase intentions. Ottoman, suggests that all aspects of marketing from product innovation, product development, distribution, pricing and promotion should claim ecological benefits if firms are to win consumer purchases. Zeithaml also talks about importance of quality quoted by Detta et al that perceived quality is a value ingredient to a product that provides customers the reason to buy the product and distinguish it from competition

Companies should ensure that the product competitively delivers both traditional and sustainability benefits. If the product doesn't work, it doesn't matter how "green" it is. Organisations should endeavour to fulfil the sustainability message throughout the entire product's lifecycle from sourcing of ingredients to the recycling process. Consumers to develop a strong relationship with sustainable companies and brands. As such the organisations should market transparently.

One of the tools for enhanced competitive advantage is securing a good brand position in the mind of the consumer. Companies embracing the marketing of green brands should ensure that quality, price and green product attributes or claims become pillars to green brand positioning. Notes that one of the tools of fighting competitions through increased purchases

is through brand positioning although positioning has a less effect that perceived quality in influencing consumer purchase intentions. In order for green brand equity to be achieved, a company must use sustainable production methods, offer a more eco-friendly option than their competitors, and outline their ethos in relation to environmental protection.

Green products are known for the premier market due to their high prices making the unfordable by the general population. The companies need to manage any sustainable pricing gap. The high price of many of the sustainable products discourages consumers from purchasing and actually can be perceived as a sustainability tax or surcharge. Eliminating or reducing the price barrier helps to dispel the notion that green products are not just for the elite and will encourage more people to consume better-for-the-environment products. Companies should not to force the consumer to make big trade-offs whether it is price, performance, convenience, or a noisy package. Most consumers have not proven that they are willing to make significant sacrifices.

Governments should come up with green policies and ensure that organisation abide to the policies. Green policies can promote economic growth, job creation and environmental sustainability and bring back GDP to what it would have been in the absence of COVID-19. The institution of green brand will also lead to new products, technologies and health nations.

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