
A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS: STIMULUS OF ECO-FRIENDLY PRODUCTS ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR.

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Abstract :

Marketing has now evolved as one of the major areas of interest for marketers. It seeks to provide competitive advantages, due to this reason many of the companies in India have now started marketing themselves as green organizations due to certain government regulations and shift in the preference of the consumers worldwide. However, not much research concerning green marketing has been done in India and there is a question about the awareness of green products among consumers. It requires investment in terms of technology enhancement, process modification, communicating benefits to customers, etc. Consumers and manufacturers have directed their attention toward environment-friendly products that are presumed to be “green” or environment-friendlies like low power consuming (energy-efficient) electrical appliances, organic foods, lead-free paints, recyclable paper, and phosphate-free detergents. Indian marketers are also realizing the importance of the green marketing concept.

Keywords: Green Products, Consumer Behavior, Sustainability, Eco-Friendly Environment.

Introduction

Green marketing includes a wide range of activities, including product alteration, changes in the production process, packaging changes, as well as modifying the product promotional activities. Therefore it would also be interesting to note the outlook and response of consumers towards these marketing efforts. As green marketing refers to a holistic marketing process in which the product's marketing consumption as well as the disposal of products and services happen in a way less harmful to the environment. With growing awareness about the consequences of global warming, non-biodegradable solid waste, the detrimental impact of pollutants on the environment has led both marketers and consumer to become increasingly sensitive to the need to switch to green products and services. Lately, green marketing has gained tremendous attention worldwide because of environmental deterioration which leads to global problems. It is also observed that companies have started using green marketing for various reasons like social responsibility, green policies, etc. (Kumar, 2010). On one hand, when the business world is becoming more socially responsible, the consumers are also changing their attitudes as they shift from buying conventional products to ecofriendly/green products (Ghosh,2010). Due to this transition and excessive competition, it has become pivotal for marketers to formulate the marketing strategies in line with consumer attitudes to be successful. Research is scarce in the extent of literature which particularly focuses on the factors and other drivers that lead a consumer towards the buying of green products. This research is an attempt to fill that gap.

Literature Review :

Hofstede (2001) has opined India as a society with clear collectivistic traits. This indicates that there is a fondness for belonging to a larger social framework. Individuals are expected to act by one's defined in-group(s). The actions of the individual are influenced by the opinion of one's family, neighbors, workgroups, and friends who are part of their social networks. Owing a green product has become a penchant which involves and spread across all the members of society. Marketers should also try to keep the pricing of green products at par with non-green products and to do the same they can opt for product line pricing as the demand for green products is already rising and lowering of prices will only provide an impetus to that. The dramatic growth in green marketing enthusiasm at the beginning of the 1990s has gradually subsided (Peattie and Crane, 2005). Green marketing entered its second phase in the 1990s when marketers beginning to experience a backlash (Wong et al., 1996). Gradually, marketers believed that consumer concern for the environment and a connected desire for green products did not translate into purchasing behavior (Schrum et al., 1995). Among all the major factors, the main aspect contributing to the reaction against green marketing was consumer skepticism about green products, green claims, and the companies' intention as well as practices (Mendleson and Polonsky, 1995).

Charter and Polonsky(1999)posited that green marketing is the marketing and promotion of a product depending upon the environmental performance or an improvement afterward. The time of the late 1980s witnessed the first phase of green marketing when the concept of "green marketing" was newly introduced and discussed in the industry (Peattie and Crane, 2005). An awaited appearance of a green tide stimulated many marketers to engage in different forms of green marketing at the starting of this first phase (Vandermerwe and Oliff, 1990). Many marketers generated positive consumers the response which translated into an upsurge of goodwill, market shares, or sales from their efforts of green marketing. However, notwithstanding reports that environmental glitches constituted one of the highest public concerns, market growth for green products lamentably fell short of marketers' expectations (Wong et al., 1996). Peattie and Crane (2005) have identified five marketing practices which led to the failure of green marketing during this period. They are:

- ☐ **Green spinning-** Taking a responsive approach by using public relations to repudiate or dishonor the public's criticisms against the company's practices.
- ☐ **Green selling** -Taking an opportunity-seeking approach through the addition of some green claims to existing products with the desire to boost sales.
- ☐ **Green harvesting-** Becoming passionate about the environment only when greening could result in cost savings (e.g., in terms of energy and material input inefficiencies, package reductions, etc.).
- ☐ **Entrepreneur marketing-** Generating pioneering green products to market without being considerate of what the consumers want.

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- **Compliance marketing-** Using humble compliance with applied or expected environmental legislation as an opportunity to promote the company's green qualifications without taking initiatives to go beyond responding to regulations.

After this phase from the mid-1990s, consumers started to become more and more environmentally and socially aware (Strong, 1996). Serious consumers for environmental protection began to emerge as a new force of green consumerism during that period.

Gradually, the rise of green consumerism has led to an even broadened consumption a concept called ethical consumerism (Uusitalo and Oksanen, 2004). According to Uusitalo and Oksanen (2004), ethical consumerism relates to buyer behavior that reflects a the concern with the problems that arise from unethical and unfair trades practices such as child labor, breach of human rights, animal testing, labor union suppressions, disparities in trading relations with the third world countries.

OBJECTIVES :

The purpose of this paper is to understand the attitude of the consumer towards the purchase predispositions for green or eco-friendly products. The paper attempts to explore how consumer behavior is affected by green marketing practices of the marketers and to find whether or not the understanding of the advantages of using green products affects their product purchase decision. This exploratory research study is designed to gain an understanding of Indian consumers' attitudes towards green marketing or the consumption of products that support environmental protection. More specifically, the study aims to fulfill the following research objectives:

1. To comprehend how Green marketing is understood by consumers.
2. To investigate whether eco-friendly products influence consumers more positively in influencing purchase behavior.
3. To discover the factors which indicate a change in consumer behavior towards the purchase of Green products.

Research Methodology :

The present study adapted Kvale's (1996), seven-a stage model of conducting an in-depth interview. The qualitative research was conducted using an in-depth interview technique with forty participants who were from varied backgrounds and belonged to the population of the city 'Delhi and NCR'. The stages of the interview were Thematising, Designing, Interviewing, Transcribing, Analyzing, Verifying, and Reporting. The study used an open-ended, exploration-oriented method, which enabled a detailed discovery of the participants' feelings and perspectives about green or eco -friendly products. The start of the interview began with the introduction and explaining the objective of the study to respondents. Prompts and probes were used in each question for extracting the exact information. All forty sessions were audio-recorded and complimented with written notes after obtaining respondents' permission.

ANALYSIS OF VARIOUS PARAMETERS :

An inclination for Green Products :

Using the probing technique which guided the participants to respond with examples, the interviewees were asked to discuss their preferred product category for green products. It was found that consumers equally prefer green products in both consumer durable and consumer non - durable category. In consumer durable categories like phone, TV, cars, electronic gadgets consumers believe that making such products with the least harm to nature would always be preferred. While in consumer non – durables there is a growing demand for the consumption of organic food products, cosmetics, and clothing.

The responses received were as follows:

“ As I am aware of the environmental problems caused due to the usage of products made up of harmful components, I always try to buy environmentally safe products and If an electronic gadget company introduces safe products than my preference will always be for those,. ” (R 12)

“When I go shopping food products, organic foods always entice me as it is produced through agriculture which does not use artificial chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and animals reared in more natural conditions, without the routine use of drugs and antibiotics. ” (R 39)

Differences in Buying Decision.

Most of the participants approved that the onslaught of non - biodegradable products cast a much harmful impact on our environment and if we continue to practice and support the same than we are actually without realizing digging graves for our children and generations to come. It was observed through the interview responses that their consumers are rapidly becoming aware and switching their buying habits from conventional products to green products. The consumer responses were as follows:

“I always try to select organic/ green products because that is the only way we can contribute to saving our environment. Moreover, it is also a healthy option to consume organic food as it is pure and helps in making our body constitution sound. (R 34)

“Surely a green product is a perfect option to live a healthy life. I recently bought myself a pair of Levis jeans which is green and safe for the environment. Likewise now I prefer green consumption habits. (R 28)

However, a few respondents were of divergent view and pointed out that the preference of a product does not completely depend upon its green origin as these products are generally many times higher than non - green products.

Rate of Recurrence of Shopping Eco-friendly products

When respondents were asked about their shopping frequency of green products eighteen of the forty participants reported as going shopping once or more than once a week and specifically lookout to buy green products. While fourteen participants stated to go shopping once every two weeks and they buy green products in food and cosmetics and clothing. Eight of them revealed that they shop once a month for buying green products. As shown in Table I below:

Table I: Rate of Recurrence of Shopping Eco-friendly products

Shopping	Frequency
Weekly	18
Fortnightly	14
Monthly	8

Inclination in Product Category

Interview participants were also enquired about where they like to go for shopping green products. A glaring majority of nineteen participants reported their preference to shop for such products at the malls, supermarkets, and retail stores and eleven of the interviewees informed that they prefer to go to traditional/local shopping places and conventional markets.

Cost Considerations

A very few respondents also said they are not ready to compromise with their preferences for green products even if a low-cost non - green product is offered to them at throwaway prices. Most of the respondents pointed out that it is true that green products are higher in prices and that probably is the only stumbling block deters a consumer from buying them. If there is a small difference in the price then that would not matter. They said:

“I am not worried about the price element.” (R 8)

“I know that if today I am buying a non-biodegradable product than my children will pay for it tomorrow” (R 29)

Visual Appeal and Packaging

The majority of the participants remarked that an impressive logo or visual appeal invokes an assurance of the product's excellent functional and hedonic utilities and thus influence their buying decision having visual appeal on a product which is pro-environmental impacts positively on consumers. The respondents added that an impressive logo or visual appeal invokes an assurance of the product's excellent functional and hedonic utilities and thus influence their buying decision. The respondents also find visual elements to be playing a pivotal role in their purchase decisions.

CONCLUSION :

There exists an optimistic influence on consumer attitudes for buying those products which are non-hazardous to our environment. Interestingly, this is especially true in the case of younger respondents' result of the present study indicates that the knowledge and understanding of the consumer on green marketing has a positive impact on their purchase preference for eco-friendly and environmentally safe products. There exist a huge scope and possibilities that can be leveraged by marketers through the understanding of consumers' outlook towards green products, for example, marketers firstly should begin with the education of the consumer through effective advertising and

other promotional tools as it is observed that more the consumer is aware of the positive impact of consuming green more he/she is likely to buy the same. This also becomes an important source of information for strategy formulation. As per the findings of the study, it is observed that younger consumers are more active supporters and buyers of eco-friendly products therefore special products and promotional campaigns can be designed with a special focus on the younger generation. The majority of the consumers during the interview sessions also confirmed their decision to buy green products for several reasons including the influence of the peer group. The marketing communication regarding green practices needs to focus more on theme and message. Advertising appeals using green products and practices are likely to move emotions and result in persuasion. Markets need to be in the top of mind recall of consumers to gain maximum from their green brand positioning. Constant and continuous communication from the organizations' side is required to make an impact and create a distinct green positioning. Consumers have shown a positive attitude towards green products at the same time they are concerned with the availability and price of such products.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETERS :

The study has implications for marketers as well as consumers and makes a good case for the start of an era of green marketing in India. The study since focused on a limited geographical area has limited generalizability but provides good insights regarding the behavior of consumers towards green products. Future research could focus on the psychographics segmentation of consumers in terms of assessing their green values and preferences. The study can be replicated at a larger scale to get more insights into the behavior of consumers and understand more about the green phenomenon.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS/IMPLICATIONS:

A major limitation of this study is that only a qualitative method of research is used. Future studies should include the use of quantitative analysis to obtain more robust findings. Also to generalize the result including a diverse population and not limiting to a particular region would be helpful.

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