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Perception of Consumers Towards Green Marketing in India

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Abstract

Consumers and manufacturers have directed their attention toward environment friendly products that are presumed to be “green” or environment friendly like low power consuming 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. Although a variety of research on green marketing has been conducted across the globe; little academic research on consumer perception and preferences has been carried out in India. This research provides a brief review of environmental issues and identifies the green values of the consumers, their level of awareness about environmental issues, green products and practices. This paper highlights the consumers’ perception and preferences towards green marketing practices and products.

Keywords: Green Marketing, Consumer Perception, Brand Association, Consumers Action

Introduction

Marketing trends can be found out by continually researching about the changes in consumer behavior in the marketplace. By identifying the changes in the consumer behavior, the businesses can modify their offering to the consumers. Consumers today are more concerned about environmental degradation and negative impact of their uses of product and services on environment. The reason for this concern could be visible climatic changes, global warming and increasing air and water pollution. Thus using green marketing by the organizations not only provides an opportunity to meet consumer expectations and address their environmental concerns, but also to gain a competitive advantage and a strong consumer base. Green marketing is also termed as environmental marketing or ecological marketing. According to American Marketing Association, marketing of products that are presumed to be environmentally safe is called as Green Marketing. Thus wide range of activities are covered under green marketing, which includes modifying the product, making changes in the production process and packaging, as well as modifying advertising or removing any activity that impacts the environment in negative way.

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Today, the Earth faces more environmental issues than ever before, hence it is imperative for companies to make and market themselves as environment friendly. Green marketing is emerging as a popular promotional strategy owing to increased consumer awareness and concerns.

The concept of green or ecological marketing calls upon businesses to follow ethical and green practices while dealing with customers, suppliers, dealers, and employees. Companies have started marketing themselves as green companies. Even the Public Sector Units and state governments are now paying a lot of attention towards environmental issues such as global warming, pollution, or water contamination and have started taking steps to prevent environmental pollution.

Green Products and marketing practices

Actually there is no consensus on what exactly is green. There is no accepted definition of green product. However based on different definitions of green marketing, some common characteristics of products generally accepted as green, including the products are: Energy efficient (both in use and in production), Water efficient (both in use and in production), Low emitting (low on hazardous emissions), Safe and/or healthy products, Recyclable and/or with recycled content, Durable (long-lasting), Biodegradable, Renewable, Reused products, Third party certified to public or transport standard (e.g., organic, certified wood), Locally produced. Many consumer durable companies are now marketing their products with Energy Star Label stating that their use will reduce the energy consumption and consumers can save a lot of money on electricity consumption over a period of time. Many companies are now offering more eco-friendly alternatives for their customers; re-cycled products are one of the most popular alternatives that benefit the environment. Companies are now focusing on not to use plastic bags, instead they use carry bag made up of recycled paper. Idea Cellular Limited also launched an advertisement stating saving trees towards their corporate social responsibility. Nerolac Paints is marketing themselves as green as they have removed hazardous heavy metals from their paints and are marketing their lead free paints in India. Dell focuses on producing green IT products under their strategy called "Go Green with Dell". Dell products are also coming in eco-friendly packaging with a system recycling kit bundled along. They are also focusing on green innovations from data-center efficiency to the use of eco- friendly materials for everything from chassis design to product packaging. Major electronic goods manufacturing organizations are selling their products with star energy ratings that help to consume less energy. More is the star rating of the electrical/electronic appliance, less is the energy consumed. Nokia has come up with the concept of recycling of phones to save the natural resources. In 2007, IBM launched Project Big Green to help clients around the world improve the efficiency of IT and better optimized their data center resources. IBM has software and services technologies to help businesses reduce data center energy consumption and cut energy costs by more than 40 percent. Efforts are being made at government and industry level to protect environment. In India Environment Protection Act in was implemented in 1986 and Environment Audit in 1992 for the protection of the environment. New Delhi, Indian capital, was one of the most polluted cities until Supreme Court of India intervened to change to alternative fuels. In 2002, Supreme Court issued a directive to completely adopt CNG in all public transport systems to curb pollution. Many greenhouse gas reduction markets have emerged over a period of time that can catalyze projects with important local, environmental, economic, and quality-of-life benefits.

Objectives

1. To investigate the level of awareness of Indian consumers about green practices.

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2. To measure the green values of the customers.
3. To identify the brands, consumer associate with green marketing practices.
4. To investigate the preferences of Indian consumers about green products.
5. To identify the factors that influences the customer persuasion to buy green products.
6. To understand the issues and challenges of green marketing practices.

Methodology and measurement

The unit of analysis in this study is the consumer level. Questionnaire survey was applied in this study to collect information from the consumers. Information collected through consumer survey is utilized for further analysis and verification of hypotheses. Green Consumer Value Scale developed by Haws et al, 2010 was adapted in this study to measure the green value of the consumers. Classification of consumers from Green Gauge Study of Roper Organization (2001) was adapted in this study. The respondents were asked to rate the statement on a 5 point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Since the neutral point on the scale was 3, those means above 3 suggests overall agreement with the statement and the mean below 3 reflects disagreement. 106 valid responses for the questionnaire were received.

Findings and Discussion

Awareness

Respondents surveyed were aware about the green products and practices. However most of the respondents were not aware about the initiatives taken for promoting green marketing practices by central/state government, NGOs and business houses in India suggesting need for better marketing communication from these entities and have to strongly communicate to the customers about their green initiatives. Newspaper and Television were found to be the most known sources of information regarding green products to the consumers.

Consumer Perception about Green Products and Practices

All consumers have rated the seriousness on higher side for various factors that are considered as environmental concern. Consumers' agreement regarding environmental degradation was high and may prefer green products over conventional products to protect the environment. Marketers can come up with new green products and communicate the benefits to the consumers. Respondents have rated the seriousness of various environmental concerns as high. The responses have marketing implications in terms of designing marketing communication campaigns, as higher mean score representing higher concern regarding the same amongst consumers and thus could be used while promoting green products. Consumers were strongly agreeing for the importance of green marketing practices and have rated "Manufacturing Eco-Friendly Product" as the most important green marketing practice followed by "Educating customers to use products in environmental friendly manner" with a mean score of 4.67 and 4.64 respectively. All the green marketing practices were found to be considered as important by the consumers with none of the green marketing practice having scored less than 4.10. This suggests that consumers are concerned about the state of environment and expect the organizations to employ green practices towards the protection of environment.

Table 1: Consumer perception about importance of green marketing practices

Green Marketing Practices	Mean	Std. Deviation
Manufacturing Eco Friendly Product	4.67	.658

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Educating customers to use products in environmental friendly manner	4.64	.733
Manufacturing products through eco-friendly process	4.53	.650
Modifying products to make them environmental friendly	4.36	.807
Modifying product packaging to suit environment	4.30	.841
Promoting products through eco-friendly modes of communication	4.20	.844
Using green supply chain for procurement and distribution	4.11	.865
Branding product associating with green marketing practices	4.10	.839

Attitude

The reliability analysis of Green Consumer Scale has shown the Cronbach's Alpha value as 0.726 (as seen in Table 2)

Table 2: Green consumer value scale reliability analysis

Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
.726	6

The Overall Green Value of the consumers is found to be 3.88 i.e. the consumers are concerned about the protection of the environment.

Table 3: Green consumer value measure

Statements	Mean	Std.Deviao n
Green Value: It is important to me that the products I use do not harm the environment.	4.43	.690
Green Value: I am concerned about wasting the resources of our planet.	4.17	1.108
Green Value: I would describe myself as environmentally responsible.	3.85	.871
Green Value: I consider the potential environmental impact of my actions when making many of my decisions.	3.77	.772
Green Value: I am willing to be inconvenienced in order to take actions that are more environmentally friendly.	3.70	1.057
Green Value: My purchase habits are affected by my concern for our environment.	3.43	1.005
Overall Green Value	3.8870	.60858

Brand Association

Following brands were recalled as being associated with Green Marketing Practices including Bajaj CFL, Suzlon Windmills, Indian Railways (paperless ticket), Nokia, Philips CFL, Nerolac Paints, Exide Green Batteries, etc. It was found that consumers were not able to recall the brand without assistance. This has marketing implication in terms of the requirement of extensive communication by the marketers to make the consumers aware about the green brands. Around 75 % of the consumers have shown willingness to buy green products if it is available in the product category often purchased. Their mean score was found to be 3.92 on a scale of 5. This implies that marketers should make the green products available to the consumers for their consumption as customers have shown willingness to buy green products if it is available.

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Around 56 % of the consumers were found to be “Sprouts”, i.e. people who can buy green products from time to time but are not involved in any environmental activities, whereas, around 22 % of the consumers were found to be “True Blue Greens”, i.e. people who buy only green products, spend time and effort in environmental activities such as recycling and believe that an individual can do much to promote the environment. Around 12 % of the consumers were found to be “Green Back Greens”, i.e. they are able to buy green products but don’t have the time and energy for environmental activities and do not want to change their lifestyles to promote the environment. It was found that the percentage of people who buy only green products is very low (22%). Thus signifying need for better promotions.

Consumers Action

Consumers felt that green products are priced higher than conventional products (with mean score of 3.83). They have revealed that they prefer the green products over conventional products while purchasing (with mean score of 3.78). Consumers have also revealed that they consider the ill effect of the manufacturing and consumption on natural environment and the price of the green product affects their purchase behavior with mean score of 3.59 and 3.58 respectively. As consumers consider the ill effects of manufacturing and consumption on natural environment it can be said that following green marketing practices not only lead to social good but also make good business sense. When asked about the factors that affect the purchase of green products, Consumers rated “awareness about green product” first with the mean score of 4.31, followed by “availability of green product”, and “product price” at second and third position. This implies that marketers have to extensively market and communicate the availability of green products to the consumers.

Influence of green consumer values on purchase of green products

The value of correlation coefficient, $R=0.445$ suggests that there is moderate positive correlation between preference of green products and green values of the customers. However only 19.8 % (R-square values of 0.198) variation in purchase preference is accounted due to green consumer values. This implies that there is impact of other factors also on green purchase behavior. These factors remain to be explored in future research.

Table 4: Influence of green consumer values on purchase decision of green products

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	0.445	0.198	0.190	0.858

Influence of green consumer values, awareness about green products and perception regarding seriousness of green marketers on purchase of green products

Only 33.8 % (R-square values of 0.338) variation is accounted due to the green consumer values, green product awareness and perception regarding seriousness of green marketers, on the purchase intention of green products. This implies that there is impact of other factors also on purchase decision towards green products. These factors remain to be explored in future research.

Table 5: Influence of green consumer values, awareness about green products and perception regarding seriousness of green marketers on purchase of green products by consumers

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.581(a)	.338	.282	.811

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Conclusion

Responses were on moderate positive level and we can conclude that consumers are not skeptic about green claims of the organizations and consumers are concerned about the present and future state of environment signifying need for green products and practices. Marketers can come up with new green products and communicate the benefits to the consumers. Due to increased awareness and concern, consumer may prefer green products over conventional products to protect the environment. Concerns were more directed towards depletion of Ozone and Global Warming. The consumers are concerned about the state of environment and expect the organizations to employ green practices towards the protection of environment. The results have implication for durable manufacturers especially to practice green marketing. The marketing communication regarding green practices need to focus more on theme and message. Advertising appeals using green products and practices are likely to move emotions and result in persuasion. It is important for markets to be in 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 positive attitude towards green products at the same time they are concerned with the availability and price of such products. This implies that Marketers should make the green products available to the consumers for their consumption as customers have shown willingness to buy green products if it is available. As consumers consider the ill effects of manufacturing and consumption on natural environment, they may purchase the green product if marketers can make them aware about the benefits of the green products (which consumers perceive as priced higher) as compared to that of traditional products. It was found that the percentage of people who buy only green products is very low and marketers need to take this as an opportunity to build their product portfolios and promote themselves as green. The study has implications for marketers as well as consumers and makes a good case for 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 behavior of consumers towards green products. Future research could focus on psychographic 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 green phenomenon.

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