AOSIS

Helping other customers to avoid harmful brands: The role of idealism, attitude and cynicism

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Background: Consumers are not always aware of how their purchase decisions may harm other humans and the environment. Green customer helping behaviours could aid in solving this problem.

Aim: The study aims to develop a research model, advancing knowledge of the extent to which idealism (an ethical philosophy) may influence green attitudes and promote green customer helping behaviours that could aid other customers in avoiding harmful brands. The study further aims to gain clarity regarding the moderating role of customer helper cynicism within the proposed model.

Setting: A self-administered questionnaire was fielded amongst consumers in South Africa and the United States of America (US).

Method: Mplus 8.5 and PROCESS macro in RStudio were used to analyse and compare the survey data obtained from the two samples.

Results: All direct relationships assessed were positive and significant for South Africa and the US samples. Varying results were uncovered between the two samples concerning the moderating role of customer helper cynicism.

Conclusion: The identified model confirms the important role of idealism in influencing green customer helping behaviours, as mediated by green attitudes and moderated by customer helper cynicism.

Contribution: Novel insight is provided into the contribution of ethical philosophy in promoting green customer helping behaviours. Additionally, direction is provided for the deployment of strategies that could promote green customer helping behaviours in diverse green contexts and across continents and that effectively may aid other customers in avoiding brands harmful to society.

Keywords: cynicism; ethical philosophy; green; helping; idealism.

Introduction

In recent years, a growing number of companies have been introducing green (environmentally friendly) products, with the aim of satisfying customers' needs for promoting environmental sustainability (Setiawan & Yosephani 2022; Zhang et al. 2022). Against the backdrop of natural resource exploitation (Arslan et al. 2022), climate change (Jones et al. 2022) and environmental pollution (Hasbullah et al. 2022), consumers supporting sustainable lifestyles are growing (Machová et al. 2022). Nonetheless, despite business efforts, consumers do not always support authentic green initiatives (Carrión Bósquez & Arias-Bolzmann 2022). Earlier research has shown that consumers tend to make purchase decisions believing that their brand choices are relatively safe, while being ignorant of the actual harm they may cause to other humans and the environment (Hartmann & Klaschka 2017).

Amid these developments, customer helping behaviour may present a viable solution for ensuring other customers are more careful in their product selections and avoid brands that may be harmful to society. Customer helping behaviours may vary from short information exchanges to visiting the purchase site with another customer (Price, Feick & Guskey 1995). In a green context, typical green customer helping behaviours may entail, providing assistance with the purchasing of green products, solving problems relating to the purchasing of green products and giving advice in relation to other customers' green purchases (Van Tonder et al. 2023). These green customer

helping behaviours are significant because customers sharing their know-how and experience may contribute to other customers being more informed about product alternatives and knowing which brands to avoid. Accordingly, a broadened understanding of green customer helping behaviour and the factors that may drive customers to assist other customers in avoiding harmful brands is needed.

Of further interest is that, to date, models addressing customer helping behaviour in a green context have concentrated on antecedents relating to thoughts about green firms and their offerings (Hwang & Lyu 2020), as well as views about oneself, other customers or environmentally friendly and/or green purchasing attitudes (Le et al. 2022; Petzer, Van Tonder & Fullerton 2023; Van Tonder et al. 2023). Thus far, there has been not much debate about the role of ethical philosophy in promoting green customer helping behaviours. This is surprising, as ethical philosophies may strongly influence individual judgements and actions in relation to universal moral concerns (Zaikauskaite, Chen & Tsivrikos 2020).

Ethical philosophy, or 'ethical ideology', formally concerns 'an individual's system of ethics that guides their decisions and behaviors when applied to ethical problems' (Malagueño et al. 2020:6). Grounded in ethics position theory and the work of Forsyth, variations in individuals' moral (ethical) judgements can be tracked to one's 'concern for others' well-being (idealism) and compliance with moral standards (relativism)' (Forsyth 2021:1; Zaikauskaite et al. 2020). Of special interest to the current investigation is the idealism ideology that seems to be more prevalent in positively influencing ethical decision-making. Idealists believe that conclusions about ethics are stable and should be considered as laws or principles, while relativists believe that standards in ethics should reflect the culture and society of the individuals concerned (Khan & Abbas 2023). Most studies involving ethical decision-making have identified idealism as having a positive relationship with ethical judgements, while relativism is identified as having a negative relationship with ethical judgements (Shah & Amjad 2017). Within an environmental sustainability context, previous research has further established that idealism strongly influences moral judgement of environmental issues and pro-environmental behaviours (Zaikauskaite et al. 2020).

Therefore, aligned to the above perspectives, it is plausible that customers with high levels of idealism may have favourable moral judgement of environmental issues. Subsequently, pro-environmental behaviours, such as helping other customers to make more appropriate consumption choices and avoid brands that may be harmful to society, may follow. However, customer helpers may also have cynical views about organisations, believing they are not being sincere in their environmentally friendly attempts (Zhang et al. 2022). Consumer cynicism addresses beliefs that firms act in an opportunistic way that may be harmful to customers. Knowledge of these matters is important, because cynical consumers may decide to exit the marketplace or act in a non-conforming manner (Indibara & Varshney 2021).

Accordingly, to further investigate these matters, the aim of this study is to develop a research model, addressing the extent to which idealism may influence customer helpers' moral judgements and promote green customer helping behaviour. The study additionally aims to verify the moderating role of customer helper cynicism within the proposed model. Survey research aided in the assessment of the regression model that was tested among respondents in South Africa (SA) and duplicated in the United States of America (US) to seek further validation of the research findings.

Theoretically, the study provides novel insight into the role of ethical philosophy in influencing green customer helping behaviours and further expands knowledge of factors that may impact green customer helping behaviours (Zaikauskaite et al. 2020). From a practical perspective, firms from both emerging and developing countries may benefit from the research findings and the subsequent steps that may be required to promote the green customer helping behaviours.

Theoretical background and hypotheses development
Idealism

Individuals make ethical judgements about particular situations grounded in their ethical ideologies and moral philosophies (Barnett et al. 1998; Ko et al. 2019). Andersch et al. (2018) professed that the idealism as operationalised by Forsyth (1980) is grounded in the deontological viewpoint, which presumes that individuals are held responsible for things within their control; and the teleological viewpoint, which assumes that practices that contribute to societal goals are acceptable, even if they cause harm to individuals. In essence, deontology involves 'modal obligation and justice' and teleology relates to 'perceived risk and perceived benefit' (Agag & Colmekcioglu 2020:8). Accordingly, individuals who are highly idealistic (deontologists) believe any actions that harm other people should be completely averted, while those who are not idealistic (teleologists) do not hold such beliefs and apply more utilitarian approaches where causing harm to others is sometimes inevitable (Agag & Colmekcioglu 2020; Andersch et al. 2018). Furthermore, Agag and Colmekcioglu (2020) professed that where a pro-environmental context is concerned, that those with high levels of idealism think that saving and protecting the natural environment is the right thing to do and that harming the natural environment is completely wrong. Khan and Abbas (2023) added that it is expected that idealism will correlate positively with pro-environmental behaviours and ethical consumption. Those who are concerned about the environment will take decisions that are environmentally ethical and will be concerned about achieving environmental goals (Alyahya et al. 2023). According to Zou and Chan (2019), idealism impacts positively on individuals' ethical

judgement. In this study, idealism involves the extent to which individuals believe they should not harm the environment or others or do anything that could impact their welfare and dignity, as proposed by the Ethics Position Questionnaire of Forsyth (1980) and used subsequently by Andersch et al. (2018).

Moral judgements (green attitude)

For the purpose of this study, the focus is on moral judgements regarding environmentally friendly consumption, as reflected by green attitudes. According to Wang, Shen and Chu (2021), attitude is the propensity to back or dislike particular behaviours, objects or ideas. Given the impact humans are having on the environment, green products and services are increasing rapidly in popularity and consumers' attitudes towards these products and services depend upon whether products and services are seen as environmentally friendly (Sohaib et al. 2022). Pandey and Yadav (2023) stated that attitude influences individuals' judgement of the benefits and costs of executing a particular behaviour. The main concern for an individual with respect to green (consumption) attitude is to 'justify and defend the cause of actions, promote its worth, and support the environment' (Pandey & Yadav 2023:3). Moreover, moral judgements are said to notably influence consumers' behaviour (Andersch et al. 2018). Studies have considered moral judgements where green consumption is concerned. Sparks and Shepard (2002) considered moral judgements in relation to food production and consumption, while Huang, Ma and Yen (2022) considered moral judgements in the context of green consumption (managing and preventing food waste). To uncover moral judgements, researchers measure consumers' attitudes (Sparks & Shepard 2002) – in this instance, green attitudes. For this study, green attitude involves the notion of whether an individual thinks environmentally green consumption is rewarding, wise and valuable to practice (Van Tonder, Fullerton & De Beer 2020).

The relationship between idealism and green attitude

As addressed earlier, within an environmental sustainability context, previous research has established that idealism strongly influences moral judgement of environmental issues (Zaikauskaite et al. 2020). Furthermore, Singhapakdi et al. (1995) explained that idealism impacts the extent to which customers view social responsibility and ethics as important. The authors opined that higher levels of idealism are associated with an increased importance of social responsibility and ethics among customers (Singhapakdi et al. 1995). Additionally, idealism has been identified as an important driver of ethical consumption (Singhapakdi et al. 2000). Customers who are idealists believe that ethical or green behaviours are the right thing to do (Zou & Chan 2019). Because green attitude in this study refers to the extent to which customers believe that 'practising environmentally-friendly green consumption' is wise, rewarding and valuable (Van Tonder et al. 2020), which is ethical in its nature, it is hypothesised that:

H1: Idealism significantly and positively influences green attitude.

Green customer helping behaviours

As highlighted in the introduction, there is evidence that customers engage in helping behaviours in a green context by solving the problems of other customers and advising other customers regarding their green purchases (Alsaggaf et al. 2019; Deng & Yang 2022; Van Tonder et al. 2023). Helping generally represents a dimension of customer citizenship behaviour and is considered as extra-role behaviour that customers undertake voluntarily at their own discretion and that may benefit a company (Gong & Wang 2022; Groth 2005; Hwang & Lyu 2020; Yi & Gong 2013). However, previous research suggests that when customers assist other customers not to purchase a given brand, it should only be perceived as a form of social support and not a dimension of citizenship behaviour, because the brand that is being avoided is being disadvantaged (Petzer et al. 2023). From a green perspective, advice to green purchasers in relation to the avoidance of harmful brands may advantage companies selling authentic green brands. Given that this study focusses on helping in relation to the avoidance of harmful brands to assist green purchasers, helping in the current study's context is deemed a dimension of customer citizenship behaviour. For the purpose of this study, green helping behaviours focus on the degree to which customers engage in helping others to avoid products and services (brands) that could be harmful to society by adapting the measure for helping as a customer citizenship behaviour (Van Tonder et al. 2023; Yi & Gong 2013) to focus on avoidance of products and services that may harm society (Gurrieri & Drenten 2019; Petzer et al. 2023).

The relationship between green attitude and green customer helping behaviours

There are opposing views with respect to whether favourable attitudes lead to aligned behaviours, coined as the attitude-behaviour gap (Mühlthaler & Rademacher 2017; Van Tonder et al. 2023). However, Hwang and Lyu (2022) found significant and positive relationships between customer attitude and selected customer citizenship behaviours, such as feedback to service providers, tolerating others' mistakes, advocacy and helping other customers. In addition, Wang et al. (2022) confirmed that where green attitude is concerned, resultant behavioural responses have been evident. Furthermore, Van Tonder et al. (2020) found that where customer citizenship behaviours are concerned, there are significant and positive relationships between these behaviours, including feedback to service providers and advocacy and green attitude. Accordingly, it is believed that in the context of the current investigation, those who exhibit a green attitude will engage in citizenship behaviours to help others avoid brands that may harm society. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

H2: Green attitude significantly and positively influences green customer helping behaviours.

The relationship between idealism and green customer helping behaviours

As mentioned, idealism in this study involves the degree to which customers consider the dignity and welfare of others to be a core concern of a society as well as the concern that members of society should not be harmed in any way (Andersch et al. 2018). Idealists believe the most suitable deeds are those that address the above-mentioned concerns, where the dignity, welfare and possible harm of others are concerned (Ko et al. 2019). Because green customer helping behaviours involve customers' citizenship behaviours, specifically helping others to avoid brands that may harm society (Solesvik 2017), it is hypothesised that:

H3: Idealism significantly and positively influences green customer helping behaviours.

The moderating role of customer helper cynicism

There has been a growing focus on cynicism with the move from modernity to post modernity, and cynicism has been viewed as having the ability to provide deeper 'insights into the contemporary human condition' (Mikkonen, Moisander & Fırat 2011:102). Modern cynics can be portrayed as informed social entities who are part of contemporary society and who ensure they are not taken advantage of, benefitting from an unobstructed view of how things operate (Bertilsson 2015). Core beliefs associated with cynicism allow consumers to reclaim control of their lives, thus representing a coping strategy for consumers (Odou & De Pechpeyrou 2011). Furthermore, cynicism is more lasting than instrumental and plays an important role in defining consumers' morality (Odou & De Pechpeyrou 2011). Moreover, it can be described as an emotional defiance, rather than being of a cognitive nature like scepticism (Ryu & Jun 2019). Consumer cynicism or customer helper cynicism further denotes a stable and learnt consumer attitude towards the consumer marketplace that is perceived as damaging because of the alleged widespread unscrupulousness of businesses operating in the consumer marketplace (Helm, Moulard & Richins 2015). In addition to the marketplace, cynicism can be directed at a particular business (Chylinski & Chu 2010). Bertilsson (2015:461) asserted that there are three focal 'cynical discursive practices', which involve cynicism towards the self, towards other consumers and towards the market, with the latter being relevant to this study because it involves a situation 'where consumers display an enlightened disbelief in the morality of brands and branding'. Mikkonen et al. (2011) viewed consumer cynicism as a counteracting discursive practice and strategy that create and maintain frustration, uncertainty as well as disenchantment towards the marketplace and business.

Accordingly, in the context of this study, customer helper cynicism involves the extent to which an individual believes that businesses will do almost anything to make a profit, such as manipulating customers, making any sacrifice necessary, taking shortcuts and acting without consequences (Helm et al. 2015; McCullough, Rynarzewska & Fullerton 2022). When customers exhibit strong cynicism schemas in general, the chances are good that these customers will also be more cynical in the marketplace (Indibara & Varshney 2021). Aligned with this notion, it is further postulated that cynicism possibly explains several customer behaviours directed at the marketplace (Helm et al. 2015) and that it leads to anti-consumption behaviours (Odou & De Pechpeyrou 2011). Cynicism involves a range of affective, cognitive and behavioural responses from customers and can be articulated through customers' 'initial suspicion, defensive attempts, and eventual alienation' (Chylinski & Chu 2010:799). Cynical consumers may decide to exit from the marketplace or act in a non-conforming manner (Indibara & Varshney 2021).

Given the above perspectives, it seems plausible that the relationship between idealism and green attitudes may be weakened when the green customer helper has a cynical attitude towards businesses in the consumer marketplace. Green customer helpers who support idealistic beliefs may be less likely to think that environmentally green consumption is rewarding, valuable and wise to practice if they believe that businesses will do almost anything to make a profit, such as manipulating customers, making any sacrifice necessary, taking shortcuts and doing anything they can without consequences.

Moreover, given the plausible relationship between green attitude and green customer helping behaviour, a moderated mediation effect may be present. Consumers with idealistic perspectives may have green attitudes and subsequently engage in green helping behaviours. However, this proposed indirect effect may be moderated by customer helper cynicism, assuming that customer helper cynicism moderates the relationship between idealism and green attitude. Considering the fundamentals of customer helper cynicism, green attitude is less likely to mediate the indirect effect when customer helper cynicism beliefs are high. Against the background provided above, it is hypothesised that:

H4: The effect between idealism and green attitude is moderated by customer helper cynicism such as that when customer helper cynicism is low, idealism is more strongly associated with green attitude than in situations of high levels of customer helper cynicism.

H5: Customer helper cynicism moderates the indirect effect between idealism and green customer helping behaviour, through green attitude. Specifically, the indirect effect is stronger when customer helper cynicism is low versus high, and the moderation effect occurs between idealism and green attitude.

Figure 1 provides an outline of the research model of this study.

Methodology
Survey description

A self-administered questionnaire was developed to survey consumers in the US and South Africa, who were at least 18

years old (being adults) and consented to participate in the study addressing matters of ethical concern. Adult respondents were targeted, because they would be able to provide rationalised responses when completing the survey. The study was duplicated in the US with the intention to seek further validation for the established model. The questionnaire included a cover letter that provided more information about the objective of the study, the type of respondent being surveyed, the treatment of the research data and the project leaders. Contact details were also provided, should the respondents want more information about the study results. The respondents had to give their consent, before they were allowed to continue with the survey. The first part of the survey sourced the demographic information from the respondents. The section included a question about the age of the respondents that was helpful to ensure that no respondent under the age of 18 would participate in the study. The latter part of the survey collected information about the constructs that were examined in this study.

To measure the study's four constructs – namely idealism, customer helper cynicism, green attitude and green customer helping behaviour – a six-point labelled Likert-type scale was used, where 1 implied 'strongly disagree' and 6 implied 'strongly agree'. Idealism was measured using five items from a scale adopted from Andersch et al. (2018), while customer helper cynicism was measured using a shortened (four-item) version of the scale from Helm et al. (2015), as adapted and pre-tested by McCullough et al. (2022). Green attitude was measured using three items from a scale adapted from Van Tonder et al. (2020) and green customer helping behaviour was measured using four items from a scale adapted from Yi and Gong (2013). Annexure 1 summarises the scales' items that were employed in the survey.

Data collection and analysis

In the US, data were collected with the aid of an online consumer panel (Dynata). In South Africa, the survey was distributed to a national consumer panel of a field services company (Consulta). In each country, the consumer panel received an email invitation from the respective service provider, explaining the study's intent and asking them to complete the online self-administered survey. Upon

H, hypothesis.
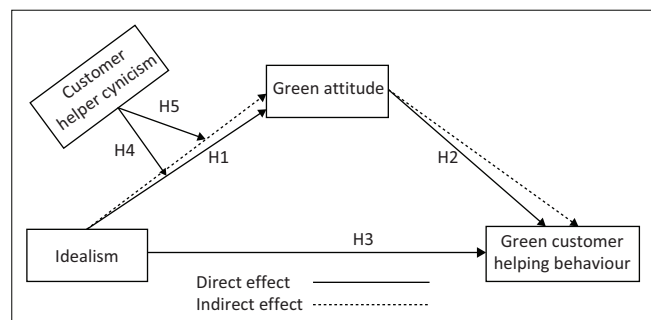**FIGURE 1:** Conceptual model for the study.

voluntarily consent, the respondents were allowed to proceed to the survey. The researchers adhered to the prescribed ethical guidelines of their respective universities and no personal data were sourced from the respondents. Table 1 outlines the demographic profile of respondents for the South Africa and the US studies.

It is evident from Table 1 that the typical respondent taking part in the South Africa study was male or female, older, married, well-educated, and full-time employed at the time the survey was completed. The typical respondent who participated in the US study was also a well-educated male or female of a more mature age, married or single, and full-time employed or retired when the survey was completed.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed in Mplus 8.5 to assess measurement model validity (Hair et al. 2019). The Mplus programme was favoured, because it allowed for the use of the maximum likelihood procedure in the assessment and to obtain more accurate results (Byrne 2001). Composite reliability (CR) measures were employed to assess construct reliability (Hair et al. 2019). The factor scores from the analysis were retained, and the research hypotheses were subsequently assessed using Model 7 of the Hayes (2013) PROCESS macro in RStudio (RStudio Team 2020). The

TABLE 1: Demographic profile of respondents.

Criteria	South Africa n = 256 (%)	United States n = 347 (%)
Gender		
Female	45.70	53.89
Male	53.13	45.82
Gender neutral or binary	0.39	0.29
Preferred not to say	0.78	0.00
Age		
Younger than 18 years	0.00	0.00
18–25 years	2.34	6.35
26–40 years	29.30	20.46
41–55 years	29.69	30.26
56–75 years	35.16	38.90
76 years or older	2.73	4.03
Preferred not to say	0.78	0.00
Marital status		
Single	18.36	30.55
Single, but living with domestic partner	8.98	4.90
Married	59.38	45.82
Divorced or Separated	9.38	11.24
Widowed	2.73	7.49
Preferred not to say	1.17	0.00
Work status		
Full-time employed	64.06	40.06
Part-time employed	7.03	10.09
Students, unemployed or 'other'	11.72	19.88
Retired	16.41	29.97
Preferred not to say	0.78	0.00
Level of education		
Did not complete high school	0.39	0.29
Completed high school	13.67	21.90
Completed a post-school qualification	83.59	77.52
Preferred not to say	2.35	0.29

mediation hypothesis was tested, with the aid of bootstrap resampling (5000 draws and 95% confidence interval [CI]).

Ethical considerations

The authors adhered to all ethical standards as prescribed by their respective institutions, with ethical clearance number: NWU-00016-21-A4.

Results

Measurement model results, validity and reliability

Individual measurement models were first compiled for South Africa and the US, comprising the four constructs of interest to this study. Within both models, it became evident that model fit could be improved by deleting the first item of the idealism scale (that obtained a standardised factor loading lower than 0.5) and by acknowledging covariances between the third and fourth items of the green customer helping behaviour scale. Subsequently, both measurement models delivered adequate model fit statistics (Hair et al. 2019) – South Africa: χ^2 (df = 83) = 180.046; (χ^2/df = 2.17), comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.96, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = 0.95, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.068; and US: χ^2 (df = 83) = 210.020, (χ^2/df = 2.53), CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.96, and RMSEA = 0.066.

In both countries, all scale items of the revised measurement models exceeded 0.5 and loaded significantly onto their individual constructs (p < 0.001). No convergent or discriminant validity issues were detected either. For all constructs measured, the average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.5 and the shared variance between any pair of constructs was never larger than their separate AVE values. In both data sets, the CR measures of all four constructs also far exceeded the 0.7 cut-off, providing further evidence that reliability was obtained (Fornell & Larcker 1981; Hair et al. 2019).

Subsequently, a multi-group CFA was conducted. Within the multi-group model, the first item of the idealism scale was omitted again, and the covariance between the third and fourth items of the green customer helping behaviour scale was accounted for in the model. Measurement invariance was achieved, as evidenced by the delta change between the CFI values of the configural, metric, and scalar model results that never exceeded 0.01 (Cheung & Rensvold 2002). Moreover, satisfactory model fit statistics were obtained (Hair et al. 2019): χ^2 (df = 188) = 491.630; (χ^2/df = 2.62); CFI = 0.96; TLI = 0.95, and RMSEA = 0.073. The chi-square contribution for the South Africa sample was 246.07 and the chi-square contribution for the US sample was 245.56. As further indicated in Table 2, the multi-group's standardised factor loadings exceeded 0.5 and loaded significantly onto their individual constructs (p < 0.001).

There were no convergent or discriminant validity issues in the multi-group model either. Table 3 shows that the AVE values for both the South Africa and US samples are above

0.5 and the shared variance between any pair of constructs are not larger than their separate AVE values.

Table 2 shows that, in both data sets, the CR measures of all four constructs far exceed the 0.7 cut-off, providing further evidence that reliability was obtained (Fornell & Larcker 1981; Hair et al. 2019). Accordingly, latent variable factor scores of the multi-group model were saved and carried over to RStudio for further analysis of the research model.

Regression model results

Table 4 summarises the output, as produced from the analysis of Model 7 of the Hayes (2013) PROCESS macro in RStudio.

Individual analysis was conducted by country. As per Table 4 (Model 7, Stages 1 and 2), the unstandardised coefficients studied are all significant, except for the relationship between customer helper cynicism and green attitude within the US sample. Within the South Africa sample, the lowest coefficient was -0.24 and the highest coefficient was 0.47. The coefficients obtained within the US sample were somewhat lower than the corresponding coefficients from the South Africa sample, ranging from -0.13 to 0.55. Moreover, in both samples, idealism had a strong effect on green attitude (South Africa: coefficient = 0.47, p < 0.001; US: coefficient = 0.41, p < 0.001), while the relationship between idealism and green customer helping behaviour was weaker (South Africa: coefficient = 0.23, p < 0.05; US: coefficient = 0.18, p < 0.05), but still significant. Furthermore, green attitude had a stronger effect on green customer helping behaviour in the US sample, compared to the South Africa sample (South Africa: coefficient = 0.38, p < 0.001; US: coefficient = 0.55, p < 0.001).

Table 4 (Model 7, Stage 1) further depicts that the coefficient of the product between idealism and customer helper cynicism is

TABLE 2: Assessment of latent variables.

Variable items	Std. factor loading		Std. error of loading		CR	
	South Africa	US	South Africa	US	South Africa	US
Idealism (Ideal)						
Ideal_2	0.75	0.77	0.03	0.02	0.88	0.90
Ideal_3	0.76	0.76	0.03	0.02	-	-
Ideal_4	0.90	0.91	0.02	0.01	-	-
Ideal_5	0.82	0.86	0.02	0.02	-	-
Customer helper cynicism (Cynic)						
Cynic_1	0.66	0.69	0.03	0.03	0.90	0.91
Cynic_2	0.85	0.87	0.02	0.02	-	-
Cynic_3	0.91	0.90	0.02	0.01	-	-
Cynic_4	0.90	0.91	0.02	0.01	-	-
Green attitude (Green)						
Green_1	0.64	0.86	0.03	0.02	0.80	0.92
Green_2	0.73	0.86	0.03	0.02	-	-
Green_3	0.89	0.93	0.03	0.01	-	-
Green customer helping behaviour (Help)						
Help_1	0.86	0.93	0.02	0.01	0.91	0.95
Help_2	0.91	0.96	0.02	0.01	-	-
Help_3	0.80	0.89	0.02	0.01	-	-
Help_4	0.79	0.86	0.03	0.01	-	-

Note: All factors loaded significantly at p < 0.001.
CR, composite reliability; Std., standard.

TABLE 3: Latent factor correlation matrix with average variance extracted on the diagonal in brackets.

Variable	1		2		3		4	
	South Africa	US	South Africa	US	South Africa	US	South Africa	US
1. Green attitude	0.58	0.78	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Customer helper cynicism	0.12	0.14	0.70	0.72	-	-	-	-
3. Green customer helping behaviour	0.28	0.43	0.13	0.14	0.71	0.83	-	-
4. Idealism	0.39	0.36	0.04	0.14	0.23	0.26	0.66	0.69

Note: All correlations are statistically significant at $p < 0.001$.
US, United States of America.

TABLE 4: Regression results.

Variable	(Model 7)											
	Coefficient		SE		T		p		CI (Low)		CI (High)	
	South Africa	US	South Africa	US	South Africa	US	South Africa	US	South Africa	US	South Africa	US
Stage 1 (Green attitude)												
Idealism	0.47	0.41	0.06	0.06	8.14	6.52	0.001***	0.001***	0.36	0.28	0.58	0.53
Customer helper cynicism	0.09	0.04	0.04	0.07	2.30	0.56	0.022*	0.575	0.01	-0.09	0.17	0.17
Idealism*Customer helper cynicism	-0.24	-0.13	0.07	0.06	-3.53	-2.27	0.001***	0.024*	-0.38	-0.24	-0.11	-0.02
Stage 2 (Green customer helping behaviour)												
Idealism	0.23	0.18	0.11	0.08	2.23	2.19	0.030*	0.030*	0.03	0.02	0.44	0.34
Green attitude	0.38	0.55	0.10	0.07	3.73	8.08	0.001***	0.001***	0.18	0.41	0.57	0.68

SE, standard error; CI, confidence interval; US, United States of America.
***, Significant at $p < 0.001$; *, Significant at $p < 0.05$.

significant and negative in both samples (South Africa: coefficient = -0.24, $p < 0.001$; US: coefficient = -0.13, $p < 0.05$). Accordingly, in both samples, customer helper cynicism moderated the relationship between idealism and green attitude. In the South Africa sample, the moderated direct effect of idealism on green attitude varied between high (point estimate: 0.24, $p < 0.01$), moderate (point estimate: 0.43, $p < 0.001$), and low (point estimate: 0.65, $p < 0.001$) levels of customer helper cynicism. Similarly, in the US sample, the moderated direct effect of idealism on green attitude varied between high (point estimate: 0.33, $p < 0.001$), moderate (point estimate: 0.44, $p < 0.001$), and low (point estimate: 0.55, $p < 0.001$) levels of cynicism.

Additionally, in the South Africa sample, the index of moderated mediation was significant (coefficient = -0.092, standard error [SE] = 0.05, 95% bootstrap CI = -0.189 to -0.009). These findings indicated that customer helper cynicism moderated the indirect effect of idealism on green customer helping behaviour through green attitude (Hayes 2018). The indirect effect of idealism on green customer helping behaviour was larger at lower levels of customer helper cynicism (coefficient = 0.24, SE = 0.08, 95% bootstrap CI [0.100, 0.406]), significant and weaker at moderate levels of customer helper cynicism (coefficient = 0.16, SE = 0.05, 95% bootstrap CI [0.071, 0.269]), and even weaker at high levels of customer cynicism (coefficient = 0.092, SE = 0.047, 95% bootstrap CI [0.020, 0.203]). In the US sample, the index of moderated mediation was not significant (coefficient = -0.071, SE = 0.04, 95% bootstrap CI = -0.158 to 0.011). These findings indicated that customer helper cynicism did not moderate the indirect effect of idealism on green customer helping behaviour through green attitude in the US sample (Hayes 2018). In view of these perspectives, H1–H4 were supported

in both samples, while H5 was only supported in the South Africa sample. Figure 2 illustrates the research results.

Theoretical implications

The contemporary consumer environment is characterised by external factors, such as natural resource exploitation (Arslan et al. 2022), climate change (Jones et al. 2022) and environmental pollution (Hasbullah et al. 2022). Amid these developments, more consumers endorse sustainable lifestyles (Machová et al. 2022), although not all green initiatives seem to receive customer support (Carrión Bósquez & Arias-Bolzmann 2022) and customers do not always avoid brands that may be harmful to society (Wiederhold & Martinez 2018; Zhang et al. 2022). Fellow customers may assist in this regard, addressing other customers' concerns and doubts, and ensuring harmful brands are avoided. As addressed earlier, customers assisting other customers, sharing know-how and expertise, are well-acknowledged in literature and also seem to be common practice in relation to green behaviours (Hwang & Lyu 2020; Le et al. 2022; Price et al. 1995; Van Tonder et al. 2023). Accordingly, the established model contributes to this conversation and provides a fresh perspective on factors that may promote the desired green customer helping behaviours.

As expected, the research findings prove idealism is an important factor that could influence green attitudes and green customer helping behaviours. These relationships were confirmed in both samples, and the effect sizes obtained for each relationship did not vary much by country (H1 and H3). Hence, the research findings further confirm previously established views that idealism strongly influences moral judgement of environmental issues and pro-environmental behaviours (Zaikauskaite et al. 2020). These findings are important as they provide novel insight into the relevance of
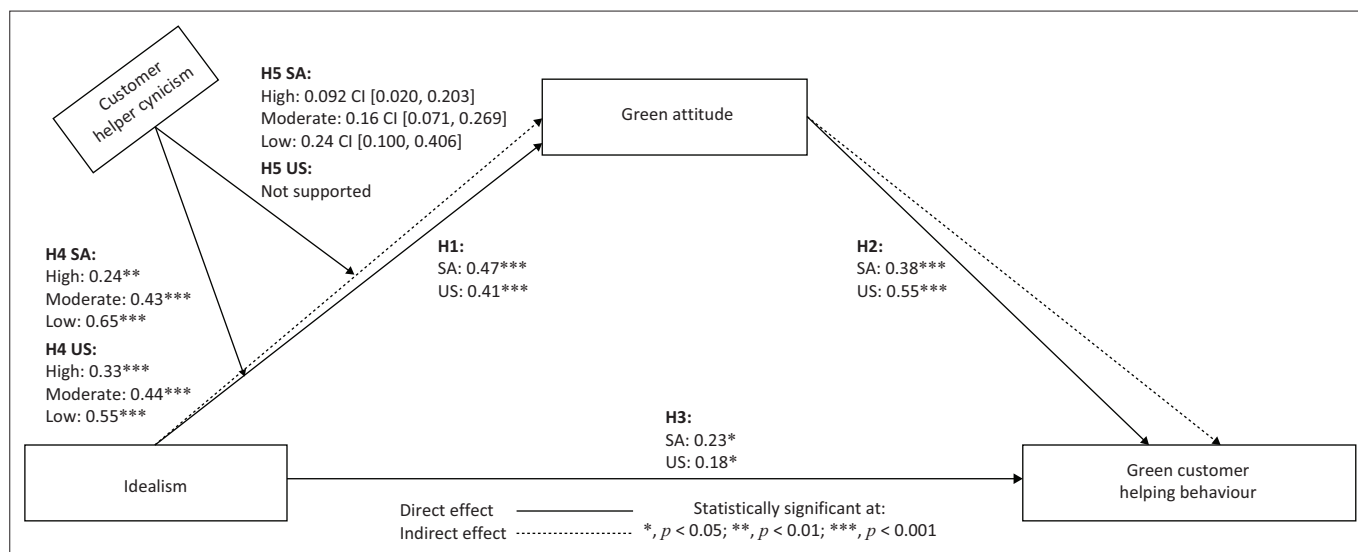
FIGURE 2: Regression results.

ethical philosophy in influencing models of customer helping behaviours (Forsyth 2021). Beyond thoughts about the green firm and its offering (Hwang & Lyu 2020), as well as views about oneself and other customers (Le et al. 2022; Van Tonder et al. 2023), more general views about how people should be treated in life also seem to be relevant, motivating attitudes and the extent to which customers may help other customers with their green behaviours. Therefore, a fresh perspective is provided on an antecedent of green attitudes and green customer helping behaviours that is not context-specific or may easily change, depending on factors such as product quality or customers' feelings. Consequently, future research could expand on these perspectives and advance knowledge of strategies for promoting green customer helping behaviour that may be more enduring in nature.

Of related importance is that, as addressed earlier, there are opposing views concerning whether favourable attitudes necessarily lead to aligned behaviours, coined as the attitude–behaviour gap (Mühlthaler & Rademacher 2017; Van Tonder et al. 2023). However, confirmation of H2 in both countries further evidences that green attitudes influence green customer helping behaviours. Hence, the research findings support the work of scholars, such as Hwang and Lyu (2022), who previously found significant and positive relationships between customer attitudes and selected customer citizenship behaviours, such as feedback to service providers, tolerating others' mistakes, advocacy and helping other customers. Evidently, green attitudes that may be influenced by perceptions of idealism could promote green customer helping behaviours.

Moreover, this research offers novel insight into the important role of customer helper cynicism in influencing green attitudes and green customer helping behaviours. An investigation of this matter was necessary as well, in view of some organisations not being sincere in their environmentally friendly attempts (Zhang et al. 2022). Subsequently, customers may not only have generic views about how others should be treated, but also about how companies treat other customers in general,

which could affect their pro-environmental behaviours. Confirmation of H4 in both countries subsequently proves that customer helper cynicism plays a role and significantly reduces the effect of idealism on green attitude. However, given that H5 was only supported in the South Africa sample, it seems that customer helper cynicism does not moderate the indirect effect between idealism and green customer helping behaviours through green attitude in the US sample. This is an interesting finding, especially because earlier research denotes that cynical consumers may decide to exit the marketplace or act in a non-conforming manner (Indibara & Varshney 2021). While customer helper cynicism negatively affects green attitudes in both samples, only respondents from the South Africa sample followed an exit strategy and were less inclined to help other customers with their green purchases, given their cynical views. A plausible explanation for this occurrence may be cultural differences and the respondents in the US – living in a first-world country with more opportunities – perhaps being more willing to assist their fellow citizens in promoting their well-being, regardless of challenges experienced. Further investigation is needed to provide clarity on this matter. Nonetheless, the current research challenges previously established views about cynicism (Indibara & Varshney 2021) and its influence on consumer behaviours.

Finally, the measures employed to assess green customer helping behaviours are significant. Specifically, the study did not address customer assistance within a specific product category, but instead followed a more generic approach. The research focussed on customer help being provided by means of avoiding brands that may be harmful to society, following idealism views and green attitudes. Accordingly, the identified model may be relevant and provide strategic guidance in diverse green marketing settings.

Managerial implications

Promoting green customer helping behaviours is imperative. Customers assisting other customers with avoiding harmful brands may contribute to more environmentally friendly

behaviours. Therefore, it is crucial for firms selling authentic green brands to devise strategies that appeal to customer helpers and motivate them to assist other customers and help them avoid brands that may be harmful to society.

Overall, the current research suggests a model that may appeal to firms in diverse green settings selling authentic green brands and that could aid them in facilitating green customer helping behaviours. The model addresses green attitudes, how customers believe people should be treated (idealism), how they perceive firms treat people (customer helper cynicism), and how customer helpers treat other people (green customer helping behaviour). Central to the development of green attitudes are customer helpers' perceptions of idealism and cynicism that may affect green customer helping behaviour. Additionally, idealism may promote green customer helping behaviours. Accordingly, it could be beneficial for firms to devise strategies addressing idealism and customer helpers' cynicism, given the important role of the two constructs within the identified model.

Firms selling authentic green brands should actively communicate with their customers and stakeholders to convey the message they are caring for and not harming other stakeholders in their business dealings. This stance should be evident in firms' practices and day-to-day operations. Being seen as supportive of the community where they operate, acting responsibly towards the environment, and treating their multiple stakeholders with dignity will be viewed favourably by idealists.

It is imperative that firms ensure they are not perceived as only being concerned with making profit at all costs. Firms should make sure their customers are aware of their corporate social responsibility initiatives and constantly implement innovative strategies to illustrate to customers that they care about their stakeholders and the environment. Focussing on their contribution to society at large, instead of only focussing on sales, will contribute to tempering customer helper cynicism, ultimately bolstering green customer helping behaviour.

Firms selling authentic green brands should also appeal to green customer helpers' idealistic beliefs and the need to help other customers make more environmentally friendly purchase decisions and avoid brands that may be harmful to society. Social media campaigns, influencer marketing and advertorials could assist in this regard.

Research limitations and directions for further studies

As noted before, it is believed that ethical philosophies may strongly influence individual judgements and actions in relation to universal moral concerns (Zaikauskaite et al. 2020). Accordingly, the current research contributes to this debate and provides novel insight into the important role of idealism (an ethical philosophy) in influencing green customer helping behaviours, as mediated by green attitudes and moderated by

customer helper cynicism. The model is relevant in both emerging market (South Africa) and developed countries (US), although customer helper cynicism only moderates the indirect effect of idealism on green customer helping behaviour through green attitude in the South Africa sample. Accordingly, in view of the constructs investigated, the research findings effectively provide direction for the deployment of strategies that could promote green customer helping behaviours in diverse green contexts and across continents.

Future research could expand the model by considering the additional influence of idealism on customer citizenship behaviours related to helping, such as advocacy and feedback, which also seems to be relevant in a green context (Van Tonder et al. 2020). Moreover, given the differences obtained in the US and South Africa samples, it may be worthwhile to further investigate the influence of culture within the proposed model. Previous research indicates that ethical positions may vary between Western, Eastern and Middle Eastern countries (Forsyth, O'Boyle & McDaniel 2008). It may also be interesting to determine if customer helpers' own involvement in green products and level of experience in purchasing and using green products could affect the outcome of the proposed model. Qualitative research techniques could be employed to advance understanding of green customer helping behaviours, as applied within emerging and developing countries.

Data availability

The research data supporting the article's findings are available in the manuscript.

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Appendix 1

TABLE 1-A1: List of measurement scales employed.

Variable	Reference
Idealism (Ideal)	Andersch et al. (2018)
Ideal1* – The dignity and welfare of people should be the most important concern in any society.	-
Ideal_2 – One should never harm another person in any way.	-
Ideal_3 – If an action could harm an innocent person, then it should not be done.	-
Ideal_4 – One should not perform an action that might in any way threaten the dignity and welfare of another individual.	-
Ideal_5 – A person should make certain that their actions never intentionally harm another person, even to a small degree.	-
Customer helper cynicism (Cynic)	Helm et al. (2015), as adapted and pre-tested by McCullough et al. (2022)
Cynic_1 – Companies see consumers as puppets they can manipulate in order to increase profits.	-
Cynic_2 – Most companies will sacrifice anything to make a profit.	-
Cynic_3 – Most businesses will cut any corner they can to improve profit margins.	-
Cynic_4 – To make a profit, companies are willing to do whatever they can get away with.	-
Green attitude (Green)	Van Tonder et al. (2020)
Green_1 – I think practising environmentally friendly green consumption is valuable.	-
Green_2 – I think practising environmentally friendly green consumption is rewarding.	-
Green_3 – I think it is wise to practise environmentally friendly green consumption.	-
Green customer helping behaviour (Help)	Yi and Gong (2013)
Help_1 – I assist other customers if they need my help in avoiding brands that may be harmful to society.	-
Help_2 – I help other customers if they seem to have problems in avoiding brands that may be harmful to society.	-
Help_3 – I teach other customer about avoiding brands that may be harmful to society.	-
Help_4 – I give advice to other customers about avoiding brands that may be harmful to society.	-

Note: Please see the full reference list of the article, Van Tonder, E., Petzer, D.J. & Fullerton, S., 2024, 'Helping other customers to avoid harmful brands: The role of idealism, attitude and cynicism', *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences* 27(1), a5746. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajems.v27i1.574, for more information.
*, Omitted from further analysis.