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Comparing green customer citizenship attitudes and behaviours in South Africa and South Korea

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Orientation: Green consumption is a popular topic of conversation and research. Green initiatives are characterised by considerations, attitudes and behaviours.

Research purpose: This article compares Korean and South African customers on five constructs plausibly associated with green customer citizenship attitudes or behaviours.

Motivation for the study: Korean consumers are favourably orientated to green consumerism and serve as valuable benchmark for South African consumers.

Research design, approach and method: Independent samples of 513 consumers in South Africa and 292 consumers in South Korea responded to an invitation-only, Internet-based questionnaire that focussed on attitudinal and behavioural issues of green purchasing and green consumption.

Main findings: Statistically significant differences exist on all five scales. The secondary data favoured South Korea from a green perspective; however, for all five constructs subjected to empirical scrutiny, the results from South Africa produced a significantly higher mean than what was in evidence in the sample of South Korean residents.

Practical/managerial implications: South African consumers tend to possess a stronger green disposition (attitude) while concurrently embracing and engaging in anti-consumption, advocacy, consumer coaching and customer helping (behaviours) – all in a green context – more so than do their South Korean peers. This implies that local consumers value green initiatives and that businesses could capitalise on the favourable green consumer trend.

Contribution/value-add: The study compares South Africa's green attitudes and behaviour internationally. Also, a country benchmark will be established as a reference mark in future studies to determine if South Africa is progressing on green consumerism.

Keywords: green; customer citizenship; behaviour; attitudes; anti-consumption; South Korea; South Africa.

Introduction

Background

Green consumption has been a popular topic of conversation and research for the past 50 years. From a practical perspective, green consumption has been defined as the 'practice of using eco-friendly products that are harmless to consumers, the eco-system, and the environment' (Geetha & Laxman 2017:2). It has been further stated that this practice addresses potential ecosystem harm from three perspectives. Firstly, are the negative consequences emanating from undesirable approaches associated with sourcing raw materials and manufacturing finished products for use by buyers; for example, deforestation and carbon emissions are often criticised by consumers, consumer watchdog groups, politicians, the media and governmental entities. Secondly, how products are used; celebrities flying on private jets and consumers driving high-horsepower cars viewed as petrol (gas) guzzlers are just two examples of this phenomenon. Finally, there has been a growing emphasis on how products that have fulfilled their usefulness to the original buyer are disposed of. For example, are they discarded in the weekly trash collection and dumped in a nearby landfill; is food waste composted; are durable goods with a remaining useful life donated to causes that help less fortunate citizens? Based on these examples, it is evident that the critics have a broad array of concerns that they deem potentially problematic for Mother Earth's health and future generations' well-being.

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Inherent to this green initiative are two broad considerations: *attitudes* and *behaviours*. These two phenomena are important as research has shown that '*cultural values influence sustainable consumption*, and then sustainable consumption positively influences consumer well-being' (Minton et al. 2022:167). Therefore, from an attitudinal perspective, individuals must possess a *green mindset* that leads them to make the decision to personally engage in green consumption so that they themselves can contribute to the cause of helping to protect the environment. The second set of considerations involves overt behaviour on the part of the individual who is seeking to play a direct role in sustainability while concurrently seeking to influence other individuals' purchase behaviour. Included within this realm of overt behaviour is *anti-consumption*; this facet of consumer decision-making involves the decision to avoid products and brands that are viewed as detrimental to our environment by intentionally omitting them from their own consideration set. Lastly, individuals with a green mindset may interact with other consumers to induce them to behave in a more environmentally responsible manner. These efforts include *green advocacy, consumer coaching* and *customer-helping behaviour*; collectively, these behaviours have been characterised as *customer citizenship* behaviour (Huang, Wei & Ang 2022). Each of these constructs represents behaviour whereby an individual provides guidance and insight in an effort to dissuade another consumer from purchasing a product that the influencer deems to be detrimental to the green cause. These vocal consumers may have significant influence within their own affiliative reference groups. There have been calls for more research to close the gap so as to develop a deeper understanding of the antecedents of green consumption. Germane to the current project, one issue of particular interest is the effort by individual consumers to influence the behaviour of other consumers (Cavazos-Arroyo & Sánchez-Lezama 2022). The five constructs identified earlier in this paragraph (green mindset, anti-consumption behaviour, green advocacy, consumer coaching and customer-helping behaviour) represent the five considerations under scrutiny in this study.

In addition to research on green behaviour by consumers (as well as green behaviour by business enterprises), it has become apparent that today's successful marketers are often engaged in a broader international reach. No longer are firms relegated to a single domestic economy. While large multinational corporations have long sought to be competitive in a multitude of foreign markets, even the smallest mom-and-pop shops have used e-tailing to reach the broader global market. The dilemma for these marketers is that consumers in different countries often behave quite differently when confronted with problems that marketers seek to resolve. There are myriad differences, even among countries that, at face value, would seem to have much in common. Research has long documented differences in behaviour while acknowledging that these behavioural differences may well be traced to differences in attitudes regarding their specific purchase-related decisions. One of those attitudes that has been subjected to scrutiny is a nation's overall mindset regarding the environment and the appropriateness of behaving in ways that assist in efforts to safeguard the planet. Consequently, there has been an effort to document those differences across multiple countries. Yet, that documentation is far from complete. This study addresses this deficiency, in part, by comparing the results from two countries on each of the five aforementioned constructs. As such, South Korea and South Africa are compared based on their green mindset, anti-consumption behaviour, green advocacy, consumer coaching behaviour and customer-helping behaviour – all from a green perspective.

Problem statement

As the background narrative indicates, there are two broad issues on which researchers have focussed considerable attention over the past 50 years: sustainability and consumer behaviour. More recently, there has been increased attention to two more specific considerations: anti-consumption behaviour and customer citizenship. Furthermore, given the reality that consumers' attitudes and behaviours have been shown to differ substantially from one country to another, researchers have focussed more attention on cross-national studies. The current project represents an amalgamation of all five of these elements. Specifically, the problem statement can be characterised as determining the differences in attitudes and behaviours in South Africa and South Korea regarding sustainability-based anti-consumption and customer citizenship behaviours.

Research objectives

Two primary and three secondary objectives are associated with this study. The initial primary objective is to verify the reliability of the five scales that form the foundation for the current project: green mindset, anti-consumption behaviour, green advocacy, consumer coaching and customer-helping behaviour. This objective involves three secondary objectives: verify the reliability of each of the five scales for the aggregate sample, the South Korean sample and the sample drawn in South Africa. The second primary objective is to determine the extent to which attitudes and behaviours relevant to customer citizenship differ from a green perspective when comparing the results from South Korea to those from South Africa.

Literature review

This review of the literature comprises five distinct sections. Firstly, that of green attitudes that are precursors to customer citizenship behaviours. As such, the focus is on identifying those constructs that can represent a form of green customer citizenship behaviour. This component of the literature review was essential in developing the questionnaire used for data collection in multiple countries – including South Korea and South Africa. Secondly, an examination of numerous independent international indices that measure sustainability issues, such as a nation's carbon footprint on a global basis. Thirdly, a detailed look at the cultural characteristics – as delineated by Hofstede – that can contribute to a theoretical basis for differences between the

two countries. The penultimate component is an overview of research and reports on each country that potentially identify differences between residents of South Korea and residents of South Africa regarding green attitudes and green behaviours that fall within the realm of customer citizenship. The final component is an examination of the comparative studies that incorporated both countries on which this project focusses (and perhaps other countries as well). Altogether, these last four rounds were meant to identify which country is winning this 'bilateral fight' towards sustainability based on the available secondary data.

Customer citizenship considerations

A rapidly growing topic for research in the B2C (business-to-consumer) market is customer citizenship. In an increasingly competitive environment, customer citizenship behaviour has become increasingly important in terms of firms' performance (Halbesleben & Buckley 2004), an organisation's competitive position (Van Tonder & Petzer 2018) and the sustainability of a customer-brand relationship (Liu, Yang & Chen 2020). Therefore, this literature review begins with an examination of the broader concept of customer citizenship.

Customer citizenship has been defined as a bundle of customers' positive, voluntary, helpful and constructive behaviours that are beneficial for an organisation (IGI Global 2022). The concept has been defined as behaviour that involves voluntary and discretionary behaviours that are not required for the successful production and/or delivery of the marketer's goods and services (Xie, Poon & Zhang 2017). These advocates have even been referred to as partial employees (Halbesleben & Buckley 2004). The broad nature of the definitions implies that customer citizenship comprises a broad array of behaviours on the part of the consumer. According to Groth (2005), three sub-dimensions comprise the customer citizenship behaviour construct. Specifically, these three sub-dimensions are the provision of feedback to the firms, the act of helping other customers and the dissemination of advice to others regarding a marketer's goods and services that are being offered for sale. More recently, Sarioglu (2020) proposed a customer citizenship scale that incorporated 34 items and comprised 7 distinct sub-dimensions. What is apparent from the literature is that there is no universal agreement as to how many, or even which, sub-dimensions should be incorporated within a viable scale that measures customer citizenship behaviour.

While individual consumers who engage in customer citizenship behaviours may focus on many criteria (i.e. country-of-origin [CoI], consumer safety and health), perhaps nowhere in marketing is this phenomenon more evident than it is with sustainability. Several studies support the premise that consumers who possess a green mindset not only purchase green products but are also prone to engage in behaviours designed to influence other consumers' decisions to engage in those same behaviours. Therefore, the question of interest is what customer citizenship behaviours a green mindset might induce.

Green mindset

A green mindset, otherwise characterised as a green *attitude*, has been referred to as a tendency by consumers to refrain from the purchase of products that they deem harmful to the environment. As such, it has been posited that consumers with a stronger green attitude will exhibit a greater tendency to purchase green products that foster sustainability while concurrently avoiding brown products that they deem harmful to the environment (Kautish & Sharma 2019). Numerous studies support this premise. Among the most recent are Jose, Biju and Vincent (2022) in their study of the purchase of organic foods; Amoako, Dzogbenuku and Abubakari (2020) who explored the purchase of organic foods by university students within the realm of the Theory of Planned Behaviour; and Van Tonder, Fullerton and DeBeer (2020) who examined the interactions among the dimensions of green attitude, green purchase behaviour and customer citizenship. This last study made the greatest contribution to this study; the authors created and tested a multi-item scale for determining the green mindset of a consumer. In their study, the scale produced a metric of 0.902 for a coefficient alpha. Thus, it was shown to be highly reliable. The scale likewise exhibits construct validity. Based on these two considerations, a decision was made to use that scale to measure one's overall green mindset in this study.

Anti-consumption behaviour

Anti-consumption *behaviour* is predicated upon the desire to avoid purchasing a product that the consumer views as an unacceptable alternative for a particular reason. These reasons may include country of origin (refusal to buy Russian products), political considerations (refusal to play golf on a Trump-branded golf course) and perceived bias against the LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, or another diverse gender identity) community (refusal to drink Bud Light beer), among many others (McCullough, Rynarzewska & Fullerton 2022). Environmental sustainability is one of the most prominent in the 'many others' category. Recent studies that have documented anti-consumption behaviour because of environmental concerns include efforts by young consumers to help preserve the planet (Ziesemer, Hüttel & Balderjahn 2021); a study addressing anti-consumption and consumption decisions within the 'organic community' (Saraiva, Fernandes & Von Schwedler 2020); and one that looked at the decline in per capita meat consumption in Australia (Malek, Umberger & Goddard 2019). An additional and somewhat earlier study incorporated a four-item scale designed to measure the anti-consumption construct (Chatzidakis & Lee 2012); their scale was based on four reasons against purchasing a particular product, and it exhibited a high degree of reliability. It was that scale that was deemed appropriate for this study.

Consumer coaching behaviour

Much of the literature addressing the broader concept of coaching is focussed on the firm's employees, either coaching other employees or coaching the firm's customers.

While there has been little research on the subject of consumer coaching, it has been found that consumer coaching *behaviour* occurs when 'customers act as productive resources by creating suggestions for service development, purchasing other services, giving suggestions to others, attending brand-centred events, and participating in brand communities' (Johnson & Rapp 2010:787). Referring to consumer coaching as *personal initiative taking*, Frese et al. (1997) developed a multi-item scale designed to measure the construct. The alpha metric of 0.88 documented a high level of internal reliability. Furthermore, the authors characterised personal initiative as behaviour that 'can be driven by traits such as a self-starting personality, proactivity, and the objective of overcoming difficulties' (Frese et al. 1997:139). Despite the dearth of information on the topic, it has emerged as a key proactive behaviour designed to influence consumer purchase decisions, particularly within the realm of customer citizenship. Based on available information, a decision was made to use the scale developed by Frese et al. (1997) in this study.

Customer helping behaviour

At first blush, one might consider customer-helping behaviour to be synonymous with consumer coaching. Yet, multiple definitions for customer-helping behaviour serve to differentiate between the two behavioural constructs. For example, it has been inferred that the pertinent actions associated with helping behaviour involve behavioural patterns such as helping other customers, submitting proposals and providing feedback; these behaviours are examples of customer-helping behaviour as delineated by Van Tonder et al. (2022). Bettencourt (1997), when referring to customers' voluntary behaviour, suggested that such activities comprise three dimensions: participation, loyalty and cooperation. It was Groth (2005) who, some 8 years later, posited that the *act of helping other customers* was one (of three) dimension that fall within the sphere of customer citizenship behaviour. Perhaps the greatest distinction between the two constructs lies in the basic premise that it is always the customer who is providing help to another customer. Yi and Gong (2013:1279) captured this distinction in their definition of customer-helping behaviour when stating that 'customer behaviour aimed at assisting other customers in making informed decisions' is a basic characteristic of customer-helping behaviour. From the broadest perspective within the services arena, it has been stated that 'helping behaviours represent the act of assisting other customers in using the services properly' by 'helping consumers to match needs to attributes' (Groth 2005:34). Therefore, while there are many definitions of customer-helping behaviour, they can be seen as addressing the concept from a common perspective. Perhaps this common perspective was best articulated by Roy et al. (2020), who stated that this form of customer engagement is best characterised as an aggregation of multiple ways customers, outside of core economic transactions, influence value co-creation and firm performance. This characterisation is also evident in the assertion that helping other customers is an important dimension of customer citizenship behaviour; that input from the customer represents behaviour that is helpful, constructive and designed to assist other customers in making better green decisions (Gruen 1995). Furthermore, these behaviours comprise voluntary, positive, constructive and helpful actions towards other customers by sharing information about a service, good or firm. Therefore, firms and other customers potentially benefit from this voluntary behaviour; from the green firm's standpoint, the helper's contribution is a bump in the marketer's bottom line (Bove et al. 2009).

Among the scales that included customer helping behaviour as a sub-component of customer citizenship behaviour was that of Yi and Gong (2013); their scale incorporated four sub-dimensions: feedback, advocacy, tolerance and helping behaviour. Johnson and Rapp (2010) developed and tested a scale that included seven sub-dimensions, each producing an alpha value exceeding 0.7. Furthermore, each sub-dimension was subjected to construct validity evaluation. Sarioglu (2020) included 32 items comprising 7 sub-scales to model customer citizenship behaviour; one of the seven sub-scales was the act of 'helping others' (or HelpOth). Finally, another scale of this ilk was labelled 'customers helping customers' (CHC); it produced a measure of the reliability of 0.97 (Bartikowski & Walsh 2011). While there were several scales from which to choose, the scale by Yi and Gong (2013) was deemed to be the most appropriate for the current research project.

Green advocacy

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines advocacy as 'publicly speaking on behalf of someone or in support of someone'; thus, it has been characterised as the act 'of representing someone's interests underpinned by the belief in someone or something' (Wilk, Soutar & Harrigan 2020:416). From a more narrow B2C perspective, advocacy refers to the act of recommending a business to others, such as friends or family (Groth, Mertens & Murphy 2004). Such advocacy could be for a brand (Apple), a country (Japan) or a cause (sustainability). For example, in a study of online financial service companies, it was surmised that a brand testimonial (brand advocacy) that featured visual cues would be a strong inducement for those exposed to the testimonial, especially if initiated by someone within the individual consumer's sphere of influence such as an affiliative or aspiratory reference group (Harrigan, Roy & Chen 2021). From a narrower perspective, brand advocacy has been conceptualised as a form of positive word-of-mouth of great value to the targeted brand (Libai, Muller & Peres 2009). Hence, the reason for extending this line of research into green advocacy comes to the forefront. The earlier discussion of the scale developed by Groth et al. (2004) noticed that their scale comprised three distinct dimensions; one of those dimensions is described as 'advising the goods or services of the firm to other consumers'. Using this premise as a basis, advocacy in a green marketing context relates to customers saying positive things about the green firm, being willing to recommend the service and (in particular)

encouraging others to use the products (Hwang & Lyu 2020). Two scales that address or can be adapted to address green advocacy were developed and subjected to empirical scrutiny by Yi and Gong (2013) and Van Tonder et al. (2020). Because of its recent application and a documented high alpha coefficient, the adaptation by Van Tonder et al. (2020) was selected for this study.

Separating South Korea and South Africa

With the five scales to be used in this study now identified, the next component of the literature review will now focus on the available information that will help to identify the attitudes and behaviours of residents of the two countries.

Global indices germane to sustainability

Because this study is comparative in design, a sound starting point is an array of indices that facilitate a comparison of the two countries. These indices all assess a country's green mindset and/or green practices.

All 193 countries that are members of the United Nations are rated based on their ability to achieve 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that foster environmental protection. The most recent report places South Korea 31st with an index score of 78.06. With a score of 64.00, South Africa falls far behind South Korea in 110th place (Sachs et al. 2023). A second metric is an environmental index that ostensibly measures a country's propensity to engage in green behaviours. This Environmental Performance Index (EPI) places South Korea, with an index value of 46.6, in 28th place, while South Africa, with an index value of 43.1, finds itself in the 95th position (Anonymous 2022a). Both countries have seen an upward trend in their EPI over the past 10 years, but South Africa has made the greatest strides over this time (Anonymous 2020). This comparison clearly conveys the idea that South Koreans are still viewed as possessing a somewhat greener mindset. Similarly, Solability (2023) provides a third metric, one intended to represent a country's Sustainable Competitiveness Index. Its metrics for 2021 place South Korea 21st with an index value of 39.6, while South Africa's index value of 53.2 places them 131st on the list of 180 countries that were measured (Solability 2023). A fourth index was reported on a measure of a country's ecological footprint; the measures were 3.16 for South Africa and 0.17 for South Korea (Anonymous 2022b). These measures imply that South Korea produces far less harm to the ecosystem than South Africa. In this regard, South Africa stands at 75th place among the 183 countries measured regarding their ecological footprint whereas South Korea is among the world's best at 4th place; this disparity provides fundamental credence to the belief that South Koreans are far more inclined to engage in environmentally friendly behaviours, which may well include actions such as consumer coaching and customer helping. A fifth index is published by *U.S. News & World Report*; it provides an overview of the best countries for green living (a.k.a. most sustainable countries). Of the 87 countries included in the 2023 report, South Africa was 62nd while South Korea was ranked 14th (Anonymous 2023). Therefore, this measure indicates that South Korea tends to be far more focussed on sustainability. Perhaps even more problematic is the fact that South Africa dropped 16 positions from their place on the 2022 list. These five unbiased measures indicate that consumers in South Korea possess a greener focus than their South African peers. Furthermore, the gap is reported to be increasing at an alarming rate. *Therefore, by virtue of coming out ahead on all five global indices, South Korea resoundingly wins round one.*

Comparison based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions

The next round of the literature review was designed to provide insight into how a country's cultural underpinnings might explain differences in consumer citizenship behaviours from a green perspective. It focusses on the measures that reflect Hofstede's ratings on six key cultural dimensions that are used to characterise numerous populations in countries across the globe. From a broad, cross-cultural perspective, these six measures provide evidence that the two countries vary significantly when compared to each other (Hofstede Insights 2024).

Therefore, the question at this point is simple. How can fundamental differences in cultures characterising the two countries explain potential differences regarding sustainability-related issues?

There was a large difference between the two countries on the individualism scale, with consumers in South Korea exhibiting a much lower score (18 vs. 65). The implication is that South Korea falls deep within the realm of collectivism, whereas the score for South African consumers places them squarely on the individualist side of the scale. A basic premise of individualism, as exhibited by consumers in South Africa, is predicated upon independence rather than interdependence. Therefore, individualism is not likely to correspond to a tendency to engage in green behaviour influenced by a desire to benefit the entire population of the consumers' home country. Conversely, by virtue of falling on the collectivist side of the spectrum, South Koreans would be anticipated to engage in green behaviours that protect society at large. Along with being part of a collectivist society, South Koreans scored far lower on the indulgence trait (29 vs. 63). Restraint is the antithesis of indulgence. Restraint represents a society, such as South Korea, that suppresses the gratification of personal needs and regulates them using strict social norms. In South Korea, one of these traits is a green mindset as evidenced by their governmental mandate that requires composting of organic waste (Fullerton, Van Tonder & Lee 2023). The South Koreans also scored markedly higher on the uncertainty avoidance index (85 vs. 49), which would likely coincide with a greener mindset because of the uncertainty as to how brown behaviours might negatively impact society in the present, but particularly in the future. South Korea scored much higher (75 vs. 34) on the long-term orientation construct while concurrently exhibiting less masculine mindset (39 vs. 62). An overview of these index

values is provided in Table 1, and a brief synopsis of the implications of the Hofstede indices follows.

These values indicate that the cultures of the two countries vary in a meaningful manner; perhaps these cultural characteristics lead to the propensity for the South Koreans to possess greener attitudes while concurrently engaging in greener actions than do the South Africans – as documented by the global indices that were the focus of the previous section of the literature review. This relationship was documented in a study that stated that '*cultural values influence sustainable consumption*, and then sustainable consumption positively influences consumer well-being' (Minton et al. 2022:167). Why might this be so? By having a (slightly) more collectivist mindset along with a greater propensity to emphasise long-term solutions, it is logical to presume that they are more likely – as a society – to embrace green solutions. Furthermore, given that previous research has documented that women tend to be more strongly oriented towards sustainability, South Korea's lean towards the feminine side of Hofstede's masculinity scale would also support the premise that South Koreans possess a greener mindset as measured by the five constructs under scrutiny in this study. Therefore, it is logical to surmise that South Koreans are more open to green solutions. *Therefore, round two unequivocally goes to the South Koreans.*

Studies and reports regarding each country

A search of the literature (using ProQuest) that focussed on customer citizenship behaviour, green advocacy, customer-helping and consumer coaching yielded little substance research. There is, however, significant research on consumers' green mindsets, anti-consumption behaviour and sustainability-related behaviour. But, when further narrowing the focus to South Africa and South Korea, research of this genre was virtually non-existent. Most of the recent research with an eye on South Korea and South Africa has not been comparative in nature; furthermore, few studies include both countries. Still, looking at the green initiatives undertaken in South Africa and South Korea provides a cursory overview of the two countries under scrutiny in this study. Research that focussed on the role that *mindful consumption, caring for nature* and *caring for the community* play in an effort to encourage sustainability has been documented (Sheth, Sethia & Srinivas 2011). The literature also identifies proactive green initiatives undertaken in the two countries under scrutiny in this study. The following paragraphs provide an overview of these initiatives – beginning with South Korea.

TABLE 1: Index values for the six cultural dimensions delineated by Minkov and Hofstede.

Country	PDI	IDV	MAS	UAI	LTO	IVR
South Africa	49	65	63	49	34	63
South Korea	60	18	39	85	75	29

Source: Hofstede Insights, 2024, *Country comparison*, viewed 01 May 2024, from https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/

PDI, Power Distance; IDV, Individualism; MAS, Masculinity; UAI, Uncertainty Avoidance; LTO, Long-Term Orientation; IVR, Indulgence.

For instance, in South Korea, there is a proposal for a multifaceted education and training programme to be implemented in a concerted effort to introduce more sustainability-based initiatives in commerce and to establish a knowledge-based institution to promote sustainability within the South Korean community (Farhat 2021). In this regard, it has been reported that 'South Korea has become a leader in the development of the latest technologies, microelectronics, biotechnology and optics, aimed at protecting the environment' (Sutbayeva et al. 2021:691). At the same time, South Korea is shifting away from fossil fuels and nuclear power, and rapidly moving towards renewable energy resources. The country is also witnessing a transformation in its industries with a transition towards decarbonisation, digitisation and automation. Furthermore, South Korea is moving towards a sustainable circular economy and achieving greater resource security (Lee & Cha 2020). The country's push towards sustainability has also seen an uptick in urban farming, with residents signing up for farming lessons as well as RFID[1]-equipped garbage cans that measure waste and then bill residents accordingly (Cho 2019).

While some countries have taken steps to encourage recycling and composting, South Korea is at the forefront by requiring its citizens to compost organic waste to enhance sustainability. It is estimated that when the law took effect in 2006, South Korea composted about 2% of its food waste; now that number is nearly 100%. Furthermore, the waste designated for composting is discarded in mandated biodegradable bags (Broom 2019; Ho 2021; Kim 2022). Thus, regarding the composting of organic waste, South Koreans are at the forefront of the countries that have enacted laws mandating that consumers engage in this form of green behaviour. Also of note, is the South Korean Green New Deal. This far-reaching initiative focusses on renewable energy, a green infrastructure and a greener industrial sector. Its green car subsidy programme offers up to $17 million in subsidies to people who buy an electric vehicle (EV). It also includes up to $33.5 million devoted to purchasing hydrogen fuel-cell EVs. South Korea has submitted its Nationally Defined Contribution (NDC) and 2050 Carbon Neutral Strategy to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC). The latter includes South Korea's long-term plan for achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 (Chowdhury 2021).

The focus of the literature review has now shifted to South Africa; it will commence with an overview of several studies that examined sustainability issues in the country. For starters, South Africans continue to emit excessive amounts of greenhouse pollution; however, young South Africans between the ages of 15 and 24 years have become more vocal in their efforts to change their compatriots' minds about protecting the environment (Bright 2021). The South African Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment have issued their own National Framework for Sustainable Development. It states that:

1.RFID = Radio-Frequency Identification. Small electronic tags that can be attached to trash bins.

> South Africa aspires to be a sustainable, economically prosperous and self-reliant nation-state that safeguards its democracy by meeting the fundamental human needs of its people, by managing its limited ecological resources responsibly for current and future generations, and by advancing efficient and effective integrated planning and governance through national, regional and global collaboration. (Anonymous 2008:1)

A more recent survey of South African consumers concluded that 'South African consumers have expressed a growing willingness to pay a premium for … sustainability over the last two years' while observing that 'sustainable packaging is already relatively well-established in South Africa, for example, with returnable glass bottles being more common than in many other countries' (Hattingh & Ramiakan 2022:1). Perhaps it is this emphasis that led to a recent study of the retail sector of South Africa, which concluded that a retailer's green image, along with its environmental performance, helps in its quest to attain a competitive advantage (Chinomona & Bikissa-Macongue 2021). We have recently seen a 'waste-to-soil' composting initiative in South Africa (Averda 2021). But, despite such available opportunities for South Africans, it has been reported that the country's climate plan completely ignores waste reduction (Bega 2021).

Conversely, in South Africa's favour is a report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which states that:

> [*M*]eeting South Africa's ambitious climate objectives will require a comprehensive strategy that includes a more effective use of carbon pricing policy, reducing inefficient government subsidies that have delayed the green transition, well-targeted support to affected industries and households, and other green financial and sectoral measures. (Qu et al. 2023:1)

While the results of this literature review component indicate that both countries are enacting laws that mandate green behaviour, and both countries aspire to move in a greener direction, the issue of carbon emissions still stands out. It essentially supports the earlier reported index on carbon footprint that placed South Africa 75th on the list of 183 countries subjected to scrutiny. Based solely on this South African shortcoming, *round three goes to South Korea by a narrow margin*.

Empirical cross-cultural studies and reports

The focus now shifts to two forms of comparison: empirical comparative studies that include both countries and official reports (other than the earlier examined indices) that provide evidence of the direction in which the two countries are headed. One recent study that included both countries was on the anti-consumption dimension, where it was reported that South Koreans were more inclined to engage in anti-consumption behaviour than South Africans; however, that study on anti-consumption decisions focussed solely on CoI considerations (Fullerton, Lee & Van Tonder 2022). A comparative study that included South Africa and South Korea incorporated *Hofstede's cultural dimensions*. One conclusion was that these dimensions could play a role in addressing issues and concerns germane to many issues – including anti-consumption attitudes, anti-consumption behaviour and sustainability (Fullerton et al. 2023). A third study likewise invoked Hofstede's cultural characteristics when stating that 'South Korea, a *collectivist* country, exhibited motivation patterns for sustainable behaviours that differed from those in the United States and Germany, which are *individualistic* cultures' (Minton et al. 2012:80). Given South Africa's position on Hofstede's individualism scale, that same assertion can be presumed to be relevant when comparing South Korean consumers to their peers in South Africa. One study that measured the *ecological* footprint and projected the increase by 2050 for the G20 nations projected that South Korea's performance will be slightly better than South Africa's regarding emissions (Espinosa & Koh 2024). Another report that included multiple countries focussed on trade and its impact on climate change, thus sustainability. The report stated that South Africa's largest exports are at risk as the country's mining exports are relatively carbon intensive whereas South Korea's low-carbon energy transition is designed to dramatically reduce coal-powered energy generation and coal imports (TIPS 2024). Therefore, the modest amount of comparative literature suggests that *round four goes to the South Koreans*.

An overview of the literature

Research of this type provides both a practical and a theoretical perspective by leading one to believe that a country with a greener mindset is more likely to engage in green behaviour such as green advocacy and consumer coaching. The literature leads one to believe that South Korea is a greener country. Therefore, does one country have a greener cultural mindset; if so, to what extent does this green attitude lead to green behaviour? Because South Korea won the literature review – four rounds to zero – it seems logical to believe that they will come out ahead in the current empirical study. Therefore, as this project moves forward, the question at hand is a simple one. *Which country will win rounds five and six when the focus shifts to attitudes and behaviours as delineated via the analyses of the primary data?*

Research methodology

The project began with a review of the phenomenon of customer citizenship. The literature review identified five constructs plausibly associated with attitudes or behaviours specific to customer citizenship from a green perspective. The review was expanded to find a multi-item scale empirically tested for reliability and validity in previous research projects for each of the five identified constructs. Based on this insight, a questionnaire was developed. The final five scales that were selected for this survey and their original source were as follows:

- Green Mindset (Van Tonder et al. 2020),
- Anti-Consumption (Chatzidakis & Lee 2012),
- Consumer Coaching Behaviour (Frese et al. 1997),
- Customer Helping Behaviour (Yi & Gong 2013), and
- Green Advocacy (Van Tonder et al. 2020).

The instrument was pretested using a sample of 175 university students. The reliability of the scales was confirmed; however, a small number of modifications in wording were incorporated. The questionnaire was done in English rather than Afrikaans in South Africa and in Korean in South Korea. Multiple quality control checks were used in the data collection process in an effort to ensure that the final dataset comprised a sample of attentive respondents. With these tasks completed, the questionnaire was deemed to be ready for distribution to select members of the two target populations.

The *South Korean* data were collected using an Internet-based approach. The questionnaire was loaded onto South Korea's most popular social network service, KakaoTalk. A team of five researchers was employed to recruit respondents using a judgement sample to assure that each prospective respondent met established demographic requirements. The initial wave of respondents was determined to be too heavily composed of younger respondents. To address this deficiency, the second wave of data collection focussed on an effort to recruit older respondents to complete the questionnaire to create the desired demographic balance in the final dataset. This step used one researcher to solicit feedback from older respondents; again, the researcher's judgement was used in the selection process. Both waves of the South Korean data collection process were completed entirely online but with an administrator present. An English version originally developed for the United States was used in South Africa; however, several changes to the demographic questions' spelling, wording and categorical responses were required for the South African version of the questionnaire. Data were collected in *South Africa* using a web-based protocol maintained by the Consulta Research Agency. Invitations were sent to select members of their consumer panel, which the agency refers to as ConsultaPanel. Upon clicking the link for the survey, two questions were used to screen the prospects to ensure that they were members of the target population. Those who passed the screening process were then directed to the online questionnaire. Their responses were directly entered into the South African database. The databases from the two countries were combined upon completing the data collection process. As noticed earlier, the questionnaires contained multiple quality control checks to identify inattentive respondents and drop them from the analytical procedures. This data cleansing process resulted in numerous respondents being dropped, which was seen as improving the integrity of the final data set.

The reliability of the five scales was evaluated using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. Each scale was subjected to three measurements: one for the aggregate sample, one for the South Korean sample and one for the South African sample. The mean score for each country's five scales was then calculated. Next, standard *t*-tests were used to determine whether the responses from the two countries were significantly different. A probability of 0.05 served as the benchmark for confirming that the difference between the two countries was statistically significant, thereby rejecting the commonly presumed null hypothesis of equal group means.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval to conduct this study was obtained from the North-West University Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC) (No. NWU-00626-20-A4).

Results and findings

With the data in hand, a cleansing process was undertaken. The cleansing of the data using multiple quality control checks resulted in eliminating inattentive respondents thereby undoubtedly improving the integrity of the data (Fullerton & McCullough 2023). With the data cleansing process completed, the dataset analyses could then proceed. This procedure was accomplished by virtue of the use of multiple quality control checks embedded within the survey. The data cleansing process resulted in a net usable sample of 513 respondents who reside in South Africa and 292 respondents in South Korea. The Internet protocol also meant that each respondent answered every question; therefore, there was zero item non-response.

The initial analytical procedure assessed the reliability of each of the five scales under scrutiny. This procedure involved three separate evaluations of the reliability of all five scales as determined by the Cronbach's coefficient alpha calculation. Specifically, coefficient alpha was calculated for the aggregate sample of 805 respondents from the two countries: 292 respondents from South Korea and 513 from South Africa. When looking at the aggregate sample, the metric for the reliability of the five scales ranged from an acceptable low of 0.732 to a robust high of 0.937. Looking solely at the South Korean sample, the coefficient alpha for the five scales ranged from a disappointing 0.563 for anti-consumption to a high of 0.939. The South African sample produced similar results, with coefficient alpha ranging from a low of 0.664 to a high of 0.932. For each of the three groups of consumers (Aggregate, South Korean, and South African), the highest measure of reliability was for the customer helping scale (0.937, 0.939 and 0.932, respectively). The lowest values for coefficient alpha were all associated with the anti-consumption scale (0.732, 0.563 and 0.664, respectively). In total, 13 of the 15 metrics exceeded the 0.7 value deemed appropriate for this type of assessment (Nunnally 1978). Five of the 15 measures exceeded 0.900. For four of the five scales, the South Korean sample produced a higher measure for reliability; four of the five exceeded the 0.7 guideline for the continuation of the planned analytical procedures. Even though the internal consistency of the anti-consumption scale for both samples was suspect, given the acceptable level of reliability for the aggregate sample, a decision was made to include anti-consumption in the analyses; however, caution should be exercised when attempting to measure

anti-consumption in future research endeavours. The decision to retain it was based upon conclusions by other researchers who have indicated that a level of reliability of 0.6 is acceptable for the type of analysis being undertaken in this study (Wim et al. 2008). and that the alpha measure for the aggregate sample exceeded the 0.7 threshold. Completing the reliability assessment leads to the next step of the analytical process. Table 2 provides an overview of the 15 reliability analyses.

The next step (round 5) was to compare the results from the two countries by calculating the mean for each of the five scales. The scales were additive in nature, with each scale comprising either three or four items. In each case, a higher value is associated with stronger support for the behaviour or attitude under scrutiny. This analysis begins with examining the green mindset as reflected by the mean scores of the two independent samples. This scale incorporated three items, thus the range of potential means (using a balanced, forced, six-point itemised rating scale) was between 3.0 and 18.0. The mean score for the South Korean sample was moderately high at 14.72, while the mean for the South African sample was far more robust at 16.16. Therefore, the initial conclusion is that both countries can be characterised as possessing a moderately strong green mindset. A *t*-test was then used to determine whether or not the difference between the two countries was statistically significant. With a *t*-value of –8.079 and 803 degrees of freedom, the calculated probability associated with the difference was < 0.001. Therefore, the difference in the mean scores for the two countries has been determined to be statistically significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that South Africa possesses a greener mindset – or *attitude* than do the South Koreans. *Therefore, South Africa breaks into the scoresheet by winning round five*.

For round six, the focus now shifts to overt *behaviour*. In this regard, the initial assessment is of the anti-consumption behaviour scale. The anti-consumption scale comprised four items, thus the range of potential means was 4.0–24.0. The actual means were 13.73 for the South Korean sample and 18.25 for the South African sample. The massive negative difference between the two means resulted in the conclusion that residents of South Africa were the greener of the two populations as they were far more likely to engage in anti-consumption behaviour based on issues relevant to sustainability. The comparison produced a *t*-value of –19.146 with 803 degrees of freedom; that difference is significant at a level of < 0.001. Given these metrics, it can be stated that consumers in South Africa are considerably more prone to overtly engage in green-based anti-consumption behaviour than are residents of South Korea.

Green advocacy is the second behavioural construct under scrutiny. This three-item scale exhibited the weakest support. The mean for South Korea was just above the scale's 10.5 midpoint at 11.16 while the mean for South Africa was a more robust 13.24. The difference of –2.08 resulted in a *t*-score of –9.047; this difference is also statistically significant at the level of < 0.001. Therefore, it can be concluded that South Africans are more likely to engage in green advocacy behaviour even though consumers in neither country could be characterised as actively participating within this realm of customer citizenship.

Attention is now shifted to the third behavioural construct, that of customer-helping behaviour. The mean score for the South Korean sample for this four-item scale was 15.64. By comparison, the mean score for the South African sample was 17.73. Thus, the observed difference was a sizable –2.09. This difference resulted in a *t*-score of –6.686 which is significant at the level of < 0.001. These results indicate that consumers in South Africa are far more likely than consumers in South Korea to engage in customer-helping behaviour.

The final scale under scrutiny is consumer coaching or what Frese et al. (1997) referred to as personal initiative taking. The four-item scale also exhibited means whereby the observed difference between the two countries was statistically significant at a level of < 0.001. The South Korean sample produced a lower mean score than the previous four comparisons. The South Korean mean was 14.91 whereas the South African mean was 17.11. This difference of –2.20 between the two samples produced a *t*-score of –6.992. Therefore, once again, South Africans are more engaged in consumer coaching behaviour. The results of the five *t*-tests are summarised in Table 3.

As seen in Table 3, not only did the South African sample produce a higher mean score on the single attitudinal scale but it also resulted in a significantly higher mean for all four behavioural constructs comprising customer citizenship from a green perspective. Based on these outcomes, it can be stated that the interpretation of these results indicates that South African consumers possess a greener attitude (mindset), and – perhaps more importantly – they are more

TABLE 2: Results of reliability testing for the five scales under scrutiny.

Scale	Coefficient alpha		
	Aggregate	South Korea	South Africa
Green mindset	0.820	0.760	0.759
Anti-consumption	0.732	0.563	0.664
Green advocacy	0.864	0.931	0.803
Customer helping	0.937	0.939	0.932
Consumer coaching	0.899	0.911	0.888

TABLE 3: Results of *t*-tests for differences between the means on the five scales.

Scale	South Korea	South Africa	dif.	*t*	Sig.*
Green mindset (3)	14.72	16.16	-1.44	-8.079	< 0.001
Anti-consumption (4)	13.73	18.25	-4.52	-19.146	< 0.001
Green advocacy (3)	11.16	13.24	-2.08	-9.047	< 0.001
Customer helping (4)	15.64	17.73	-2.09	-6.686	< 0.001
Consumer coaching (4)	14.91	17.11	-2.20	-6.942	< 0.001

*, Significance based on 803 degrees of freedom for each calculation; (*) Number within parentheses represents the number of items comprising each scale.

prone to engage in green behaviour than consumers in South Korea. Based on the results associated with the four behavioural constructs, *the South Africans overwhelmingly won the sixth round*.

Managerial implications

Given the differences in attitudes and behaviours documented in the comparison of South Korea and South Africa, it is apparent that marketers cannot treat the global market as a homogeneous entity. The results emanating from this study underscore the essential need for sustainability initiatives and resource management practices across different countries and regions be customised to address better the challenges posed by varying economic conditions and incongruent ecological capacities. Standardised marketing strategies are inferior to those customised for each market. This reality further documents the need for researchers – academicians and practitioners alike – to continue engaging in cross-national research designed to identify differences and suggest how a marketer can best address those differences. A marketer might be headed for an embarrassing and expensive demise without such insight. With that insight, the marketer might instead create a sustainable competitive advantage that will help it prosper while extending its own life cycle.

Younger consumers are known to embrace green procedures more emphatically, including customer citizenship behaviours. And they are more vocal in their support. Governments would be wise to reach out to this younger group of citizens to enlist their support. Furthermore, marketers should recognise Gen Z and Generation Alpha as two unique market segments that they can target with green products and promotions. Emphasis should be directed towards Generation Alpha, those consumers born after 2009.

It has been shown that women tend to be more open to green behaviour than are men. Perhaps this logic can be extended to those countries that score low on Maslow's masculinity scale. These countries include Scandinavian countries, Spain and France. Governments might induce green behaviour, and marketers might capitalise on green products and promotional initiatives. Therefore, it goes beyond focussing on a specific demographic – in this case women – and focusses on a country's cultural underpinnings.

Marketers must be careful not to *greenwash*. Pretending to be green when you are not will result in pushback and criticism, hindering the marketer's ability to succeed in the marketplace, especially with greener consumers. Customer criticism can be louder than customer advocacy. And its impact can be substantial. For example, Ryanair dealt with consumer resentment and government intervention when it engaged in greenwashing by claiming to be Europe's 'lowest emissions airline' (Akepa 2021).

Regarding green advocacy, the results show that both countries scored low on the scale, albeit on the positive side of the scale. While the results for South Africa (13.24) were moderate (based on the scale's midpoint of 10.5), the mean for South Korea (11.16) placed them in a neutral position. Therefore, one area that apparently needs to be addressed by green advocates in both countries is the need to get consumers more involved, more proactive, and more vocal in their support of green initiatives.

Discussion

The cleansing of the dataset resulted in the decision to drop a meaningful percentage of the respondents from the data analysis process. The respondents who were dropped failed one or more of the quality control checks in the data collection process. The inattentiveness of these dropped respondents was deemed detrimental to the data's integrity. Thus, their responses were not incorporated within the final dataset. This cleansing process is strongly recommended for future research efforts that involve survey research, particularly Internet-based surveys where the respondents are compensated for each completed questionnaire.

When engaging in research that is based upon the evaluation of constructs by calculating a single metric from a multi-item additive scale, it is imperative that each scale be internally consistent. In essence, the researcher needs to ensure that each item in the scale is measuring the same phenomenon. This study measured reliability for each scale using Cronbach's alpha. Coefficient alpha was calculated three times for each of the five scales by assessing the aggregate sample and each country individually. Of the 15 metrics, 13 exceeded the 0.7 reliability standard established by Nunnally (1978), which remains the common benchmark in today's research efforts. High reliability helps assure meaningful measurements when using a multi-item scale to measure phenomena such as an individual's green mindset. The two measures that did not satisfy this standard were substantially lower than 0.7, but one approached and one exceeded the 0.6 guideline as delineated by Wim et al. (2008). Furthermore, the anti-consumption scale produced the lowest alpha score for all three iterations. Therefore, while the scale used to measure anti-consumption behaviour is marginally adequate, it is suggested that an alternative scale be identified or developed for future research of this ilk, especially in cross-cultural research. The other four scales used in this study (green mindset, green advocacy, customer helping and consumer coaching) all withstood empirical scrutiny and are deemed appropriate for future research endeavours that generally feature customer citizenship.

The primary focus of this project was to identify differences between South Korean residents and South African residents when comparing attitudes and behaviours pertinent to green customer citizenship. The observed differences between the five pairs of means were all statistically significant at a level of less than 0.001. This outcome indicates that the differences are not because of random error but are true differences between the two population parameters. All five of the assessments of the pertinent pairs of group means produced

a negative *t*-score. All five negative outcomes indicate that the South African respondents had a stronger green inclination on all five constructs under scrutiny. From an attitudinal perspective, they exhibited a considerably stronger green mindset. From a behavioural perspective, they had higher scores regarding participation in green advocacy behaviour, engaging in behaviour intended to help other customers make green decisions, coaching individual consumers so that they might learn the underlying logic for engaging in green behaviour, and the likelihood of engaging in overt, planned anti-consumption behaviour that is based upon a perceived breach of ethical standards by the targeted marketer and/or organisation regarding conduct deemed to be detrimental to the environment. Therefore, while South Korea came out ahead in the assessment of the secondary data, South Africa was the clear winner when the focus shifted to the primary data. Given these outcomes, it can be stated that the results are somewhat paradoxical. Still, the results are meaningful to governmental agencies and marketers alike.

There is substantial evidence that a stronger green mindset does indeed contribute to greener actions on the part of the consumer. Based on the results from this study, South African residents more openly embrace and engage in the three behaviours related to customer citizenship behaviour: green advocacy, consumer coaching behaviour and customer helping behaviour. While the statistical significance of the observed differences indicates that South Africa scored significantly higher on all five scales, it is worth noting that differences of the magnitude observed in this study are managerially significant based on the corresponding measures of effect. Therefore, South African consumers are more prone to engage in formal and informal communications designed to influence their peers on the perceived wisdom of engaging in green behaviour. This behaviour includes purchasing, consuming and disposing products in ways that do not adversely impact the ecosystem. Perhaps the South Africans view their country as more pristine today, and their behaviours aim to maintain it. Or perhaps they have paid more attention to the warnings articulated by those who openly elucidate their concerns. Despite this awareness, they are not firmly embracing green advocacy, even though they are typified as highly likely to engage in sustainability-based anti-consumption behaviour. Still, while they are concerned about their green future, from a collective perspective, they are not what has been referred to as Green Warriors (Fullerton, McCullough & Van Tonder 2021). But while not being strong green advocates, they are far more inclined to engage in customer helping and consumer coaching behaviours. Perhaps South Africans view their peers as needing information and assistance in decision-making. Somewhat surprisingly, South Korean consumers are less likely to embrace anti-consumption behaviour based on green concerns actively. Perhaps future research could gain an understanding of why that is the case.

While numerous studies and reports have examined both South Korea and South Africa from a sustainability perspective, few have examined the two countries simultaneously. Furthermore, there is a dearth of information about the two countries and their participation in customer citizenship behaviours. Given the recent emergence of customer citizenship as an important focus by academicians and practitioners alike, it is hoped that the current project will be the impetus for others to continue down the path towards more active investigations of this phenomenon in countries across the globe.

Limitations

The authors wish to make readers aware of a few caveats for this study. The most disconcerting are potential questions regarding the representativeness of the two samples. While efforts were made to control demographics, were the samples microcosms of the entire populations of the two countries, or were there issues that hindered the achievement of that goal? Was there selection bias, particularly in South Korea where there was some initial face-to-face interaction between the researcher and the respondent even though the survey was completed by the respondent on a solitary basis? The primary concern in this regard is age, even though the second wave of data collection attempted to ameliorate this deficiency. In South Africa, a web-based survey may reach a desirable segment of the population, but it would be deficient if the goal was to draw a representative sample of the entire population. Furthermore, having it available only in English may have had two negative results: no input from non-English-speaking residents and animosity among South Africans who thought that it would have been more appropriate to distribute the survey in Afrikaans or perhaps provide alternatives for the multitude of languages spoken by different segments of South Africa.

Conclusions and future research

This project focussed on five key outcomes. Firstly, the literature review identified five scales used in previous research on customer citizenship that are commonly used within the realm of sustainability-oriented initiatives.

Secondly, the literature was used to determine which country possessed a greener mindset and engaged in green activities pursuant to green customer citizenship. Thirdly, this research empirically verified the reliability of each of the five identified scales. Fourthly, this study produced a snapshot of consumers' current perceptions and behaviours regarding customer citizenship within a green context in the two countries under scrutiny. Finally, the results provided empirical evidence of the differences between consumers in South Korea and South Africa on each of the five identified constructs.

Before data analyses were conducted, the two countries' databases were cleansed. This process allowed for eliminating *systematic noise* resulting from inattentive respondents such

as speeders, straight-liners, and satisficers. Based on the sheer magnitude of the number of respondents who were dropped from the database and thus not included in the subsequent analyses, this cleansing process was instrumental in the task of acquiring quality data. Thus, quality control checks such as instructional manipulation checks are strongly encouraged for all forms of survey research, especially when data collection is via an Internet platform.

Empirical scrutiny documented significant differences between South Korea and South Africa. In all five of these five assessments, the mean for the scale under examination for the South African sample was higher than the corresponding mean for the South Korean sample. These results indicate that consumers in South Africa tend to possess a stronger green mindset (attitude) while concurrently being more likely to engage in all four of the green customer citizenship behaviours under scrutiny: green advocacy, consumer coaching behaviour (personal initiative taking), customer helping behaviour (consumers helping consumers) and anti-consumption behaviour. Scored like a six-round boxing match, South Korea came out ahead in the first four rounds of the evaluation process based on the literature review. Conversely, South Africa scored higher in both rounds of empirical scrutiny (attitude and behaviour). Although the score is 4–2 in favour of South Korea, no winner can be declared. Prize fights last 12 rounds, so this one thus is far from over. Based on the primary data from this study, South Africa appears to have gained momentum. Irrespective of who ultimately wins this battle, both countries appear to be moving in the right direction. Therefore, perhaps rather than viewing it as a battle, it would be better characterised as simultaneous efforts to achieve a common goal. It is only hoped that these efforts are recognised, embraced and enacted across the globe. If so, then all 195 countries across Mother Earth will be winners.

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Competing interests

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Authors' contributions

C.B. registered the project for ethical clearance, was involved with collecting and analysing the South African data, and reviewed and made final corrections to the article. S.F. conceptualised the study, collected and analysed the South Korean data, and compared and did the article writing.

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Data availability

The data are available on request from the corresponding author, C.B. and may be used with permission or in conjunction with the authors.

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