

Explaining the dimensions and components of green consumption culture: Qualitative Study in Iraq.

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Abstract:

This qualitative study aims to explain and analyze the dimensions and components of green consumption culture in Iraq, through in-depth interviews with a sample of (15) academics and marketing experts. The study sought to explore the cultural and behavioral elements that shape consumer environmental practices in the Iraqi context. Data analysis using a thematic analysis revealed that green consumption culture consists of five interconnected dimensions: environmental awareness, environmental attitudes and motivations, environmental values and beliefs, responsible consumer behavior, and the cultural and social dimension. These dimensions demonstrate a logical sequence that begins with environmental perception, proceeds through the formation of attitudes and values, and culminates in the adoption of sustainable consumer practices, within a social and cultural framework that influences individual behavior.

Although the study provided a deep, fact-based understanding of green consumer culture, it faces some methodological limitations, most notably its reliance on a qualitative approach and the limitation of the sample to experts only, which limits the generalizability of the results. The study recommends future research using a quantitative or mixed-method approach, encompassing broader segments of society, to test the discovered dimensions and expand statistical understanding of green consumer behavior in Iraq.

Keywords: green consumption, consumption culture, customer behavior, Thematic analysis.

1. Introduction

In light of the increasing environmental challenges facing the contemporary world as a result of rapid industrial growth and unsustainable consumption patterns, global interest in the culture of green consumerism has grown as a key path to achieving sustainable development and reducing the environmental impact of human activity (Liu, 2024). The concept of "green consumerism" refers to consumer behavior that considers the environmental and social impacts of their purchasing decisions and encourages the adoption of environmentally responsible practices, such as choosing eco-friendly products, recycling, and rationalizing the use of resources (Vysotska, 2022).

The culture of green consumerism has become a central topic in environmental, marketing, and sociological studies, particularly in the context of calling for a cultural shift toward a lifestyle more compatible with the requirements of environmental sustainability (Testa, 2021). However, this concept remains shrouded in ambiguity in many cultural and social contexts, particularly in developing countries, where economic, cultural, and educational factors intersect in shaping consumer awareness and environmental behavior (Nga, 2024). Hence, the need for in-depth qualitative studies that seek to clarify the dimensions and structural components of this culture in light of the local context, to understand its determinants, manifestations, and social manifestations (Yan, 2021).

This qualitative study seeks to explore and analyze the dimensions and components of green consumer culture from a sociological-behavioral perspective, relying on a qualitative research methodology as a framework for understanding the social and cognitive dynamics that govern consumer behavior toward the environment. The study relies on a systematic review of relevant recent literature, as well as the collection and analysis of qualitative data through in-depth interviews with a group of individuals, with the aim of identifying the cultural patterns, values, motivations, and barriers that shape this type of consumption.

The expected results of this research contribute to the construction of an integrated conceptual framework that helps researchers, policymakers, marketers, and civil society understand the cultural and social reality associated with green consumption and develop effective strategies to promote this culture at the individual and institutional levels. The study also provides a scientific basis for guiding environmental awareness campaigns and designing educational and cultural programs that promote sustainable consumer behavior.

2. literature review

Green consumer culture is a modern concept that has emerged within the framework of global efforts to address contemporary environmental challenges (Chi, 2021). The concept refers to a system of values, beliefs, and knowledge that guides the behavior of individuals and groups toward consumption patterns

that take environmental and sustainability into account (Ka, L. S., 2025). This concept evolved from the environmental movements of the twentieth century, which called for reducing excessive consumption and pollution (Baynova, 2021). It later evolved into a cultural and social framework that reflects the relationship between humans and the environment in daily life practices, particularly regarding purchasing, consuming, and disposing of products (Dai, S., Chen, 2022).

Studies indicate that green consumer culture is not limited to individual behavior, but rather encompasses societal structure, cultural factors, and ethical values that determine the nature of the relationship with the environment (Yang, 2022). Individuals who belong to societies with high environmental awareness or educational systems that promote concepts of sustainability are more likely to adopt green consumer patterns. Economic and social factors, such as income levels and trust in environmental policies, also play a fundamental role in shaping this culture, underscoring the multidimensional and complex nature of green consumer culture (Ribeiro, 2023).

A review of the literature reveals that several factors influence the promotion or weakening of a green consumption culture, the most important of which are: the quality of environmental education, the level of trust in environmental products, the availability of sustainable options in the market, the role of the media in disseminating environmental education, and institutional practices related to social responsibility and environmental governance (Zhao, 2021). The nature of the prevailing culture in society also plays a significant role, as individualistic societies may focus on personal impact, while collectivist societies contribute to promoting collective green behaviors (Chen, 2025).

On the other hand, research shows that the application of green consumption culture varies across geographical and cultural contexts (Hasudungan, 2024). While tangible steps have been taken in many developed countries toward promoting sustainable consumption, developing countries still face multiple challenges in this area, including weak environmental infrastructure, lack of public awareness, and a gap between knowledge and actual behavior (Martey, 2023). In the Arab context, there is growing interest in this topic in light of the environmental pressures facing the region. However, green culture is still in its infancy and requires integrated efforts at the educational, political, and media levels to promote it (de Moraes, 2021).

Based on the above, it can be said that the culture of green consumption represents a pivotal dimension in the transition towards sustainable development. It requires integrated interaction between individuals, society, and institutions through education, awareness-raising, public policies, and the provision of sustainable alternatives (Huang, 2022). This contributes to shaping a cultural environment that supports responsible consumption. Promoting this culture is also a prerequisite for achieving the desired environmental and social transformation, especially in countries facing complex environmental, economic, and cultural challenges (Duong, 2024).

3. Methods and Materials

3.1. Study Design and Participants

This study utilizes a qualitative research methodology to explore the dimensions and components of green consumption culture. The study included fifteen respondents chosen based on certain criteria to enable a thorough grasp of green consumption culture. Participants were separated into two groups:

- Academic Experts: Professors having at least 10 years of marketing-related teaching and research experience.
- Marketing experts and managers: They have extensive experience and expertise in analyzing consumer patterns and understanding and comprehending their needs.

3.2. Data collection:

We used semi-structured interviews to facilitate in-depth conversations and collect rich qualitative data. These interviews were conducted to investigate various aspects of green consumption culture among Iraqi consumers.

3.3. Data Analysis:

We utilized NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, to manage and analyze the interview data. This tool assisted in classifying the data and identifying prevalent themes and cultures associated with green consumption culture.

4. Findings and Results

Profile Participants

Demographic variables (specialization, profession, work experience, academic background, etc.) are pivotal elements in qualitative studies, especially when the goal is an in-depth analysis of a complex social phenomenon such as "green consumption culture."

In this research, these variables are not viewed as mere descriptive data, but rather as analytical tools that allow us to understand how environmental perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors vary across participants' professional positions and intellectual backgrounds. This diversity in participants' backgrounds helps analyze green consumer culture from multiple perspectives: academic, environmental, and marketing. This enhances the reliability of the results and their multiple interpretive perspectives.

The initial interviews and their content analysis revealed that the diversity of participants enabled the researcher to explore the dimensions of green consumer culture within the Iraqi cultural context.

Table (1) Profile Participants.

Participant	Job Position	Age	Gender	Experience Years
1	Professor	50	Male	20
2	Professor	45	Male	15
3	Professor	43	Female	12
4	Professor	55	Male	22
5	Professor	60	Male	25

6	Professor	53	Female	18
7	Marketing and sales Manager	60	Male	30
8	sales Manager	55	Female	19
9	Marketing and sales Manager	45	Male	15
10	Marketing Manager	50	Female	20
11	Marketing and sales Manager	55	Male	17
12	Marketing and sales Manager	47	Female	15
13	Marketing Developer	65	Male	30
14	Marketing and sales Manager	50	Female	15
15	sales Manager	50	Female	20

Results of Qualitative Analysis

The data were analyzed using the thematic Analysis method after conducting a series of semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of (15) participants, including university professors specializing in marketing, environmental experts, and marketing managers in production institutions, with the goal of exploring and understanding the dimensions and components that comprise Iraq's green consumption culture.

Table (2) Results of Qualitative Analysis

Categories	Subcategories	Concepts (Open Codes)
Environmental awareness	Climate change awareness	Global warming, carbon emissions, climate variability, climate risks.
	Waste awareness	Plastic waste, household waste, waste recycling, waste sorting.
	resource scarcity Awareness	Excessive resource consumption, water scarcity, encroachment on green areas, and energy drain.
Green Attitudes and Motivations	Preference for Eco-friendly products	Purchase organic products, biodegradable products, encourage local products, Eco- friendly goods and services
	Personal motivation	Supporting sustainable markets, consider environmental value, focusing on quality, and accepting higher prices due to environmental support.
	Trust in green brands	Consider product certification, focus on product documentation, credibility in marketing
	Rejection of harmful products	Avoid polluting goods, stay away from industrial products that are harmful to the environment, reject goods that waste energy.
Environmental Values and Beliefs	Social Responsibility	Moral Responsibility, Promoting Eco-Conscious Businesses, Mindful Consumption
	Environmental Justice	Justice in the distribution of environmental burdens, equal environmental rights, community environmental empowerment

	Consumption Efficiency	Waste management, environmental conservation, and responsible consumption
Responsible Consumer Behavior	Reducing consumption	Responsible consumption, avoid waste, Prefer permanent over temporary
	Rationalizing resources	Water conservation, efficient use, sustainable behaviors.
	Recycling	Sorting waste, supporting recycling initiatives, and materials recycling.
	Effective waste management	Waste awareness, waste reduction, environmental cooperation.
Cultural and social dimension	Community Impact	Family and community, social values, cultural values.
	Media	Environmental awareness campaigns, green media content, social media impact.
	Societal Cues	Environmental role models, religious symbols, cultural influence
	Education	Environmental education integration, knowledge creating green behavior, and the role of universities and educational institutions.

4.1. Environmental awareness

Environmental awareness is one of the essential pillars in shaping a green consumer culture. It refers to the extent to which individuals are aware of current environmental problems and their connection to their daily consumption behaviors (Zhang, 2025). Results from qualitative interviews with academics, marketing managers, and environmental experts revealed that this dimension manifests itself through three interconnected elements: climate change awareness, waste awareness, and resource scarcity awareness. This dimension reflects consumers' level of understanding and knowledge of major environmental issues, and their willingness to translate this understanding into responsible and sustainable consumer practices. Participants expressed a growing awareness of the impacts of climate change on daily life, such as rising temperatures and erratic weather. One expert noted, "Consumers have begun to associate excessive fuel or electricity consumption with increased carbon emissions that impact the climate."

The analysis noted that the majority of participants are aware of the seriousness of pollution resulting from waste, particularly plastic and household waste. One participant stated, "Many people have started looking for alternatives to plastic packaging or sorting their waste, and this is a notable development." Interviews

revealed an understanding among some consumers that natural resources such as water and energy are not sustainable. One academic said, "People are increasingly aware that water can run out and that electricity costs the environment a lot, so some are turning off unnecessary appliances." This kind of awareness drives rational consumption and encourages the shift toward sustainable alternatives.

4.2. Green Attitudes and Motivations

This dimension expresses the psychological tendencies and personal motivations that motivate individuals to adopt sustainable consumer behaviors. It relates to the emotional and value-based aspects of green consumer culture (Camacho, 2024). Participants indicated that this dimension is embodied through four main elements: preference for environmentally friendly products, personal motivations, trust in environmentally friendly brands, and rejection of harmful products.

The interviews revealed that many consumers tend to choose products with "green" attributes, such as recyclability or low emissions. One consumer stated, "I prefer to buy an environmentally friendly product even if it is more expensive, because I know it is better for me and for nature."

These motivations include ethical values, concern for family health, or even a desire to contribute to environmental protection. As one consumer stated, "When I buy an environmentally friendly product, I feel like I am fulfilling a moral duty." Participants emphasized that brand transparency and credibility increase trust and engagement. One academic said, "If a company is clear about its environmental commitment, it makes me trust its products more." Several respondents noted a growing awareness of refusing to purchase products that cause environmental harm, such as single-use plastics or chemicals, reflecting a shift in consumer preferences: "I've started avoiding materials that I know are harmful to the environment, even if they're cheaper." This dimension is an indicator of the maturing culture of environmental consumption in certain contexts, even in the face of limited resources or weak environmental infrastructure.

4.3. Environmental Values and Beliefs

This dimension represents the ethical and intellectual foundation that guides consumer behavior toward more sustainable practices and reflects the extent to which environmental principles are deeply embedded in individuals' awareness and attitudes (Yang, 2024). Interviews revealed that this dimension consists of three intertwined elements: social responsibility, environmental justice, and efficient consumption. Interview results showed that consumers who embrace positive environmental attitudes often stem from a high sense of social responsibility. One stated, "It is my duty to care for the environment, because it is a collective responsibility." Participants also expressed a strong belief in the importance of environmental justice. One academic noted, "It is unfair for certain communities to bear the consequences of excessive consumption by

other groups." Consumers also seemed to embrace values of rationalizing use and avoiding waste, not just for the sake of saving, but as an ethical and environmental value. As one marketing manager said in an interview, "Some customers have begun to prefer products that help them use less resources, such as water or energy." The environmental values and beliefs dimension reflects a deeper level of awareness, where consumers not only understand environmental issues but also believe in the importance of environmental justice and embrace responsible consumption as part of their ethical identity. It thus represents a pivotal dimension in establishing a green consumer culture that stems from values, not just external influences or temporary situations.

4.4. Responsible Consumer Behavior

This dimension reflects the practical shift in green consumption culture from awareness and attitudes to actual behavior. It embodies the extent to which individuals are committed to adopting conscious consumer practices aimed at reducing environmental impact (Shah, 2025). Qualitative interviews revealed that rationalizing consumption is one of the primary behaviors adopted by responsible consumers. One participant noted, "I now only buy what I actually need and have gotten rid of the habit of random hoarding," reflecting a shift from quantitative to qualitative consumption.

In the same context, the importance of rationalizing resources emerged as another manifestation of this behavior, particularly with regard to water and electricity use. One respondent stated, "I turn off unused appliances and utilize sunlight as much as possible," demonstrating an awareness of the sustainable use of natural resources. References to the adoption of recycling practices were also frequent, although still limited in some areas. Awareness of this practice is gradually increasing. One participant explained, "I reuse glass and plastic containers instead of throwing them away," a behavior that contributes to reducing pollution and waste. Effective waste management has been reflected in a growing awareness among some individuals of the importance of waste sorting and safe disposal. An environmental worker said, "We've begun to notice that some families separate organic waste from others, and this was uncommon before." This reflects the beginnings of a collective shift toward environmentally responsible practices. Thus, responsible consumer behavior represents the practical application of environmental principles, through conscious practices that range from reducing unnecessary consumption, to rationalizing resource use, adopting recycling habits, and ultimately managing waste in a manner that minimizes environmental damage.

4.5. Cultural and social dimension

The cultural and social dimension is one of the indirect drivers of green consumption behavior, as individuals are influenced by the social and cultural environment in which they live, contributing to their adoption or rejection of sustainable environmental practices (Sharma, 2024). Interviews revealed that societal influence plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals' attitudes toward

eco-friendly products. One participant noted, "People are influenced by the behavior of their neighbors or relatives. If they see someone using green products, they may imitate them out of social acceptance." Media outlets were considered an important tool in conveying environmental messages and promoting a culture of green consumption. One academic explained, "When channels broadcast environmental content, we notice increased awareness even among those who were previously uninterested," highlighting the media's impact on building knowledge and promoting positive attitudes. Regarding societal cues, which include socially accepted or expected symbols and behaviors, some participants noted a gradual shift in society's perception of those who adopt green lifestyles. One expert stated, "It's now normal to look with respect at those who reduce waste or use reusable bags," indicating a shift in social norms that previously favored heavy consumption as a status symbol.

Education clearly emerged as a pivotal element in instilling an environmental culture in individuals from an early age. One marketing manager stated, "When a child receives environmental concepts at school, they later pass them on to their families, and this makes a huge difference in societal awareness." This highlights the role of the education system as a means of producing generations who are more aware and sustainable in their consumer behavior.

Thus, the cultural and social dimension represents the broader incubator within which consumption patterns are formed, and within which individuals interact with societal, media, and educational influences that reshape their behavior toward the environment, either enhancing or diminishing it.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This qualitative study, titled "Explaining the dimensions and elements of green consumer culture in Iraq," was based on in-depth interviews with a sample of 15 experts in the fields of marketing and the environment. It revealed five interconnected dimensions that form the structural framework of green consumer culture in the Iraqi context (environmental awareness, environmental attitudes and motivations, environmental values and beliefs, responsible consumer behavior, and the cultural and social dimension). These dimensions were found to be cognitive, behavioral, and social, and reflect the nature of the interaction between the individual and his or her environment in light of complex environmental and economic challenges. Environmental awareness constituted a key entry point toward a general understanding of environmental issues. Interviews revealed that individuals' awareness of climate change, the waste crisis, and the scarcity of natural resources constituted an initial motivation for responsible consumer behavior. Meanwhile, the environmental attitudes and motivations dimension represented a transitional stage from knowledge to commitment. Participants noted that a preference for eco-friendly products was linked to personal motivations, ethical values, and trust in green brands, while a rejection of products deemed harmful to the environment was paralleled. Environmental values and beliefs are evident in a moral commitment and a growing sense of social responsibility and environmental justice, coupled with a

desire to achieve efficient consumption and avoid waste. Responsible consumer behavior is a practical expression of these attitudes and values, through the adoption of tangible behaviors such as resource conservation, recycling, and effective waste management. Meanwhile, the cultural and social dimension refers to the influence of societal factors in guiding individual behavior, such as the role of media, education, and social cues that promote or weaken environmental practices.

Despite the significance of the findings, the study faces several methodological limitations that should be considered when considering their generalization or use in decision-making. The study relied exclusively on a qualitative approach through interviews, which provided a deep and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study, but at the same time, it does not provide the ability to statistically generalize the results to a wider audience. Furthermore, the sample was limited to experts and academics, meaning the end-consumer perspective on everyday life was absent, which may limit the comprehensiveness of the findings. Moreover, the study did not cover all regions of Iraq, making it necessary to expand geographically to ensure representation of the diversity of cultural and social contexts.

In light of the above, there is real potential for future expansion of the study by incorporating a quantitative approach, allowing for measuring the prevalence of the discovered dimensions and elements in different social circles using questionnaire tools and statistical data analysis. A conceptual model could also be developed and tested using techniques such as factor analysis or structural equation modeling (SEM) to verify the validity of the relationships between variables. The study also recommends expanding the target groups to include different age and socioeconomic groups (such as women, youth, and low-income groups), with a focus on understanding the impact of education and local media in consolidating a culture of green consumption. It is also proposed to study the same dimensions in institutional settings such as companies and schools, or to conduct comparisons between different Iraqi governorates, and even with regional countries with similar cultural characteristics, to enhance the effectiveness of targeted environmental and marketing policies. Based on the above, it can be said that this study represents a first step towards building a local scientific understanding of the culture of green consumption in Iraq, paving the way for quantitative and comparative studies that can contribute to formulating more effective environmental strategies and policies based on realistic behavioral and cultural foundations.

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