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What they say is not what they do: exploring the gap between fair-trade consumers

by
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Abstract

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Introduction

Consumers in developed countries have set a trend through their shopping behaviour, and have in this case influenced processes of production and consumption of goods that are considered ethical. Ethical consumerism which happens as consumers, increasingly, encourage ethical production through the purchasing of ethical goods and services has become ever more lucrative and reached £32.2 billion in the UK in 2006 (The Co-operative Bank, 2007). This. Ethical consumption practices have gone far beyond the primary utilitarian function of serving basic human needs. As such, consumers are presently often considered as co-creators of value (Senge and Carsted, 2003) as their consumption reflects principles and beliefs through what is purchased or not (Dickinson and Hollander, 1991).

The word *ethics* originates from the Greek word *ethos* meaning conduct, customs or character. As such, ethics can be described as the application of morals to human activity. Ethical consumerism deals with consumers' decisions to use their disposable income for common good. This can be considered as a vote because each time consumers shop, they will be either supporting the brand and the company by purchasing the item or withdrawing support by avoidance - when the item is found unethical. This act of consumption gives them the power to change the fate of the products or the services (Shaw *et al*, 2006). Ethical behaviour should, in turn, provide benefit to individuals, specific groups or society (Manning *et al*, 2006). Consequently, ethical consumer behaviour in the market place echoes a conscious and deliberate act to make certain consumption choices due to personal and moral beliefs (Carrigan *et al*, 2004:401).

There are five main types of ethical buying. Firstly, *positive buying*, which was identified by Friedman cited by Harrison *et al* (2005) as positive boycotts. It is referred to favouring a particular product over another. Secondly, *negative purchasing or boycott* relates to avoiding a product that was 'not approved' by consumers, such as battery hen eggs. Thirdly, *fully screened approach* looks both at the company and at the product and evaluates which is the most ethical overall. Fourthly, in *relationship purchasing* consumers seek to educate the sellers about their ethical needs. Finally; *anti-consumerism or sustainable consumerism* takes place when consumers avoid unsustainable products (Harrison *et al*, 2005).

Consumers involved in any of these types of ethical buying are referred to as *ethical consumers* and are defined as those who buy from companies that make and sell products that do not harm or exploit people, animals and environment. Presently, ethical consumerism encompasses concern for climate change, fair trade, animal welfare, human rights, health and safety issues, local products, organic, labour standards (Tallontire *et al*, 2001; Carrigan *et al*, 2004), oppressive regimes (Shaw and Shiu, 2001), and even investment (Schlegelmilch, 1997). The focus on ethical marketing shows the increasing importance of this segment.

However, some show scepticism in the light of past experiences which showed the market share for ethical products accounted for only 1 percent (De Pelsmacker *et al*, 2005). Notwithstanding, expressions of socially responsible attitudes might not be the most dominant criteria in the consumers' buying decision. Carrigan and Attalla (2001) found that most consumers lacked information to be able to distinguish whether a company had or had not behaved ethically. Hence, evidence suggests that there is no guarantee that all those who are regarded as ethical consumers would always behave ethically.

Despite the positive consumers' attitude towards ethical products and, consequently, the increasing supply of these over the last decade, this seems not sufficient to explain consumers' attitude towards 'alternative' foods as a whole. The expected change in consumer behaviour sometimes fails to meet the expectations of producers and retailers. Many support ethical trade in principle, but then choose other food products when shopping. Hence, there seems to be a gap between consumers' attitude and behaviour. Understanding and narrowing such a gap is considered crucial to the sustainability of ethical trading as consumers must not only support it in principle, but also in practice.

An analysis of the gap between consumer attitude and behaviour

Since attitude is considered to be a major determinant of behaviour (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), communication on exploitation of the environment through mass media is believed to have enhanced positive consumers' attitude and subsequently triggered change in behaviour. Far from agreeing with this view, Burgess *et al* (1971) found that apart from attitude and knowledge to act, incentives given were important to reinforce socially and environmentally acceptable behaviour. Yet, Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) pointed out that such unconscious pro-environmental behaviour could be easily reversed or altered to a more unsustainable pattern because, as such, it was not based on solid values. Whilst on the one hand, ethical consumption required a certain measure of social activism; on the other hand, consumers followed a general cultural norm where buyer decision was also based on individualised risk assessment (Giddens, 1991; Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006). The majority of consumer decision making process was understood to be influenced by price, quality, convenience and brand familiarity (Carrigan and Attalla, 2001; Prendergast *et al*, 2001). Robinson and Smith (2002) found that consumers interested in buying 'earth-sustainable' products actually decided not to purchase them owed to perceived lack of availability, inconvenience and price, and therefore exposed the gap between positive attitude and behaviour. Ethical marketing depended heavily on 'reflexive consumers' who are not necessarily social activists' people. They are the type of people who required far more information about the source of a product in order to make their own assessment of a product they are buying. This type of reflexive consumerism embodied issues such as the environment, human rights, labour and animal welfare. In this sense, 'reflexive consumers' would like to have fully traceable products with 'something else'.

In the early days, traditional thinking supported the idea that increased knowledge tended to encourage favourable attitudes which, in turn, lead to pro-environmental action. Burgess *et al* (1998) called this the 'information deficit model'. However, so far no one has been able to confirm the validity of such a model (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002). In reality the process of change involved not only the dissemination of information but it also included other important psychological and social factors such as, locus of control, personal responsibility and action skills to perform environmentally related actions (Hines *et al*, 1987). Internal locus of control in particular made individuals realise that their positive actions made a significant contribution to environmental causes. Hungerford and Volk (1990) have broadly categorised these into entry level variables (i.e., empathetic perspective toward the environment), ownership and empowerment variables.

It is widely accepted that irrespective of the outcome, any attempt to promote long-term pro-environmental behaviour would primarily require knowledge and awareness of environmental issues (Newhouse, 1991; Chawla, 1999; Blake, 1999; Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002). Inclusionary style of environmental communication is believed to stimulate positive attitude (Burgess *et al*, 1998). However, the over emphasis on information and the difficulty of including all the environmental stakeholders in the decision-making process proved to be a practical constrain (Blake, 1999). Such discrepancy showed only part of the whole problem. Rajecki (1982) cited by Newhouse (1991) suggested the potential causes for the gap in terms of direct versus indirect experience, normative influences, temporal discrepancy and attitude-behaviour measurement. It is interesting to note that temporal discrepancy refers to attitude which is susceptible to change with the passage of time. So it is appropriate to choose the most influential learning experiences to determine and change environmental attitudes and behaviour.

Ajzen and Fishbein, in their theory of reasoned action and theory of planned behaviour have explained the relationship of belief, attitude, intention, subjective norms and behaviour; and stated that people are rational and they used the available information in a systematic way (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). However, researchers proved that such a relationship had other dimensions. As a result, the decision-making process could be considered as almost unpredictable: positive attitudes were not necessarily followed by positive intentions (Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006). Although the model of responsible environmental behaviour proposed by Hines *et al* (1987) was an improvement of the theory of planned behaviour the relationship between knowledge and attitudes, attitudes and intentions, and intentions and actual responsible behaviour, were weak at best.

In fact, other authors considered the relationship between attitude and behaviour as not being strong (Newhouse, 1991; Hines *et al*, 1987; Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002). According to Kraus (1995) and Ajzen (2001), cited by Vermeir and Verbeke (2006), attitude alone was a poor predictor of intentional behaviour. As such, there seemed to be many more factors that influenced pro-environmental behaviour. Hines *et al* (1987) called these situational factors and included economic constraints, social pressures, and

opportunities to choose different actions. Yet, Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) considered institutional, economic, social and cultural factors to be broadly under external factors. As a part of demographic factors they also recognised the affect of gender and years of education on people's reception to change. But all these factors, along with psychological factors, were actually intertwined.

Interestingly, Stern *et al* (1993) adopted a different framework to enlighten the existing gap between current principle and actual practice through motivational factors. According to them, motivation was a strong internal stimulus around which behaviour was organised. Subsequently, they proposed a model based on the altruism theory of Schwartz (1977) wherein environmental concern is caused by egoistic, social and bio-spherical orientations. Among these egoistic orientations, individualism was considered to be the strongest motivation to explain pro-environmental behaviour. However, the flip side of egoistic dominance showed that positive action took place only when such behaviour supported individual needs and desires. Consumers who did not actually turn expressed interest into purchasing habits were many. Despite the growth in sales of fair trade goods, for example, the gap between attitudes and buying practice seems to be wide. Moreover, decisions about grocery shopping were found to be 'unashamedly selfish'. Groceries shopping decisions, rather than being driven by altruistic motives, were in fact determined by price, convenience and value (FSA, 2007). Hines *et al.* (1987) proposed a 'Model of Responsible Environmental Behaviour' which was refuted by Grob (1991) who disagreed that knowledge of one cause would lead directly to action.

Many more theories have attempted to outline the reasons for this gap between consumer knowledge and spending habits. Burgess *et al* (1998) proposed a linear model where knowledge led to a certain attitude, which in turn led to positive behaviour. Other researchers have tried to explain the 'gap' in more detail. Rajecki (1982) proposed causes for pro-environmental behaviour as being related to experience, influence, time and attitude-behaviour measurement. Rajecki (1982) believed that people's attitudes changed depending on the distance in time from the main motivator driving the expected action. In addition, Hines *et al* (1987) and Stern *et al* (1993) attempted to explain why some people cared more about certain issues than others. Their contributions were useful in the understanding that not all decisions made by humans were actually rational, and based on information available. Nevertheless, none of the theories so far have given satisfactory explanation to bridge the gap between attitude and ethical behaviour.

Furthermore, Chawla (1998) suggested that values shaped most of one's motivation in what made people support certain causes such as environmentalism. But crucially, many people's attitudes were shaped before they were conscious of making decisions. Blake (1999) pointed out that most of the analysis made about consumer behaviour was limited, because they failed to take into account individual, social and institutional constraints. Refuting the theory of reasoned action, Blake revealed the false assumption that people are always rational and use the available information in a

systematic way. Blake (1999) also identified several barriers between concern about an environmental issue and action, which consisted of individuality, responsibility and practicality and how these attitudes interacted which each other were especially important for people with no strong social or ecological concerns. Since major barriers could be stopping consumers buying ethical products, the 'responsibility' barrier, which related to trust would, then, become a barrier between concern and action.

Based on Blake's value-action gap model, Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) pointed out that whilst responsibility is almost similar in concept to locus of control, in practice it referred to social and institutional constraints which hinder people to act pro-environmentally regardless of their attitudes or intentions. These barriers are relevant to people who do not have strong environmental concerns. In spite of integrating internal and external factors Blake (1999) had also failed to deal with all the important social, cultural and psychological factors.

Even though there are successive attempts to understand and bridge the gap between what the consumers say and actually do with respect to pro-environmental concern, there are omissions and contradictions in the literature. Considering this state of affairs Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) proposed a model of pro-environmental behaviour exploring the gap between intention and action in the consumer spending habits. This model was built upon the principles proposed by Fietkau and Kessle (1981) and later developed by Fliegenschnee and Schelakovsky (1998) cited by Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002). This model considered emotional involvement as a factor for linking environmental knowledge, values and attitudes to pro-environmental behaviour. They called this 'pro-environmental consciousness', which was derived from personal values, shaped by personality traits and affected by internal and external factors, including here social and cultural ones. Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) suggested that expected responses would vary according to different personal life stages as well as, for example, the extent of education or knowledge about environmental issues. As for other possible barriers to behaviour, it identified old behaviour as the worst. This is because old behaviour limited all possible attributes deriving from both internal and external factors that determine environmental consciousness (Figure 4). Although these factors will not vary at different stages, their roles will vary during the development process of people's lives. However, even this model with all its good intentions could not accommodate all the important determinants of positive consumer behaviour.

Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) pointed out it was almost impossible to create a model that fully explained the gap between intention and action which incorporated all the factors discussed, as it would be far too complicated. Indeed, some consider the model to have some serious omissions. Gender and years of education were important factors when considering how receptive to change a person might be. Equally, 'concern for others' and 'willingness to be open to new ways to help' could be considered typically 'female traits'. Consequently, the balance between male and female opinion was important when evaluating why a person did not buy ethical products.

Henceforth, the different models offer valid explanation under certain circumstances and therefore indicated that these models are situation, location and people specific. As demonstrated by Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) it is literally impossible and impractical to have a single model to narrow the gap between positive attitude and pro-environmental behaviour. O'Donoghue and Lotz-Sisitka (2002) have brought to light the many laminations of the 'pro-environmental model'.

Aim and Objectives

There seems to be a gap between consumers' attitude and behaviour. Understanding and narrowing such a gap is considered crucial to the sustainability of ethical trading as consumers must not only support it in principle, but also in practice. This study aimed at exploring the reasons why people do not purchase fair trade products. In order to ascertain the gap between intention and action, fair-trade mangoes were used to test the consumers' motivation for buying fair-trade in the UK.

Methodology

The aim of this study is to test Kollmus and Agyeman pro-environmental behaviour model. The research method consisted of a two-stage data collection. Firstly, in-depth interviews were carried out with two importers of fair trade fruit in January 2008. Secondly, a survey consisting of a questionnaire was conducted with consumers of two counties in the UK: Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. The questions were developed to capture the elements of the conceptual framework. Using a Likert-5 scale, corrections of bias of order effect and acquiescence were considered with the negative side of the scale placed on the left, as well as two-stage questions to counter the bias of central tendency. Data from 101 valid face-to-face questionnaires were collected and analysed using T-test and Chi-square.

Results

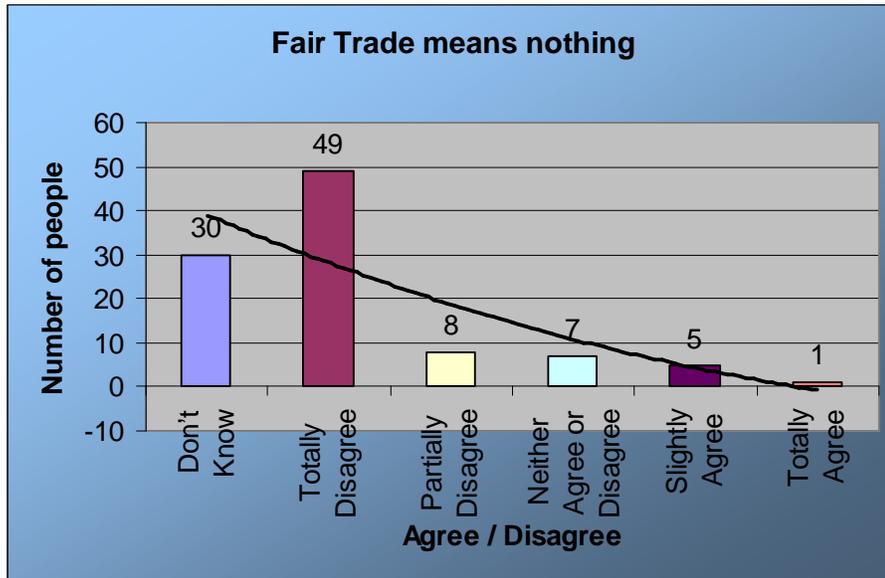
There were no significant differences between the two areas studied. Female responses tended to be higher than male. Almost two-thirds of the respondents were married or had a partner in typically childless households. Only 3% of the respondents purchased their groceries from the Coop considered an ethical food retailer. Moreover, some 28% of the respondents also used food retailers with strong corporate social responsibility claims such as Waitrose and Marks & Spencer. These retailers were also perceived as offering a wide range of fair-trade products. Amongst the fair-trade products, bananas, coffee, tea, chocolate and mangoes were purchased regularly, in this order. Whilst some 31% of the respondents claimed not to buy fair-trade, another 21% purchased it regularly. However, the remaining respondents showed a low frequency: fortnightly or monthly.

The vast majority agreed that fair-trade products helped poor farmers in developing countries. However, the correlation between fair-trade helping the environment was not strong which contrasted with the respondent's notion that that fair-trade promoted sustainable development. Fair-trade products were perceived as providing farmers with a better price for their products;

being trustworthy; helping the environment and the poor; and social responsibility.

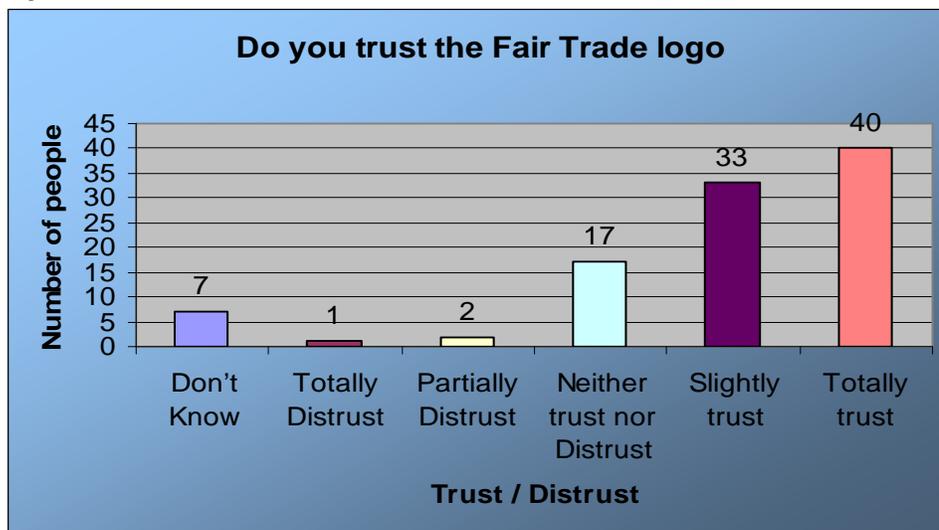
In Figure 1, when a negative statement was offered, 'fair-trade means nothing', it was rejected by the majority of the respondents. The dark line in the figure below represents the average responses.

Figure1 -



Furthermore, Figure 2 below demonstrates that the respondents strongly believed that the fair-trade logo, and the messages it carries, represented a trusted source.

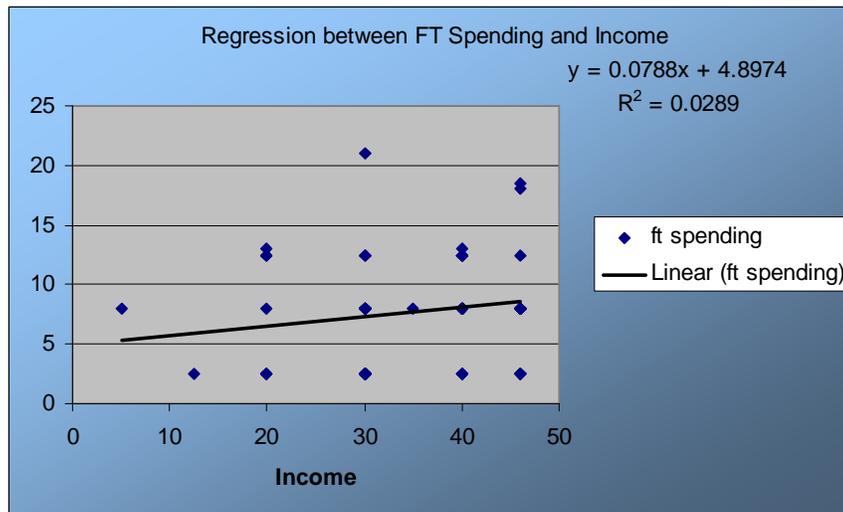
Figure 2 -



A positive correlation was identified between age of the respondent and the willingness to buy fair trade mangoes. The older the respondent the more

likely they buy fair trade at 92% confidence (Chi test: 0.005592734). The level of income was also determinant for the purchase of fair trade, as shown in Figure 3 below. For every £1,000 more in income consumers were likely to spend £0.78 more ($Y = 0.0788X + 4.8974$ at $R^2 = 0.0289$).

Figure 3 -



The survey could not establish a significant difference regarding the level of education and the willingness to buy fair trade; however, married couples were more likely to consider this option (at 92% of the probability it was 0.008799845) than single people.

One of the barriers identified against the purchasing of fair trade mangoes was price, followed by lack of knowledge. Some 55% of the sample did not read the stories describing the workers of fair trade provided by the fair trade certifier. However, the vast majority trusted the messages conveyed by the logo. Moreover, 2/3 of the respondents stated it was generally difficult to find fair traded products.

Consumers tended to project extra attributes to fair traded mangoes by believing they were of higher quality, nevertheless, many were not sure of extra health benefits. In this case prior knowledge might be playing an important role in consumption decision.

The reasons the respondents did not buy fair trade were given as follows: 'price'; 'more press information'; 'more promotion by supermarkets'; 'lack of habit'; and 'ability to find fair trade products'. Nonetheless, the motivations behind positive action related to 'helping the environment', 'participating in positive social change' which are strong determinants of purchase.

Conclusions

Kollmus and Agyeman's model served as a preliminary guide to questionnaire design and consequent data gathering. Alluding to the fact that there is a

behavioural gap between intention and action is considered an important area of study in marketing.

Gender imbalance of the respondents and sample size consisted of a major limitation for this study. However, the results provided interesting insights into an area little studied and would guide managers of product and niche categories to better understand the motivations about purchase.

As seen in the literature old habits are strong in determining change. The number of respondents who did not purchase fair trade products was high. Those were unlikely to become regular buyers of ethical products. Nonetheless, for most of the reasons consumers do not buy fair trade, these can be acted upon. Despite trust in fair-trade and what the products represent, information and old habits are still major barriers that managers and retailers need to overcome.

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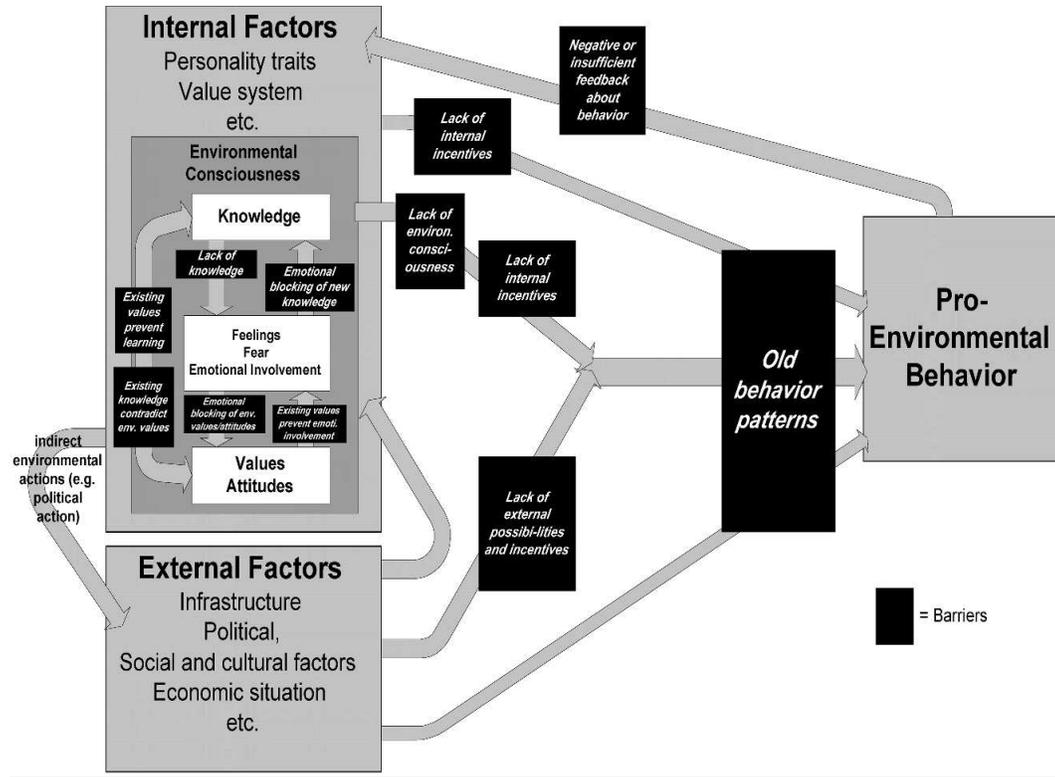
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Appendices:

Figure 4 – Model of Pro-environmental Behaviour



Source: Kollmus and Agyeman (2002)