Food Research 9 (1) : 117 - 125 (February 2025)
Journal homepage: https://www.myfoodresearch.com

FOOD RESEARCH

RESEARCH PAPER

Factors influencing Chinese consumers' green purchase intention: a quantitative analysis in the food industry

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Article history:
Received: 10 April 2024
Received in revised form: 31 July 2024
Accepted: 30 September 2024
Available Online: 22 January 2025

Keywords:
Green environment,
Purchase intention,
Food industry,
China

DOI:
https://doi.org/10.26656/fr.2017.9(1).095

Abstract

China is one of the world's most populous countries and has a huge consumer market. As a result, China is seen as the world's largest consumer market with ecological concerns. The increasing environmental problems have brought many negative effects on the lives of Chinese consumers. Therefore, the green purchase intention of Chinese consumers can affect the development of green markets at home and abroad. Before improving the green market environment and its strategies, companies must first identify which factors influence consumers' green purchasing intentions and how they can use these factors to attract consumers' attention and influence their purchase decisions. This study investigated several factors that influence Chinese consumers' purchase intention towards green food in the food industry. Quantitative analysis was used in this study and 200 valid responses were collected using an online questionnaire. Analysis was performed using a partial least squares (PLS) path modelling approach for variance-based structural equation modelling. The results indicated that environmental attitudes, eco-labelling, eco-packaging and green advertising have a significant positive impact on Chinese consumers' green purchase intention. However, environmental awareness has no significant effect on green purchase intention.

1. Introduction

The issue of environmental sustainability has been regarded by the global community as one of the key driving forces of innovation over the last few decades, and it has been consistently placed on the agenda of global political conferences (Dangelico and Vocalelli, 2017). From the perspective of consumers, environmental problems not only compel consumers around the world to pay more attention to their nature and environment but also see the emergence of consumers with environmental awareness. Consumers gradually realize that changing their purchase intention, behaviour and mode can reduce the damage to the environment (Pratiwi *et al*., 2018). They began to prefer to purchase green products or green food to reduce the negative impact of consumption on the environment.

From the perspective of enterprises, consumers' attention to the environment promotes the emergence of sustainable development and the change in the market environment. Enterprises need to be sensitive to changes and improve their business to adapt to changes. To attract more consumers and achieve better enterprise performance, they must also adjust their business strategies, more closely link their business activities with global environmental issues, and make enterprises more environmentally friendly (Tan *et al*., 2022). Companies, for example, can use environmental protection resources in their manufacturing process to demonstrate their social responsibility to target customers; green marketing strategies such as green advertising and eco-labelling can also be used to promote products. However, the premise of these aspects is to know what factors affect consumers' green purchase intention.

The food industry is an indispensable and growing industry. China's one-child policy has not only resulted in an ageing population, but it has also resulted in a significant change in China's population structure. As the population ages, the increase in the number of elderly

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eISSN: 2550-2166
Published by Rynnye Lyan Resources

consumers will open new business opportunities. Long and healthy life expectancy is the expectation of most elderly people. Under the influence of this expectation, the medical care and food industry will become a hot industry (Daxue Consulting, 2023). Therefore, it is very important for the food industry to use environmental protection elements to promote its products. This study focuses on the green purchasing intention of Chinese consumers in the food industry. China is regarded as the largest consumer market in the world. The increasing environmental problems have brought many negative effects on the lives of Chinese consumers. On the other hand, China is a populous country and has a huge consumer market. Therefore, the green purchase intention of Chinese consumers can affect the development of green markets at home and abroad (Zhu and Sarkis, 2016). Before improving the green market environment and its strategy, enterprises must first determine which factors will influence consumers' green purchasing intention, and how to use these factors to attract consumers' attention. External factors such as ecological packaging, green advertising and ecological labels of green products, as well as consumers' attitudes and awareness of environmental protection, maybe the key factors affecting consumers' green purchase intention.

As China faces increasing environmental pressures due to rapid industrialization and urbanization, the food industry will be compelled to adopt greener practices to mitigate the negative impacts on the country's diverse ecosystems. This shift not only aimed to preserve biodiversity and natural resources but also aligns with growing consumer demand for sustainable and eco-friendly products. From the outcome of this study, the food industry can contribute to the broader goal of environmental conservation while meeting the needs of the world's largest consumer market.

2. Materials and methods

2.1 Green purchase intention

Intention is the inner mental activity that precedes action. Purchase intention is an indication of the consumer's attitude towards a product. Before a purchase action occurs, the consumer should first have the intention to buy the product. Green purchase intention refers to the consumer's intention to prefer products or services with environmentally friendly features (Pratiwi *et al*., 2018). According to the TPB model, attitude usually influences people's behaviour, but this effect is influenced by intention (Ajzen, 1985). Therefore, positive intention will lead to the occurrence of purchase behaviour; on the contrary, negative willingness will reduce the possibility of consumers' purchase behaviour (Mishal *et al*., 2017). Currently, consumers have a better understanding of harm to the environment caused by environmental problems, such as global warming, acid rain and so on. On a global scale, society pays more attention to the environment, which leads to more green products and green consumerism. As a result, when influencing consumers' purchase decision-making process, the role of green purchase intention cannot be ignored (Li and Jaharuddin, 2020; Pang *et al*., 2023). Figure 1 illustrates the proposed research framework.

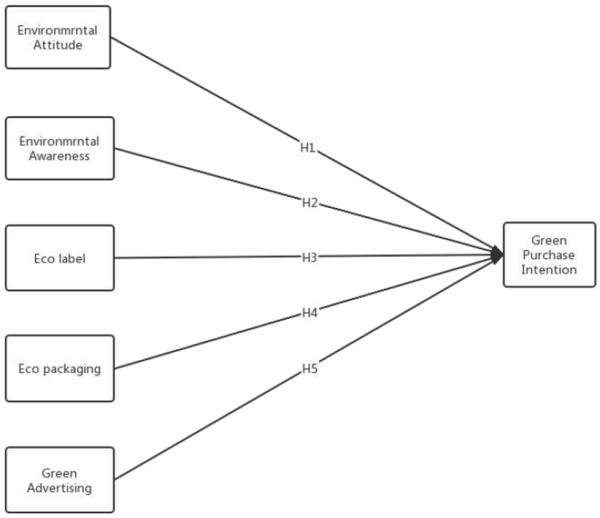

Figure 1. Research Framework.

2.2 Hypothesis development

2.2.1 Relationship between environmental attitude and green purchase intention

Attitudes are a way of expressing feelings that can be reflected on specific objects. Environmental attitudes are a perceived assessment of the value of environmental protection (Pratiwi *et al*., 2018). When people have positive attitudes towards the environment, they are more likely to be concerned about environmental issues and what behaviours are helpful to the environment. This may make them more likely to buy and use products that are environmentally friendly. The literature shows that environmental attitudes have a significant driving effect on consumers' green purchase intentions. This means that consumers' attitudes towards environmental issues have a positive effect on green product purchase intentions (Cheung and To, 2019). When consumers predict that certain intentions and behaviours will be more beneficial to society, they are more likely to have green purchase intentions. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis.

H1: Environmental attitude has a positive impact on consumers' green purchase intention

https://doi.org/10.26656/fr.2017.9(1).095

2.2.2 Relationship between environmental awareness and green purchase intention

Environmental awareness plays a vital role in the study of sustainable development and environmental issues. It reflects individuals' understanding, value judgment and belief on how to minimize environmental hazards, and emphasizes people's general attitude, concern, or emotion towards environmental problems (Cheung and To, 2019). Based on the existing literature, environmental awareness plays a useful role in promoting consumers' purchase behaviour (Song *et al.,* 2019). When a person is more concerned about protecting the environment, they have strong environmental awareness, and consumers who pay attention to the environment are more inclined to take some actions in some aspects that can protect the environment and reduce the damage to the environment. Environmental awareness leads to consumers' green purchase behaviour. Consumers who are environmentally conscious pay more attention to the environment and are more likely to engage in environmentally friendly purchasing behaviour. For example, compared with ordinary consumers, consumers who have environmental awareness are more willing to choose and pay for the ecological packaging of food, to reduce the consumption of natural resources and damage to the environment. Therefore, we hypothesize that environmental awareness has a significant positive impact on consumers' green purchase intention and behaviour.

H2: Environmental awareness has a positive impact on consumers' green purchase intention

2.2.3 Relationship between eco-label and green purchase intention

Eco-labels can be used to mark and help consumers distinguish and choose whether products are environmentally friendly products in the process of consumer decision-making (Norsiah *et al*., 2020). Every industry has some level of mystery and complexity for consumers, which is frequently due to information asymmetry between enterprises and consumers. The label of green products usually contains product instructions, production raw material information, and it helps consumers better understand the product information, including the product manufacturing process, product composition and product value (Cai *et al*., 2017). Consumers will be able to tell the difference between environmentally friendly products and ordinary standard products with the help of eco-labels. As a result, the eco-label is an important green advertising and strategic tool for communicating to consumers the environmental awareness of products; and it has gradually become a tool that can help companies show and publicize their corporate social responsibility for the environment. In general, consumers have a positive green awareness of eco-label products, and eco-label recognition influences their purchasing intentions (Tan *et al*., 2019). For consumers with environmental awareness, eco-labels can provide them with information that affects their purchase decisions as an ideal information tool (Kumar and Kapoor, 2017). To sum up, we put forward the following hypothesis.

H3: Eco-label has a positive impact on consumers' green purchase intention

2.2.4 Relationship between eco packaging and green purchase intention

Compared with ordinary packaging which will cause fewer negative effects on the environment, ecological packaging has the characteristics of degradability, recyclability and reusability. It usually uses degradable, renewable, and recyclable materials and energy. "Use renewable and recyclable materials and energy as much as possible" is a phrase used to describe green packaging, also known as sustainable packaging (Orzan *et al*., 2018). Ecological packaging can not only save resources through recycling, but also reduce the burden on the environment because of its degradable and recyclable advantages, and finally achieve the goal of environmental protection (Nguyen *et al*., 2020). In general, the use of ecological packaging will bring high costs to enterprises. Therefore, it is necessary for enterprises to popularize the benefits of ecological packaging to consumers, encourage consumers to buy ecological packaging and publicize corporate social responsibility. Reduce the issue of organic packaging products impeding green purchasing behaviour due to consumers' lack of understanding of ecological packaging (Orzan *et al*., 2018). Thus, we put forward the following hypothesis.

H4: Eco packaging has a positive impact on consumers' green purchase intention

2.2.5 Relationship between green advertising and green purchase intention

Advertising is considered one of the most widely used forms of promotion by companies and is an indirect form of communication-based on a message of product superiority. This style of communication brings pleasure to consumers and thus changes their willingness to buy (Pratiwi *et al*., 2018). Green advertising is a further evolution of advertising. It is a way for companies to communicate with consumers, promoting information such as the environmental safety attributes of their products (Chang, 2011). While normally consumers are

https://doi.org/10.26656/fr.2017.9(1).095

unable to notice environmental information such as the environmental attributes of green products due to a lack of access to detailed information about them, green advertising helps companies to develop this communication channel and helps them to communicate product information and ideas related to green products to consumers (Pratiwi *et al*., 2018). In addition, green advertising has a catalytic effect on consumers' green purchasing intentions. On the one hand, it helps promote public awareness of environmental issues, and the existence of green products and helps consumers to differentiate between green products and other alternatives; on the other hand, it enables companies to communicate the environmental benefits of their products to consumers and create a socially responsible brand image in the minds of consumers, thereby attracting consumer attention to environmentally safe products (Chang, 2011). Green advertising influences consumers' willingness to buy green by encouraging them to buy environmentally friendly products and by focusing their attention on the benefits they will gain by engaging in green purchasing behaviour. There is a positive relationship between green advertising and green purchase intentions (Muposhi and Dhurup, 2017). Therefore, we hypothesize that green advertising has a positive impact on green purchase behaviour.

H5: Green advertising has a positive impact on green purchase intention

2.3 Research methods

In this study, the method used to collect primary data is a structured questionnaire survey. The questions are all closed-ended questions. The questionnaire is divided into two parts. The first part captured demographic details of participants such as gender, age, annual income level, educational background, marital status and employment. The second part consists of the independent variables and dependent variables. A seven-point Likert-scale are used with measurement ranges from 1 = 'Strongly disagree' to 7 = 'Strongly agree'. In terms of sampling method, non-probability convenience sampling is employed. The survey instruments of Green Purchase Intention (GPI 4 items) were adopted from He *et al*. (2019), Eco-Label (EL 5 items) from Shabbir *et al* (2020), Eco-Packaging (EC 3 items) from Nguyen *et al*. (2021), Green Advertising (GA 7 items) from Shrestha (2018), Environmental Attitude (EAT 3 items) from Kalsi and Singh (2019) and finally Environmental Awareness (EAW 5 items) from Chu (2018). All items were measured using a seven-point Likert scale. The primary target population includes Chinese consumers residing in China. An anonymous online questionnaire using “Wenjuanxing” or Tencent questionnaire is used for data collection. The questionnaire is translated into Chinese so that Chinese consumers can better understand the content expressed in the questionnaire.

3. Results

From the questionnaires collected, 200 out of the 230 reports were valid questionnaires and the response rate for this study was 86.96%. Data is analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS software. The questionnaires contained demographic information on the participants, including gender, age, annual income (in CNY), highest educational background, marital status and employment status. Detailed information on the respondents is presented in Table 1. In terms of gender, 52% of the participants were male and the remaining 48% were female. The largest proportion of respondents was between the ages of 18 and 25 years old, accounting for a total of 42% of the number of respondents. As for annual income, the majority had an annual income of CNY60,0001-80,000 (23%), followed by those with an

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents.

Variable	Classification	Percentage
Gender	Male	48.0
	Female	52.0
Age	18-25	42.0
	26-35	25.5
	36-45	15.5
	Above 45	17.0
Annual income level (CNY)	Under 25,000	13.0
	25,001-40,000	5.0
	40,001-60,000	22.0
	60,001-80,000	23.0
	80,001-100,000	15.5
	Over 100,000	21.5
Educational background	Secondary school certificate	9.5
	Junior college/technical school certificate	29.5
	Bachelor degree or equivalent	45.0
	Master’s degree	15.0
	Doctoral degree	1.0
Marital status	Single	39.0
	Married	60.0
	Divorced	0.0
	Widowed	0.0
	Others	1.0
Employment status	Student	14.0
	Educator	11.5
	Business	8.5
	Worker	9.0
	White collar	36.0
	Civil servants or staff of public	21.0

https://doi.org/10.26656/fr.2017.9(1).095

annual income of CNY40,0001-60,000 and CNY100,000 or more (22% and 21.5% respectively). For the highest educational background, 45% had a Bachelor's degree or equivalent. More than half of the respondents were married (60%) and 39% were single. The employment status showed the majority were white collar staff (36%) followed by civil servants or staff of public institutions (21%).

In Table 2, the results of Cronbach's alpha for the variables involved in this study were above 0.835. All values were above the threshold value of 0.7, a situation where the results of reliability analysis are usually considered acceptable (Hair *et al*., 2019). Therefore, all the measures involved in this study have inherent reliability and consistency. For the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), each structure reached convergent validity when the value of AVE was above 0.50 (Hair *et al*., 2019). As shown in Table 2, the values of AVE for all variables are between 0.533 and 0.783, which are higher than the threshold of 0.5. The variance inflation factors (VIF) with respect to each structure, i.e. all the VIF values are less than 3, which implies that there are no multi-collinearity problems (Nawi *et al*., 2021).

Fornell-Larcker criterion was also used to determine discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). According to Hair *et al.* (2019), to establish the discriminant validity of each construct, the value should not exceed 0.70. As seen in Table 3, the result of Fornell-Larcker criterion is greater than the correlation between the constructs, i.e. the largest value of the item is always on the diagonal. It means that each construct in this study has discriminant validity. In addition, the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) is another method for evaluating discriminant validity. Its threshold value is 0.90. If the HTMT ratio is below 0.90, it will indicate validity (Henseler *et al*., 2015). The values of all HTMT shown in Table 4 were less than 0.90. Therefore, the discriminant validity is acceptable and satisfactory.

Table 5 shows the path coefficient, confidence interval, t-value, and p-value. The path coefficient reflects the influence intensity of the independent variable on the dependent variable, and its absolute value determines its influence degree. When the path coefficient is positive, the independent variable is positively correlated with the dependent variable. It can have a significant effect on the dependent variable and this hypothesis can be extended to the full sample with research implications. Table 5 shows EAT (β = 0.347, $p<0.05$), EL (β = 0.293, $p<0.05$), EP (β = -0.205, $p<0.05$) and GA (β = -0.126, $p<0.05$) and no zero values appeared in their confidence intervals. This indicates that environmental attitudes, eco-label, eco-packaging, and green advertising have a significant positive effect on green purchase intention. Thus, the above data supports H1, H3, H4 and H5. In contrast, EAW (β = 0.069,

Table 2. Reliability analysis, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and collinearity test.

Construct	No. of item	Cronbach's Alpha	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Collinearity
Environmental Attitude (EAT)	6	0.858	0.533	1.107
Environmental Awareness (EAW)	3	0.860	0.781	1.151
Eco-label (EL)	5	0.849	0.768	1.174
Eco Packaging (EP)	3	0.888	0.641	1.207
Green Advertising (GA)	7	0.835	0.584	1.109
Green Purchase Intention (GPI)	4	0.908	0.783	-

Table 3. Fornell-Larker test.

	EAT	EAW	EL	EP	GA	GPI
EAT	0.876					
EAW	0.310	0.800				
EL	-0.097	0.081	0.764			
EP	0.254	0.322	0.006	0.884		
GA	0.116	0.113	0.270	0.085	0.730	
GPI	0.406	0.280	0.300	0.328	0.270	0.885

Table 4. Heterotrait-Monotrait ratios (HTMT).

	EAT	EAW	EL	EP	GA	GPI
EAT						
EAW	0.352					
EL	0.186	0.126				
EP	0.297	0.372	0.061			
GA	0.131	0.152	0.312	0.111		
GPI	0.458	0.308	0.296	0.368	0.279	

https://doi.org/10.26656/fr.2017.9(1).095

Table 5. Results of path coefficients with direct effects and hypothesis decision.

Hypothesis		Path Coefficient	B (Path Coefficients)	Confidence Interval (95.00%)	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	EAT → GPI	0.347	0.231	0.445	5.490	0.000	Supported
H2	EAW → GPI	0.069	-0.043	0.180	1.019	0.154	Not supported
H3	EL → GPI	0.293	0.198	0.386	5.348	0.000	Supported
H4	EP → GPI	0.205	0.102	0.316	3.155	0.001	Supported
H5	GA → GPI	0.126	0.048	0.242	1.960	0.025	Supported

p>0.05) implies that environmental awareness has no significant relationship with green purchase intention of Chinese consumers, and H2 is not supported.

4. Discussion

Environmental attitudes have a positive impact on consumers' green purchasing intentions. When consumers have positive attitudes towards the environment, they are more likely to be concerned about environmental issues and what behaviours can have an improving effect on the environment, which may make them more likely to be willing to purchase green products. This is in line with past research by Cheung and To (2019). Consumers are more inclined to generate green purchase intentions when they believe that certain intentions and behaviours may be more beneficial to the environment. Taking advantage of this consumer psychology, brands can actively create their own brand values and demonstrate their environmental attitudes to consumers to stimulate their purchase intentions.

The relationship between environmental awareness and green purchase intention was not significant. This result contradicts the study by Song *et al.* (2019). Environmental awareness as a value emphasizes people's general attitudes, concerns or emotions towards environmental issues and plays a crucial role in the study of sustainable development and environmental issues (Cheung and To, 2019). Environmental awareness does not always lead to green purchase intention due to a variety of reasons. Eco-friendly products are often more expensive than their conventional counterparts. Consumers might be aware of environmental issues but still prioritize cost savings over sustainability. In addition, some consumers may doubt the effectiveness of green products or the impact of their individual actions. Consumers might think their purchase will not make a significant difference in the grand scheme of environmental issues. Green products can sometimes be less convenient in terms of availability, ease of use, or required lifestyle changes. Consumers might prefer more readily available or easier-to-use non-green alternatives. Furthermore, there is scepticism about the authenticity of green products due to greenwashing, where companies falsely claim their products are environmentally friendly. This distrust can deter consumers from purchasing green products. Another possible reason is many consumers have established purchasing habits and are resistant to change. Switching to green products requires breaking old habits and forming new ones, which can be challenging.

Under the influence of Chinese national policies and the social environment, eco-labels of products in the Chinese food industry may have a positive impact on consumers' green purchase intention. There is a positive and significant relationship between eco-label and green purchase intention, implying that eco-label positively influences Chinese consumers' green purchase intention. This result is consistent with previous research (Norsiah *et al*., 2020). Eco-label serves as an important strategic communication tool and a channel for consumers to access product information (Kumar and Kapoor, 2017). It not only helps consumers to identify green products but also has the function of helping companies communicate eco-friendly values and images about their brands to consumers. Brands can use the eco-label to provide consumers with clearer information about the ecology of their products. Brands can also use the eco-label as a promotional point to communicate to consumers how the brand's green products stand out from other ordinary food products. Through these aspects, Chinese consumers' awareness of green food is raised, thus achieving the goal of increasing Chinese consumers' green purchasing intentions.

Eco-packaging has a significant positive relationship with green purchase intention. Therefore, eco-packaging will enhance Chinese consumers' green purchase intention in the food industry. This result is consistent with Nguyen *et al*. (2021). These researchers found that with the gradual spread of environmental knowledge, consumers tend to choose products with eco-packaging, which positively influences consumers' willingness to buy green. More than half of the respondents believe that eco-packaging plays an important role in protecting the environment and have chosen green products with eco-packaging. Based on this result, marketers can make more visible and environmentally friendly improvements to product eco-packaging. The positive impact of eco-packaging on consumers' intention to purchase green products can be used wisely by promoting the brand's philosophy and building its environmental image while

https://doi.org/10.26656/fr.2017.9(1).095

stimulating consumers' awareness of environmental protection.

Green advertising has a positive effect on Chinese consumers' green purchase intention, and this study confirms this view. Green advertising can stimulate consumers' green purchase intention, which is consistent with the findings of Muposhi and Dhurup (2017). Green advertising plays a catalytic role in consumers' green purchase intention. It helps to raise public awareness of environmental issues and can also draw consumers' attention to products that are environmentally safe (Chang, 2011). Respondents responded positively to questions related to green advertising and generally believed that green advertising helped them to become aware of green food and increase their knowledge of green practices. These findings are similar to those of Richards (2013). Although some respondents had doubts about the veracity of the information in the green advertisements, most respondents still believed that the information provided in the green advertisements was true and would attract them to learn more about the product and make them want to buy it. Brands and companies can effectively use green advertising to provide Chinese consumers with information about green food products and environmental issues, such as health and environmental benefits. This will not only help consumers gather knowledge related to green products and the environment but also increase consumers' intention to consume green products, which in turn will help companies to further develop the emerging market of Chinese green food.

This study provides useful information for companies in the food industry to better understand what factors influence Chinese consumers' green purchase intentions in the industry. This will provide meaningful suggestions to help companies use effective marketing strategies to influence consumers' green purchasing intentions and provide direction on what marketing strategies are more effective for the Chinese food industry in emerging markets for green products. Effective marketing communications, including green advertising, environmental attitudes, eco-labels and eco-packaging, can stimulate Chinese consumers' green purchase intentions. Green advertising, environmental attitudes, ecolabels and eco-packaging not only help companies establish a positive brand value and image but are also useful sources of information for consumers about green products. They can enhance consumers' awareness of environmentally friendly products and increase their awareness of the environmental benefits of these products. Marketers can provide consumers with a wealth of information about green product attributes through green advertising, eco-friendly attitudes, eco-labels and eco-packaging, which can lead to green purchase intentions. In addition, given the trust Chinese consumers have in the government and authoritative experts, companies can further enhance the impact of these factors by gaining consumer trust through cooperation and empowerment with both parties.

5. Conclusion

In an emerging Chinese market, companies in the food industry are increasingly concerned about their action and strategies towards environmental impact. These companies are also beginning to inject a significant number of green elements into their marketing strategies to attract consumers. Although past research has shown that consumers have a positive perception of environmentally friendly products, this does not always inspire a green purchase intention. The food industry is highly competitive and it is important for companies in the food industry to recognize which marketing factors influence consumers' purchase intentions to enhance their competitive advantage. In summary, in the food industry, environmental attitudes, eco-label, eco-packaging and green advertising have a significant positive impact on Chinese consumers' green purchase intention. Environmental awareness, on the other hand, currently has no significant impact on Chinese consumers' green purchasing intentions.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgements

The authors thanked the respondents who participated in this study.

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