

Consumer Awareness and Perception Towards Green Products: A Study of Youngsters in India

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ABSTRACT

Consumers are becoming more ecologically conscious and desirous of purchasing environment friendly products i.e. green products. The present study is an attempt to investigate consumer perception and purchase intention towards green products among youngsters in India. The data has been collected from 120 youngsters of different areas of NCR. The findings of the study reveal that 71 percent respondents perceive green products as environment friendly products while 12 percent respondents take it as energy saving products. Male respondents are more aware about green products and also consider it while making shopping in comparison to female respondents. Majority of the respondents are ready to pay 11-20 percent more prices than the prices of non-green products. Thus, researchers conclude that the consumers does not have environment concern only, but also have positive and high intentions to buy green products. The study brings out interesting insight that, though consumer were environmentally concerned and ready to pay high yet they were not aware as to what constitutes environmentally friendly products. Hence, marketers need to consider efforts that are required to convert the environment concern into environmental consumption behaviour.

Keywords: Environment protection, Green Product, Marketing Strategy, Purchasing Behavior.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental issues like global warming, depletion of natural resources, changing weather, are most talked about issues now a day. This may directly or indirectly affect the way one behaves, specifically while making a purchase decision. The greediness of a human being and desire to get maximum with minimum resulted into a ruining the essential supporting systems of life i.e. land, water and air (Smith, 2009). For example, the World Health Organisation (WHO) Reported air pollution in India causes 5, 27,700 deaths every year, 21 percent of communicable diseases in India are related to polluted water (Mannarswamy, 2011). Moreover, National Geographic (May, 2008) ranked Indians at the bottoms of the list of 14 nationalities in environmental awareness.

A new sense of urgency about Indian environmental degradation has compelled a number of ordinary individuals to make eco-conscious life style changes (Jain & Kaur, 2004). The environment has become a mainstream

issue and consequentially consumers are becoming more concerned about their habits and the effect that these have on the environment (Krause, 1993). There are evidences in various researches to suggest that consumers are increasingly choosing or avoiding products based on their environmental impact (Coddington, 1993; Davis, 1993; Grove et al, 1996; McDougall, 1993; Ottman, 1992). A study established that 69 percent of the general public believes that pollution and other environmental damage are impacting their everyday life (Schlegemilch, 1996). Hence, the impact of environmental problems now more clearly visible to one and is resulting into desire to do something in one form or the other.

With a tidal wave of interest focusing on ways to reduce energy consumption and at the same time to be ecologically and environmentally, Green marketing has fast emerged as a worldwide phenomenon which interests both the marketing practitioners as well as the consumers. According to American Marketing Association "Green marketing is the marketing of product that are presumed

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to be environmentally safe. Green marketing includes the developing and marketing such product & services that satisfy the customer requirement for quality, reliable price and easy availability of the product without having a harmful impact on the environment (Mishra and Sharma, 2010; Polonsky, 1994 and Rakshita, 2011). In business, the terms —Green product and Environmental product are used commonly to describe those that strive to protect or enhance the natural environment by conserving energy and/or resources and reducing or eliminating use of toxic agents, pollution, and waste (J. Ottman, 1997). It is also referred as a product that is environmentally preferable relative to comparable products. Thus, green marketing approach is largely used as a tool by the gigantic corporate houses in order to make a difference in the consumer's point of view when it comes to making market decisions. All this prompts the present study. Therefore, in the present study an attempt has been made to analyse the youngster's perception regarding the purchase decision of green products in India.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A lot of literature is available regarding green products, consumer awareness regarding green products and perception of green products individually. There are a few studies of collective attempts regarding consumer awareness and perception regarding green products. The first signs of interest in green marketing could be seen in the 1970s but it was not until late 1980s and the 1990s that green marketing gained attention from a broader audience (Hess and Timen, 2008). Various researchers argued for a rapid growth in the use of ecological products which represented a shift in consumption behaviour and with increased demand for green products, consumers were ready to pay additional cost too (Gurau and Ranchhod, 2005; Prothero, 1997). According to Green Portfolio (2006) 50 percent of marketing and PR management believed that green credentials were important to customers; and 84 percent predicted this importance was likely to grow further. The actual growth of green consumerism was found to be very little and a difference between concern and actual purchase was identified by the mid 1990s. Although the market share of green products continued to slowly increase, the earlier boom or the remarkable growth of environmental products was no longer a reality (Crane, 2000; Peattie and Crane, 2005).

A dominating approach to green marketing that evolved during this period was the Holistic view which meant that marketers and corporations adopting an environmental friendly strategy must, due to the nature of environmental issues, consider the entire chain of events the company enrolls in (Hess and Timen, 2008). It include steps such as planning, production, product features, logistics, packaging as well as promotion and advertisement as a part of the marketing process (Ottman, 1992; Wasik, 1996). Jacquelyn A. Ottman (2008) wrote in *Marketing Daily* that “the power of green lies in marketers' hand”. It was not engineers, lawyers or legislators that had the most power to clean up the environment. The creative folks who have the power to design and promote cleaner products and technologies and help consumers evolve to more sustainable lifestyles. Rex and Baumann (2007) found that green marketing could learn lot of things from conventional marketing in discovering other means than labelling to promote green products like addressing a wider range of consumers, working with the positioning strategies of price, place and promotion and actively engaging in market creation. Another study done by Chang and Fong (2010) made a survey of the consumers who had experienced purchasing green or environmental products in Taiwan and found that green product quality and green corporate image could bring green customer satisfaction and green customer loyalty.

Ali et al. (2011) evaluated the green purchase attitude and green purchase intention of Pakistan consumers and found that there are many customers who have positive and high intention to purchase green products but due to high prices and poorer qualities as compared to non-green products then do not buy them. Hence, Rao et al. (2011) suggests that if business offer environmental friendly products to consumers with affordable prices and high quality as compared to traditional products, along these consumers have positive intentions to purchase green products, green product purchase will be high. Moreover, Chase and Smith (1992) also revealed that 70% of the consumer purchase decisions were influenced by environmental protection message given in advertising and product labelling. Many organizations have responded to these changing consumer preferences (Carson and Fyfe, 1992). Companies which adopted policies of environmental sustainability and developed strategies such as Green Marketing or Environmental Marketing not only reduced the environmental damage but also increased the profit for

themselves (Berth, 2011; Fuller & Gillett, 1999; Kotler and Armstrong, 2001; Porter & Van der Linde, 1995; Sharma, Iyer, Mehrotra, & Krishnan, 2010; Van Dam & Apeldoorn, 1996).

On the other hand, Maheshwari and Malhotra (2011) found that consumers are not overly committed to their environment and look to lay too much responsibility on industry and government whereas Patra and Joshi (2009) believed that majority of respondents considered individuals to be responsible must take appropriate initiatives to protect the environment. Consumers are not too much concerned about the environment but as they have become more sophisticated, they require clear information about how choosing one product over another will benefit the environment. But, many consumers remain confused about which products are better for society and the environment. Research has shown that consumers do not always understand environmentally friendly labels attached to products (Kangun and Polonsky 1995). Eco-labels such as 'Biodegradable', 'Sustainable', 'Environmental friendly', and 'Recyclable' are usually unfamiliar or unknown to consumers. The study also revealed that majority of respondents are willing to pay price premium, but the level of acceptability varied considerably (Aryal, 2009). In general only top two percent will pay more than 20 percent for many green products whereas majority of shoppers are looking for parity in pricing related to more sustainable products (Sachdev, 2011; Kumar, 2011).

Thus, there is no deficiency of studies regarding Environmental awareness and its influence of green

purchase intention worldwide. However, not much work could be traced specifically focused on green products perception and purchase intention among youngsters in India. With this in view, the researchers try to look into youngster's awareness and perception of green products with following specific objectives.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To investigate consumer awareness and perception towards green products.
2. To analyze consumer purchase intention towards green products.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is a descriptive cum exploratory in nature and is based on primary data. The data has been collected with the help of a well structured questionnaire. The questionnaire has been designed with the help taken from the study of Heutz (2009). The questionnaire was pre-tested on sample of 35 respondents and revised again with the help of suggested change. The population comprised of people age group of 18-30 living in NCR. Since, the population was very heterogeneous and difficult to approach, hence purposive sampling was used. In all 150 respondents were contacted, out of which 120 were patient enough to complete the task of interview. So in all, a sample consisting of 120 respondent was finalized for further analysis which was run into two phases. In first phase, all 120 questionnaires were analyzed to assess the awareness of green products. In second phased only 101

Table 1: Socio-Economic Factors of Respondents

| Variables | Respondents -101 | | Variables | Respondents -101 | |
|--------------------|------------------|---------|-------------------|------------------|---------|
| | Number | Percent | | Number | Percent |
| Gender | | | Educational Level | | |
| Male | 50 | 49.5 | Secondary | 6 | 5.9 |
| Female | 51 | 50.5 | Graduate | 11 | 10.9 |
| Total | 101 | 100 | Master Level | 84 | 83.2 |
| Income Level (Rs.) | | | Total | 101 | 100 |
| Less than 25000 | 24 | 23.8 | Age (years) | | |
| 25000-50000 | 39 | 38.6 | 18-22 | 15 | 14.9 |
| 51000-75000 | 22 | 21.8 | 23-26 | 76 | 75.2 |
| Above 75000 | 16 | 15.8 | 27-30 | 10 | 9.9 |
| Total | 101 | 100 | Total | 101 | 100 |

questionnaires were analyzed since, 19 respondents were not at all aware of green products and green marketing. So, further analysis was not meaningful regarding perception and purchase intention towards green products on these 19 respondents. The study mainly used frequency, mean, cross tabulation, Chi Square Test and One way ANOVA.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF THE RESPONDENTS

Understanding the demographic and psychographic background and their perception towards green products become essential because there is significant association among the awareness of consumers towards green products and age, geographical area, educational level and income (Teng et al., 2011).

The table 1 present a demographic profile of respondent. In the table the age has been grouped in to three category in 18-22 (as youngster is on final stage of his/her education and is in early adulthood), 22-26 (as youngster complete education and is in initial stage of carrier and start getting mature) and 26-30 (matures as a person and in economic stability). The Income group were classified in to four categories and income here means monthly family income. As per the table, among the presents sample majority of respondents (75.2 percent) were in the age group of 23-26 years. Male and female were equally represented, whereas in case of income majority respondents (83.2 percent) were in category of 25,000-50,000 Rs. per month.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Awareness and Perception About Green Products Among Respondents

To get the deeper insight about the perception regarding green products it is essential to know consumer awareness of green products and what they understood by green products.

Table 2: Understanding the Meaning of Green Products

| <i>What to your mind on hearing the term Green products</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percent</i> |
|---|------------------|----------------|
| Environmental friendly | 71 | 70.3 |
| Bio-degradable | 4 | 4.0 |
| Recyclable | 9 | 8.9 |
| Energy saving | 12 | 11.9 |
| Green in colour | 5 | 5.0 |
| Total | 101 | 100.0 |

The table 2 shows that 70 percent of respondents were aware of as to what makes green product. 12 percent respondent thinks green products as energy saver, whereas 9 percent respondents meant them to be recyclable products. However, 5 percent respondents were not at all clear of the meaning of green products as to them green products are the products which are green in colour.

Table 3: Consideration Regarding Green Products while Making Shopping

| | <i>Gender</i> | | |
|--------------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|
| | <i>Total</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> |
| Yes | 36 (72.0%) | 24 (47.1%) | 60(59.4%) |
| No | 14 (28.0%) | 27 (52.9%) | 41 (40.6%) |
| Total | 50(100.0%) | 51(100.0%) | 101(100.0%) |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 6.513a | 1 | 0.011 |

Table 3 presents that 60 percent of the respondents take in consideration of green products while making shopping and 40 percent respondents never considered the same. So, it reveals that though awareness level is quiet high yet its conversion in to purchase intention is low. While discriminating the respondents among male and female, male respondents (72 percent) and female (14 percent) take into consideration green products while making purchase decision, meaning thereby that male respondents were more considerate toward green products and environmentally friendliness, probably due to the fact that males are generally more outgoing and hence more exposed to environmental concern than females. Furthermore, Pearson chi-square test also shows a significant association between male and female with their shopping decision.

Table 4: Green Products Purchased by Respondents

| <i>Product Name</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Products Name</i> | <i>Frequency</i> |
|----------------------|------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| CFL tube | 8 | Money plant | 1 |
| Recyclable Paper | 8 | Neem | 1 |
| Green eggs | 2 | Solar cooker | 1 |
| Stationary | 2 | Spinach | 1 |
| Use disposal glasses | 1 | Stationary | 1 |
| Wall paints | 1 | Use Alovera zel | 1 |
| Cycle | 1 | Use joots bags | 1 |
| 5 Star Laptops | 1 | Wooden toys | 1 |
| Energy saving laptop | 1 | green tea | 1 |
| Total Response | | | 34 |

Table 5: Relation between Perception Regarding Green Products across Demographic Variable

| | Overall Mean | Gender | | Age | | Income | | Education | |
|---|--------------|--------|------|-------|------|--------|-------|-----------|------|
| | | F | Sig | F | Sig. | F | Sig. | F | Sig. |
| 1. I think green product will help me to protect the environment. | 4.15 | .753 | .388 | 1.569 | .213 | 3.839 | .012 | .532 | .661 |
| 2. I think it is of better quality than non green products. | 3.30 | .698 | .409 | 1.459 | .237 | 1.102 | 0.352 | .732 | .535 |
| 5. I think the promotions of green products by the companies are just a publicity stunt. | 2.86 | 2.732 | .102 | .220 | .803 | 1.376 | .255 | .888 | .450 |
| 4. I think green products are too expensive as increased price doesn't add any benefit in it. | 2.71 | .080 | .778 | 5.213 | .007 | 3.320 | .023 | .819 | .487 |
| 3. I think green products make no difference than non green products. | 2.66 | .000 | .990 | 1.132 | .327 | 2.097 | .106 | 1.661 | .180 |
| | | | | | | | | | |

The table 4 reveals that only 34 respondents gave the response of this statement. It means that only 50 percent of the respondents among out of those who consider green products while making a purchase decisions could response to this question and out of these too, many respondents gave superfluous answers as if they are not aware what green products constitutes. So, a deeper analysis tells that those who claim to be environment friendly are infact superfluously considerate about green products. In totality only 40 percent (34 out of 120) respondents were able to recall shopping of green products which also includes the products which are not green products. So, actual purchase and awareness comes out be much less. CFL tubes and recyclable papers are the most preferable green products among respondents. But, apart from that there are lot of misconception among respondents regarding green products.

Table 5, presents the respondents perception about the green products which were asked on likert scale of 1-5 from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Further, T-test and ANOVA were used to see the significant difference between perception and demographic variable at the 5% level of significance. The table shows that majority of respondents do believed that green products help them to protect the environment as they considered green product as environmentally friendly products and they also support that green products are of better quality than non green products. But the respondents are neutral on the fact that promotion of green products by companies is just a publicity stunt. Moreover, respondent also have a misconception that green products are too expensive and it make no difference in comparison of non green products. Moreover, the F test across different demographic variable showed significant relationship between perception of respondent with age and income only meaning thereby

that there is no difference in perception regarding green products were observed across different demographic variable expect in case of income and age regarding price and environment protection respectively.

Table 6: Perception Regarding Green Product Prices as Compared to Non-Green Products

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------|-----------|---------|
| Higher | 35 | 34.7 |
| Same/average | 32 | 31.7 |
| Don't know | 20 | 19.8 |
| Lower | 14 | 13.9 |
| Total | 101 | 100.0 |

Table 6 reveals that 35 percent respondents perceived the prices of green products as higher in comparison to other products and another nearly 20 percent respondents were unaware about price differentiation and surprisingly 14 percent respondent believed low price of green products in comparison of its benefits. This again speaks about the misconception and lack of awareness regarding green products. But at the same time, only 32 percent respondents think that on an average price of green products and non-green products is almost same.

Table 7: Purchase of Green Products in Case of Same Price of Non Green Products

| | Frequency | Percent |
|--------|-----------|---------|
| Always | 54 | 53.5 |
| Often | 34 | 33.7 |
| Seldom | 11 | 10.9 |
| Never | 2 | 2.0 |
| Total | 101 | 100.0 |

Table 8: People's Readiness to Pay More Prices for Green Products

| | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percent</i> |
|---------------|------------------|----------------|
| 11%-20% | 32 | 31.7 |
| 1%-10% | 27 | 26.7 |
| More than 30% | 19 | 18.8 |
| 21%-30% | 18 | 17.8 |
| 0% | 5 | 5.0 |
| Total | 101 | 100.0 |

Table 7 and 8 presents that majority respondents, (54 percent always and 34 percent often), were ready to purchase green products if the prices were same. Only 2 percent respondents respond that they would never purchase the green products whether prices are same or different. Not only this, sizable no. of respondents were ready to pay higher prices. The careful reading table reveal that the respondents have the intention and desire to contribute towards safeguarding environment but they lack awareness as to how. This calls upon the role of marketers the spread the word of awareness. The results of the study consistent with the finding of Joshi (2011) that in green marketing consumers is willing to pay more to maintain a cleaner and greener environment. Green marketing assumes even more importance and relevance in developing countries like India. Thus, there is a need to pressurize consumers, manufacturers and suppliers to minimise the negative effects on environment through green products.

Concern and Efforts for Environment Protection

The previous discussion was about respondents' awareness and their perception of green marketing. In the following analysis an attempt has been made to look into the overall concern that people have towards environmental issues and efforts which they can make. The analysis is based on five point Likert scale address in third person so that the general perception of the people on such issues can be assessed.

As per Table 9, the respondent in all age group believes that Environmental protection is an important concern (4.11) which needed to be addressed by all of us, though they think that people consider environment protection somebody else problem as people are not ready to change their living habits (3.85), because they are not sure whether people taken into consideration their concern for environment while making purchase decision. Respondents across all the age group do not perceive efforts for environment protection as wastage of time (1.86) meaning thereby that respondents understands the need of environment protection but there are still living in dilemma that environment protection is the responsibility of society, not their own. It also indicates that people see the environmental issues as a problem but somebody else's problem (3.47).

The above table presents that only 68 respondent give the response for this question meaning thereby that 33 percent respondent are not concern with environment.

Table 9: Concern Regarding Environment Protection

| | <i>Mean 18-22</i> | <i>Mean 23-26</i> | <i>Mean 27-30</i> | <i>Overall Mean</i> |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Society needs to take some action in protecting environment to ensure healthy living. | 3.80 | 4.14 | 4.30 | 4.11 |
| 2. People think to take some action for environment protection. | 3.07 | 3.58 | 3.30 | 3.48 |
| 3. Environmental protection is an important concern but people are not ready to make any change in their living habits | 4.00 | 3.84 | 3.70 | 3.85 |
| 4. People take environmental consideration into account when buying a product. | 2.53 | 2.84 | 3.20 | 2.83 |
| 5. Environmental protection actions are simply a waste of time, money and resources. | 2.20 | 1.78 | 2.00 | 1.86 |
| 6. People see the environmental issues as a problem but somebody else's problem | 3.73 | 3.33 | 3.80 | 3.47 |
| | | | | |

Table 10: Steps Taken by the Respondents to Save the Environment

| <i>Steps to Save the Environment</i> | <i>Frequency</i> |
|--|------------------|
| Tree Plantation | 29 |
| Conservation of natural resources like water, energy, papers | 14 |
| Avoid use of Polythene bags | 10 |
| Always dump the garbage in the dustbin | 4 |
| Buying green products | 4 |
| Do not cut the trees and do not harm the distinct animals | 1 |
| Don't burn crackers on diwali | 1 |
| mostly use bicycle | 1 |
| spread less pollution | 1 |
| Teaching about plants | 1 |
| Use natural colours on holi | 1 |
| walking or using public transport | 1 |
| Total Response | 68 |

Table 11: Green Product Purchase Intentions of Respondents and ANOVA Test Across Income Category

| | <i>Overall Mean value</i> | <i>F Value</i> | <i>Sig.</i> |
|--|---------------------------|----------------|-------------|
| 1. I would like to buy environmentally friendly products because they are less polluting. | 3.93 | .909 | .440 |
| 2. I would like to buy them because these products are healthier, of better quality and safer than non green products. | 4.21 | 4.947 | .003 |
| 3. I would like to buy green products even if they are more expensive than the non-green ones. | 3.27 | 1.392 | .250 |
| 4. I would like to green product as it gives me the pleasure of being environment friendly. | 3.85 | 1.489 | .222 |
| 5. I would like to buy green products as it gives me a positive attitude towards environment. | 4.15 | .352 | .789 |

Furthermore, tree plantation and Conservation of natural resources like water, energy are the major steps taken by the respondent to save the environment. The table quite clearly indicates towards a deeper issue as respondents do not see that they can make any contribution towards environment protection by the way of environmentally responsible shopping and consumption behaviour. As only 6 percent respondents consider buying green products as an effort towards environment protection.

Table 11 presents the finding regarding purchase intention and their readiness to buy green products for various reasons. Majority respondents across all demographic categories are willing green products even on high price feel that buying green products is less polluting and healthier (4.21) and make them feel a sense of contribution towards environment protection (4.15 and 3.85). The results of one way ANOVA test did not confirm any difference regarding green products being healthier and

less polluting, their willing to buy even at a higher price and a feeling of contribution they get from buying green products across all demographic variable expect income in case of statement, "I would like to buy them because these products are healthier, of better quality and safer than non green products".

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that though majority respondents claim to be aware of green products, but the awareness seems superficial and over-claimed. The deeper analysis reveals clearly that majority respondents, who claimed to be aware of green products, actually did not know as to what green products constitutes, exactly. Furthermore, the respondents did not understand that buying green products also contributes towards environment protection. The study also shows that people in general have lot of concern and strong

desire to do something towards environment but they did not know how they can contribute. Hence marketers and Government cannot be individually held responsible but environmental protection agencies, media, must create awareness about green products as a mean to save the environment. Marketer should take initiative keeping in the mind that consumer are concerned and willing to do their bit towards environment protection. Marketers by satisfying this urge and desire of consumer towards environment through effective promotional strategies to educate them about green products, their usage and resultant impact on the environment protection will in long run help enhance their goodwill and building strong brand image in the eyes of consumers. Similarly the study points towards the need for an active role on the part of government and various stakeholders in educating the consumers towards being a green consumer.

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