Young adults as part of sustainable household: moderating role of descriptive and injunctive parental norms

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Acknowledgements:
This paper is based on research undertaken in the frame of the Project of the Croatian Science Foundation - UIP-2019-04-3580; EfFICAcY - Empowering financial capability of young consumers through education and behavioural intervention.

Cite as:
Uzelac Marija, Lučić Andrea (2021), Young adults as part of sustainable household: moderating role of descriptive and injunctive parental norms. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 50th, (104239)

Paper from the EMAC Regional 2021 Conference, Warsaw, September 22-24, 2021

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Abstract

The paper aims to investigate the influence of parental norms on the relationship between young adults' sustainable consciousness and their sustainable behavior as part of the household. The empirical research was conducted by using questionnaire on sample of 356 young adults, between 18 and 28 years old, on the territory of the Republic of Croatia. It is discovered how parents do not determine young adults' attitudes towards sustainability or their sustainability behavior. Young adults' attitudes are primarily determined by knowledge which could, through sustainable attitudes, lead to sustainable behavior. National politics should understand and emphasize the importance of sustainability lifestyle among young adults and make investments and efforts in context of sustainability education and overall sustainability knowledge empowerment of young adults.

Key words: sustainable lifestyle, parental norms, young adults

1. Introduction of the Paper

The modern world is disrupted by environmental pollution, overconsumption, and market inequality. Sustainable lifestyle, as aspiration to live in harmony with habitat, allows consumers to fulfill their full potential and preserve the environment, through energy, resource and money saving (Alexander & Ussher, 2012), for future generations (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Sustainability as a way of living is crucial to stop further economic, social, and eco-system usurpation on the global level and achieve consumers' well-being (French & Kotzé, 2018). To accomplish sustainable capability, individuals and households have to adopt desirable sustainable habits in context of water and energy consumption, recycling and reusing, and responsible and green purchase (Waitt et al., 2012).

Young adults, as important incoming consumers, could have great impact on future economy and environment through their sustainable behavior and attitudes, pro-environmental actions and, finally, creating of their own sustainable households. Parental influence, as the most important socialization factor, is strong determinant and predictor of sustainable behavior (Lee 2014; Gotschi, Vogel & Lindentha, 2010; Grønhøj & Thøgersen, 2012) and sustainable attitudes (Youn, 2008), and could be used to predict, encourage and affect young adults' sustainable habits and progress in context of sustainable lifestyle. However, the parental impact on young adults' role as part of sustainable household was not investigated up to now.

The aim of the paper is to investigate the influence of parents as socialization agents on the relationship between young adults' sustainable consciousness as sustainability knowingness and attitudes, and their sustainable behavior and actions as part of sustainable household. The purpose is to examine if parents', through their behavior, interference, and encouragement, in context of sustainability, could affect and empower young adults' sustainable behavior and their role as part of parental sustainable household or their independent sustainable household. Finally, the goal is to determine if parents could stimulate young adults to create their own sustainable households and live sustainable lifestyle in the future.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Young adults' sustainable consciousness

In current rapidly changing and challenging society, sustainable lifestyle as practicing of frugal consumption, environment protection, saving of energy and natural resources, and reducing of waste accumulation (Mawere & Awuah-Nyamekye, 2015) provide young adults, as individuals and part of households, long-term well-being in context of physical and mental health, saving money and overall life satisfaction (Alexander & Ussher, 2012). As part of sustainable household, young adults participate in fulfillment of household's needs without interference in future generations' needs fulfillment (Chiu, 2004). Therefore, young adults could affect sustainable household capability through sustainable practice in context of water and energy preserving and consumption, recycling and reusing, and purchasing (Waitt et al., 2012).

Sustainable consciousness is defined as understanding and recognition of sustainability practice in terms of knowledge, attitudes and behavior through economic, social, and environmental dimension (Gericke, Boeve-de Pauw, Berglund & Olsson, 2019). It refers to young adults' tendency to improve modern society, help the environment and encourage their personal development in order to create prosperous world for whole mankind (Savelyeva &

Douglas, 2017). Young adults who implemented sustainable lifestyle, recycle and save resources, donate money and clothes, volunteer, take actions to protect the environment (Adnan, Ahmad & Khan, 2017) and have positive attitude toward sustainable clothing (Su, Watchravesringkan, Zhou & Gi, 2012). In context of food consumption, they prefer healthy food, seasonal vegetable and fruits, and sustainable, local production (Kamenidou, Mamalis, Pavlidis & Bara 2019). Finally, young adults who live sustainably perform responsible and frugal purchase (Gatersleben, Murtagh, Cherry & Watkins, 2019) and, consequently, save money (Alexander & Ussher, 2012).

Young adults' sustainable behavior and sustainable purchase could be predicted by their support for environmental organizations, attitudes toward sustainable development and consumption, parental and peer influence, recycling practice, responsibility and care for the environment and society, sustainability knowingness (Joshi & Rahman, 2017; Lee, 2014), subjective norm and sociocultural factors (Joshi, Sangroya, Srivastava & Yadav, 2019; Judge, Warren-Myers and Paladino, 2019), emotional intelligence (Kadić-Maglajlić, 2019) and spirituality (Lee, Bahl, Black, Duber-Smith & Vowles, 2016). On the other hand, considering all the benefits of sustainable lifestyle for individuals, households, and overall society, it is crucial to ensure quality sustainable knowledge and equal opportunities for young adults to be part of global sustainable development (Renton & Butcher, 2010).

2.2. Relationship between sustainability knowledge, attitudes and behavior

Sustainable knowledge, preform thorough sustainable development education as part of educational curriculum, positively affects young adults' sustainable concussions and awareness (Berglund, Gericke & Chang Rundgren, 2014; Olsson, Gericke & Chang Rundgren, 2016). Sustainable education programs, to be efficient, should be focused on implementation of desirable sustainable practices, motivation of young adults and their understanding of the importance and consequences of their actions, and ethics and moral ideas of sustainable development (Ken, Tukker, Vezzoli & Ceschin, 2008). According to previously conducted research, sustainable knowledge has mixed influence on sustainable attitudes and behavior. Liang et al. (2018) and de Carvalho de Carvalho, de Fátima Salgueiro and Rita (2015) noted knowledge has positive influence on behavior. On the other hand, Joshi and Rahman (2017) found weak connection between knowledge and behavior. Furthermore, Fang et al. (2018) noticed negative relationship between knowledge and attitudes, while Liang et al. (2018) emphasized how knowledge is crucial foundation of attitudes.

In context of sustainable attitudes, as personal's sustainable values and beliefs (Murray, 2011), Taufique and Vaithianathan (2018) and Kotchen and Reiling (2000) found positive influence of attitudes on sustainable behavior and behavioral intention. On the other hand, Young, Hwang, McDonald and Oates (2010) found weak connection between attitudes and behavior. Diverse findings in context of relationship between knowledge, attitudes and behavior could be explained by cultural differences such as nation's attitudes towards family, nature or money (Boeve-de Pauw & Van Petegem, 2011). According to Gifford (2011) the gap between attitudes and behavior could be interpreted by consumers' lack of sustainable awareness or knowledge about specific problem and how to solve it, overloading of sustainable interventions or messages, inability to perceived their own impact or adapting to the behavior of the majority. Finally, past sustainable behavior and experience, consequently, lead to future sustainable behavior (Summers, Smith & Reczek, 2016).

2.3. Parents as the most important socialization agents of sustainable lifestyle

Socialization refers to the process of young adult's adjustment according to environment through acquiring required attitudes, norms, knowledge and skills (Hayta, 2008). According to social learning theory, environment forms young adults' attitudes, and knowledge (Bandura, 1986). Parents and family present the most important socialization agent for young adults (Leclerc, 2012; Pinto, Parente & Mansfield 2005). According to Leiser and Ganin (1996), parents could perform socialization through two types of parenting. Protective parenting, which isolates children from challenges and responsibilities, and teaching parenting, which empowers future responsible consumer behavior among children. Parental norms could be descriptive and injunctive. Descriptive norms define young adults' perception of parents' usual behavior in specific situation, while injunctive norms refer to perception of behavior that parents would approve or disapprove of (Cialdini, Kallgren, & Reno, 1990). Therefore, parents' actions and behavior represent the foundation for young adult's decision-making (Ironico, 2012).

Parental influence is defined as crucial predictor of sustainable behavior among young adults (Lee, 2014). Parents, through their sustainable behavior, teaching system, and determined values, transfer sustainable habits on young adults (Grønhøj & Thøgersen, 2012), who will transfer adopted habits to their future children, as next generation. Parental behavior has positive impact on pro-environment behavior among young adults, especially on recycling (Matthies, Selge & Klöckner, 2012) and pro-social behavior (Kasser, Ryan, Zax & Sameroff, 1995). As some young adults still live with their parents, they could learn from their purchase activities (Fischer, Böhme & Geiger, 2017). Also, parents affect sustainable purchase, in context of organic food (Gotschi, Vogel & Lindentha, 2010), and sustainable attitudes among young adults (Youn, 2008). Therefore, parents, through their influence, could stimulate young adults to perform sustainable practices and transfer sustainable habits to their own household and family.

3. Methodology and Sample Structure

The empirical research was conducted by using questionnaire on sample of 356 young adults, between 18 and 28 years old, on the territory of the Republic of Croatia, in order to investigate young adults' sustainable knowledge, attitudes, and behavior, together with effect of parental norms. The questionnaire was consisted of four section. The sustainable consciousness scale, in terms of knowingness, attitudes and behavior, covers three dimensions: environmental, social, and economic (Gericke et al., 2019). Secondly, the sustainable household capability scale, in context of water consumption, household purchase, recycling and reusing, and energy consumption, was taken over from Waitt et al. (2012) to examine young adults' behavior as part of sustainable household. Items regarding parental descriptive and injunctive norms were adjusted according to the Theory of planned behavior questionnaire (Ajzen, 2002). All items were measured by 7-point Likert scale. Set of demographic questions were at the end of questionnaire. The other applicable research also used online questionnaire as adequate method on sample of young adults in terms of sustainability (Judge, Warren-Myers & Paladino, 2019; Lee, 2014; Taufique & Vaithianathan, 2018).

The questionnaire was distributed by email and through online groups on social media. The used method was considered appropriate as the members of the contacted groups were young adults. During the distribution, the beginning of the questionnaire clearly emphasized the required age of the respondents. Respondents of the research were chosen in sample by

using snowball sampling technique. Therefore, primarily contacted respondents made further recommendations for recruiting of other respondents, their peers, and forwarded the questionnaire. The sample structure is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Overview of sample structure

	Total	Percentage
Sex		
Male	87	24,44%
Female	269	75,56%
Age		
18	1	0,28%
19	21	5,90%
20	43	12,08%
21	76	21,35%
22	37	10,39%
23	29	8,15%
24	44	12,36%
25	17	4,78%
26	36	10,11%
27	34	9,55%
28	18	5,06%
Current employment status		
Student job	140	39,33%
Permanent	47	13,20%
Part-time	31	8,71%
Freelance job	10	2,81%
Volunteering	18	5,06%
Missing	110	30,90%
Education		
Primary	3	0,84%
Secondary	187	52,53%
Bachelor's degree	74	20,79%
Master's degree	92	25,84%
Mother's education		
Primary	17	4,78%
Secondary	194	54,49%
Bachelor's degree	57	16,01%
Master's degree	88	24,72%
Personal average monthly income		
2.000 HRK and less	135	37,92%
2.001 - 6.000 HRK	75	21,07%
6.001 - 10.000 HRK	36	10,11%
10.001 HRK and more	14	3,93%
Missing	96	26,97%

	Total	Percentage
Living status		
Parental household	249	69,94%
Independently	26	7,30%
Household with a roommate	25	7,02%
Dorm	19	5,34%
With a partner without children	26	7,30%
With a partner with children	7	1,97%
Other	4	1,12%
Place of residence		
Zagreb	142	39,89%
Velika Gorica	73	20,51%
Split	20	5,62%
Karlovac	17	4,78%
Osijek	15	4,21%
Other cities	89	25,00%
No. of people in the household		
1	10	2,81%
2	41	11,52%
3	79	22,19%
4	117	32,87%
5	69	19,38%
6	25	7,02%
7 and more	15	4,21%
Current status		
Employed	80	22,47%
Unemployed	10	2,81%
Student	266	74,72%
Father's education		
Primary	10	2,81%
Secondary	213	59,83%
Bachelor's degree	54	15,17%
Master's degree	79	22,19%
Household average monthly income		
5.000 HRK and less	24	6,74%
5.001 - 10.000 HRK	84	23,60%
10.001 - 15.000 HRK	75	21,07%
15.001 HRK and more	78	21,91%
Missing	95	26,69%

4. Results

The model consists of five first order constructs. The reflexive variables are descriptive parental norms, injunctive parental norms, sustainability knowingness, and sustainability attitudes. The modeled formative variable is sustainability household behavior. The validity and reliability of reflexive variables are shown in Table 2. Cronbach alpha for all 4 reflexive variables indicates acceptable to very good level of reliability, as it is above 0.6. Furthermore, the discriminant validity of variables, by using the Fornell and Larcker criterion (1981), is proven. The absence of multicollinearity is confirmed, as all square roots of AVE, on the main diagonal, are higher than correlation coefficient.

Table 2. Validity and reliability of variables in the model

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	AVE
Descriptive parental norms	0.830	0.837	0.898	0.746
Injunctive parental norms	0.806	0.811	0.887	0.726
Sustainability knowingness	0.705	0.724	0.834	0.627
Sustainability attitudes	0.622	0.669	0.794	0.567
Sustainability household behavior		1.000		

The results of the structural model are presented in Figure 1, Table 3 and Table 4.

Figure 1. Results of the PLS-SEM structural equation model

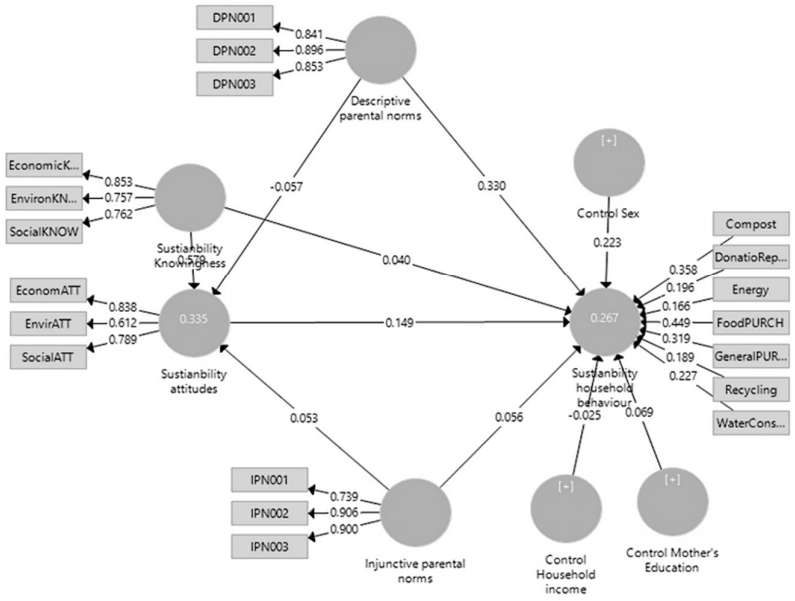

Table 3. Direct effects for mediation

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
Descriptive parental norms → Sustainability attitudes	-0.057	-0.064	0.061	0.947	0.344
Descriptive parental norms → Sustainability household behavior	0.330	0.327	0.101	3.282	0.001
Injunctive parental norms → Sustainability attitudes	0.053	0.062	0.057	0.930	0.353
Injunctive parental norms → Sustainability household behavior	0.056	0.064	0.073	0.767	0.444
Sustainability Knowingness → Sustainability attitudes	0.579	0.584	0.043	13.491	0.000
Sustainability Knowingness → Sustainability household behavior	0.040	0.043	0.067	0.602	0.548
Sustainability attitudes → Sustainability household behavior	0.149	0.149	0.079	1.892	0.059

According to Table 3, descriptive and injunctive parental norms have no statistically significant effect on sustainability attitudes. Only descriptive parental norms have significant but mild positive effect on sustainability household behavior. Sustainability knowingness has statistically significant and large positive effect on sustainability attitudes while has no significant effect on sustainability household behavior. With relatively low statistical

significance (p=0.059), it was noted the significant but very mild positive effect of sustainability attitudes on sustainability household behavior. In Table 4, on lower level of statistical significance (α=10%), the significant positive mild effect of sustainability knowingness on sustainability household behavior through sustainability attitudes was noted, as p-value is less than 0.100.

Table 4. Indirect effects for Mediation

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values
Injunctive parental norms →Sustainability attitudes →Sustainability household behavior	0.008	0.009	0.011	0.706	0.480
Sustainability Knowingness →Sustainability attitudes →Sustainability household behavior	0.086	0.087	0.047	1.853	0.064
Descriptive parental norms →Sustainability attitudes →Sustainability household behavior	-0.009	-0.010	0.011	0.765	0.445

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Based on previously conducted research, parents are the most important socialization agent who could affect young adults' attitudes on a larger scale (Leclerc, 2012; Pinto, Parente & Mansfield 2005). Therefore, the stated discovery of how parental norms have no impact on young adults' sustainability attitudes is very surprising and uncommon. However, according to the results, through their own behavior, parents could mildly affect young adults' sustainability behavior as part of household. The presented finding is partially accordant to the previous research which emphasize the positive effect of parental impact on young adults' sustainable behavior (Grønhøj & Thøgersen, 2012; Kasser et al., 1995; Matthies, Selge & Klöckner, 2012) but not entirely as the parents are presented as strong predictor of sustainability behavior among young adults (Joshi and Rahman, 2017; Lee, 2014). Therefore, it could be concluded how parental norms do not affect young adults' sustainable behavior due to stronger impact of personal factors such as responsibility towards society and environment (Joshi & Rahman, 2017; Lee, 2014), emotional intelligence (Kadić-Maglajlić, 2019), spirituality (Lee et al., 2016), subjective norms (Gifford, 2011) or sustainable knowledge (Joshi & Rahman, 2017) among young adults.

By conducted research, strong effect of sustainability knowingness on young adults' attitudes towards sustainability was discovered, which could consequently lead to positive sustainable behavior of young adults as part of sustainable household. The observed strong impact of the sustainability knowledge on attitudes follows previous findings according which sustainable knowledge leads to development of positive sustainability attitudes (Berglund, Gericke & Chang Rundgren, 2014; Ken et al., 2008; Liang et al., 2018; Olsson, Gericke & Chang Rundgren, 2016). Even if discovered weak but positive effect of sustainability attitudes on behavior is accordant to previous research (Young et al., 2010) founded consequential impact of knowingness on behavior could be substantiated by previous research's finding on positive effect of sustainability knowledge on sustainability behavior (de Carvalho, de Fátima Salgueiro & Rita, 2015; Liang et al., 2018).

According to conducted research, parents do not determine young adults' attitudes towards sustainability or their sustainability behavior as part of sustainable household. Young adults' attitudes are primarily determined by sustainable knowledge which could, through sustainable attitudes, lead to sustainable behavior among young adults. Therefore, national politics should understand and emphasize the importance of sustainability lifestyle among

young adults. They have to make investments and efforts in context of sustainability education and overall sustainability knowledge in order to empower young adults' knowledge and inform, encourage and motivate them to live sustainably. Consequently, they will create welfare for individual consumers, households, national economy, and whole mankind. The research was conducted on the territory of the Republic of Croatia, which presents the main limitation. Therefore, further research should consider expanding the investigation on other countries of the European Union. Furthermore, only parental norms as predictor of sustainable behavior among young adults were examined. Future research should include more predictors and dimension of cultural differences as well.

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