

Environment Policy and Consumer Behavior in Japan

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【要旨】

日本の環境政策と消費者行動

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経済社会の発展に伴い、地球環境問題が世界中で注目されている現在、行政、民間企業および第三セクターである市民社会がそれぞれの役割を果たし、協力し合っていくことはますます重要な意味を持つ。消費者である市民の一人一人が自己のニーズと幸せが満たされることを追求すると同時に、社会の主役としてその消費行動、ライフスタイルおよび消費者が選んだ政策が家庭、地域ないし国家、世界の福祉を実現させることができるはずである。将来、消費者としてのみならず、社会生活者としての消費者市民の役割はますます大きくなると考えられる。日本はこのような消費者市民社会へ転換しつつあるが、様々な社会問題、環境問題が存在している現在では、消費者市民社会を如何に実現するかが大きく注目されている。

本論文では環境行政の消費者行動への影響を分析し、消費者市民社会における主役である消費の社会価値を持つ消費行動およびその影響を究明し、グリーン消費に対する環境行政の役割を考える。

日本における消費者社会の形成には環境行政と関連団体が大きな推進役を果たしているが、グリーン消費には意識と行動の乖離、消費者自身の環境保護意識と周りの雰囲気との乖離が見られる。これからの環境行政は経済インセンティブのほかに、環境意識の形成およびグリーン消費行動を実現させ、タイムリーに関連情報を公開することが欠かせない。グリーン消費行動に合った環境行政の制度設計が課題になる。

With socioeconomic development and global environment issues as a worldwide concern, it is important, above all, for administrative policy, enterprise, and citizen to play their roles properly and make coordinated efforts. As the main player of the consumer citizenship society, all citizens, including their consumption behavior, ways of social life and policy as adopted, should aim at the well-being of their family, region, nation and even the whole world when their personal needs and well-being are sufficed. The trend is that each citizen is understood to become a social worker and consumer citizen, both of prime importance, rather than merely a consumer. Against the backdrop of such a shift faced by Japan, how to achieve a consumer citizenship society is receiving attention in today's increasingly emergent social and varied environmental issues.

This paper focuses on the impact of the government's environment policy on consumer behavior, and analyses social values embedded in consumer behaviors in the consumer citizenship society and their impact so as to consider

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the function of environment policy in promoting green consumption. The paper is organized into the following parts: (i) principles of consumer behaviors and green consumption; (ii) Japan's environment policy and consumers' eco-friendly behaviors; (iii) consumer citizenship society formation and contributing factors; and (iv) issues to be tackled in Japan's consumer citizenship society.

In the process of Japan advancing towards a consumer citizenship society, environment policy and related groups and organizations have played a forward-pushing role, but in respect to eco-friendly consumption, individual awareness, action, and eco-friendly sense deviates from the surrounding social ethos. The future environment policy should direct more attention and effort towards the forming of eco-friendly awareness and the practice of eco-friendly action, besides the reward of financial benefits, to eco-friendly consumers. The updated disclosure of information is also indispensable. Designing eco-friendly consumer policy to accommodate a particular nation's consumer behavior model will be an important project.

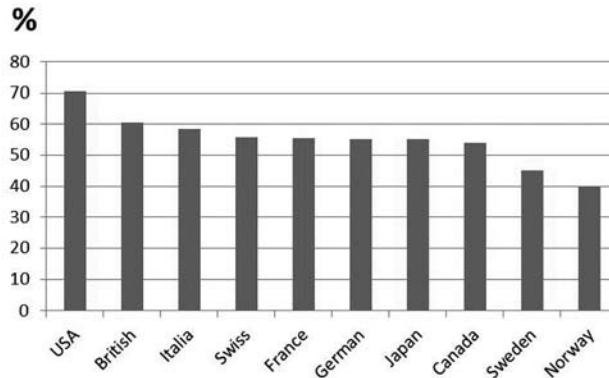
I. The decision model of consumer behavior and green consumption

Purchase behavior is of particular importance in consumer behaviors, and related research has summarized factors deciding consumer purchase behavior in the following aspects: (i) market factor of producers (segment market, products' market target group, and market positioning, among others); (ii) retail factors (subsection of retailers, positioning and target group); and (iii) personal characteristics and psychological factors. Personal factors include mainly gender, age, income, education, profession, marital status and lifestyle, accessible time and affordable money for shopping while psychological factors include mainly consumption behavior, influence of information, and shopping motivation, among others; (iv) social factors such as family, social community, social stratum, values, religion and other cultural factors and situation of information communication; (v) factors for consumers to handle information (purpose of behavior and limitation to subjective initiative, adaptive capacity to environment and capacity to handle information); and (vi) feedback of consumer satisfaction.

In recent years, green consumption is very popular because household consumption contributes 30 to 40% to environmental deterioration (Grunert, 1993). It is clear that to actively instruct individuals and families to practice environmental consumption can reduce overall social environmental burden among which purchase behavior is crucial (Figure 1). As a developed country in environmental protection, Japan began to popularize green consumption and green purchasing campaign in the early 1990s. In 2000, Japan issued the Law on Promoting Green Purchasing according to the Basic Law on Promoting Building a Cyclic Society to promote international and public organizations to take the lead in green purchasing, to facilitate information disclosure of environmental protection products and to achieve a society with sustainable development.

Japan's green campaign emphasizes the following principles: the first is the necessity to review purchases so as to reduce environmental burden, which means that economic factors like quality and price are not the only factors to consider while purchasing, and priority should be given to environmentally friendly products and services. Meanwhile, Japan has adopted a system of environmental-protection label to provide consumers with simple and straight-forward information to advance green purchasing.

Figure 1. Ratio of consumption among the family budget expenditure



Compiled from the *Annual Report on National Accounts* and OECD statistics

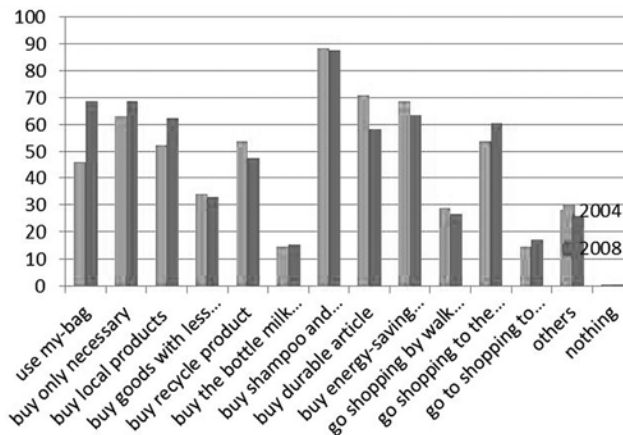
II. Japanese environmental policies orientation and environmentally friendly consumption

The solution for environmental problems concerns benefits and fairness between the developed and developing countries, as well as those between the present and future generations. Consequently, the solution should be coordinated among all social sectors. A solution for environmental problems requires effects made by the government, corporations, and individuals, which should fulfill their promises. Whether a citizen passively consumes or chooses to actively consume in society will bring an opposite world for the future. At present, “consumer citizenship” has emerged in Europe and America, which means a society in which everyone can improve the social development if each can have an influence on consumption. That is, with satisfaction of personal needs and comforts and as a primary social role, each citizen’s consumption behavior, life style and administrative policies that each citizen chooses can realize happiness in a family, an area, a country, and even in the world. Japan is faced with such a transition. With more serious environmental problems and kinds of social problems, the whole of Japanese society is greatly concerned with how to realize a consumer-citizen.

Until now, laws in relationship to the environment and legal system that improve to establish a recycling society have largely promoted a transition of Japanese consumer awareness. On the one hand, Japanese electric appliances and other fields implement the system of “top-runner,” as an important part in industrial policy, strengthens industrial environmental protection. On the other hand, ecolabeling to consumers’ purchases has a positive influence on environmentally friendly consumption. Among Japanese citizens, the population of those who deem that the benefit of the whole nation is more important than individuals has increased since 2000. And the increase first exceeded 50% in 2008. Furthermore, the population of those who consider that they should implement their promises and their consumption behavior can change society has reached approximately 60%. However, although many citizens thought they could take action for social development, approximately half consider that the whole society tends to take less care about the environment. Consumption, individualism and selfishness, which are self-centered, is the common approach. We know that the reality is far from wishes that people are eager to change society.

According to the *Kyoto Protocol*, which came into effect in 2005, gas emission in 2012 will decrease by 6% as

Figure 2. Shopping practices in consideration for environment



Compiled from the Cabinet Office *National Survey on Lifestyle Preferences* (2008)

compared with emission in 1990. As shown in Figure 1, emission from the industrial sector occupied a large part but was reduced by 4.6% in 2006 while that from household, transportation and other sectors increased rather than declined. In particular, emission from households stands at a high level. Thus it is noticeable that emission from households will increase in the future. Compared with the U.S., Australia and Canada, average gas emission leading to greenhouse effects in Japanese families is lower but equal to that in Germany. However, emissions in Germany, British, France and the like continue to decrease in recent years while slightly increasing in Japan.

Although problems, such as the earth getting warmer are of interest in Japan, how to form a consumer-citizen society, that is, change citizens' life style in essence, is still a significant topic. An investigation into consumers demonstrates that the population of consumers, whose daily shopping connects to environmental protection, such as purchasing and replacing goods, an appropriate purchase and buying energy-saving products, has reached more than 60%. In particular the population of those who use environmentally friendly bags is up to 70%. The proportion of consumers who implement environmentally friendly behaviors without economic motivation, such as purchasing products with an ecolabel, shopping in environmentally friendly stores and trying to buy products with minimal packaging, is relatively low (Figure 2).

III. Establishment and promotion of consumer-citizen society

Based on a realization of the maximal benefits of individuals and families with economic and reasonable consumption, which is consumer behavioral mode, the mode is not beneficial for sustainable development in society during an era with economic globalization and more serious environmental problems. We should be concerned with individuals' behavioral mode influencing the environment. We also should consider environmental policy effects on individual behavioral mode.

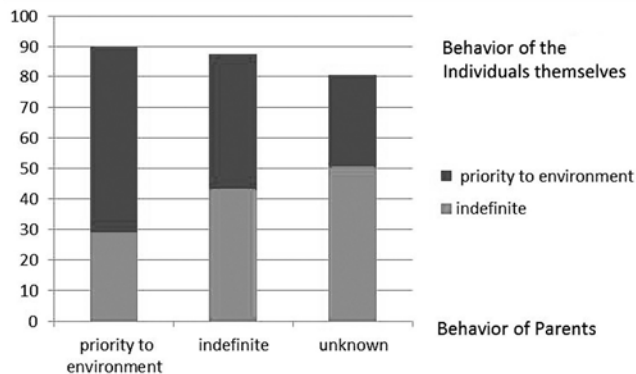
By 2007 ecolabeled Japanese products increased to more than 4,600 brands. The market size also greatly enlarged compared with the market during an early period. However, these brands are mainly office and corporate products,

which account for few of the goods that consumers buy. Although the popularity of the ecolabel system in Japan has exceeded 97%, the population of consumers who actually purchase products with an ecolabel is only approximately 27%. We should make efforts in product propaganda and change consumer purchasing motivation.

Relevant research shows that environmentally friendly awareness in Japan is great when compared with consumers in other countries. However, consumers avoid implementing the promises of environmental protection. Therefore, we must change individual values, consumption behaviors and awareness. It is necessary to devise relative policies to attain the goal.

Citizen living preferences published by the Japanese Cabinet Office indicate that consumers who accept environmentally friendly education pay more attention (+10%) identifying environmentally friendly natures than those who are less accessible to relevant education or propaganda. The survey also finds that environmentally friendly behaviors of families and parents can greatly influence their children. Children would prefer to choose products with environmentally friendly behaviors if their parents do so. This infers that models concerning environmental protection can promote consumption behaviors to change more individual consciousness and actions (Figure 3).

Figure 3. The environmental action of the parents and the individuals themselves

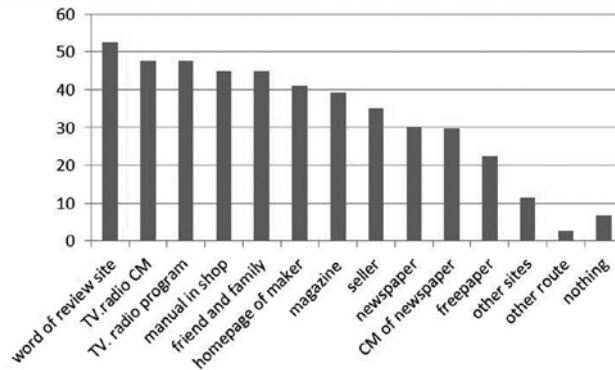


Compiled from the National Survey of Lifestyle Preferences (2008)

In addition, information dissemination also has great effect on purchasing behaviors. Other than the aged who have less access to the Internet, information on websites, blogs, SNS sites and other interactive platforms can be spread fast and far. Consumers can easily get the information they need. Named as “Consumer Generated Media,” the Internet can counteract the asymmetry between individuals and corporations. At the same time, 70% of consumers would be able to confirm relevant information and the business community’s response to environmentally friendly products. The number of consumers shopping on the Internet continually increases (Figure 4).

Note that consumers have more ways to find relevant information, but this does not mean that consumers’ rights have more support. The most important topic now is how to increase consumer ability to analyze information and to improve the credibility of all the information. Moreover, the use of “environmental protection” in ads actually has no specific legal meaning. Such an expression misleads consumers. At the same time, problems concerning environmental protection in the consumption process are not as the same as before. The reason is that others

Figure 4. How the consumers get shopping information



Compiled from www.myvoice.co.jp

could legalize non-environmentally friendly acts. The need is to devise a system supported by the government in accordance with consumer purchasing intents, to include some economic motivations, such as taxes and fines, with the popularization, and an improvement in environmentally friendly education and approaches. We should improve consumer awareness of their effects and influences on socioeconomic life and social responsibility.

As the policy practitioners, the most urgent task is to perfect the relevant administrative departments in relationship to consumers. Administrative organs with highly professional knowledge and high efficiency are able to design consumer policies in terms of consumers' market evaluation and able to address the kinds of problems by the adoption of preventive measures.

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