

Green Consumer: A Conceptual Analysis

Abstract

Environmental issue has become important in social and corporate life during the twenty-first century. Consumers are becoming more environmentally conscious and are demanding green products from manufacturers. Consumers want to buy ecologically friendly products and reduce their impact on the environment. This has resulted in the emergence of new concepts like green marketing and green consumer. Green marketing is all about marketing products that are considered environmentally safe. The green consumer is someone who voluntarily engages in consumer practices that are regarded as environmentally friendly (Peattie, 2001). In last few decades various studies have investigated the concept of green consumer. This study aims to examine the concept of green consumer and the identity of green consumer from green consumer classification and existing literature.

Keywords: Green Marketing, Green Consumer, Green Consumer Classification.

Introduction

Understanding environmental consciousness is one of the most important issues facing industry (Dembkowski and Hanmer-Lloyd, 1997). Green marketing is largely concerned with resource conservation and the development and implementation of environmentally friendly strategies (Oyewole, 2001). Climate change and environmental catastrophes have prompted consumers to become more aware of their impact on the environment as issues such as environmental degradation have become increasingly important. As these problems and consumer awareness of the environment continue to grow, consumers re-evaluate their behaviour and consumption patterns, making greater efforts to reduce environmental damage by recycling and purchasing ecologically sound products. Research shows that despite this, there is still wide variation between consumer intentions and their behaviour. This has important implications for government policy and corporate innovations, in particular marketers of consumer products/services and environmental organizations.

In general, green consumers have the education and intellectual orientation to appreciate value; they will understand evidence that is presented in support of environmental claims. Research clearly demonstrates that environmental concern has spurred an interest in environmentally friendly consumption. Moreover, people are generally willing to pay more for products that provide significant benefits not otherwise obtained from alternate suppliers. Nevertheless, consumers often evaluate environmental attributes after price and quality (Paladino,2005).

Despite the importance of understanding the 'green' consumer for product innovations and public policy formulation, there is still relatively little known about the concept of green consumer and green consumer classification in terms of respective factors. . A number of studies were undertaken to determine the characteristics that define green consumers, and to identify consumer groups that would be willing to pay more for green alternatives.

The study of consumers helps firms and organizations in improving their marketing strategies (Singh,2011).The green consumer has been the central character in the development of green marketing, as businesses attempt to understand and respond to external pressures to improve their environmental performance. Marketing practitioners and academics are attempting to identify and understand green consumers and their needs, and to develop market offerings that meet these needs. So far there is little consensus about the identity and nature of green consumers, except that they have been something of a disappointment to the marketers who have pursued them. These difficulties perhaps reflect the folly of trying to understand green consumption and green marketing by viewing it as simply a variation on conventional marketing. This article proposes some different ways of looking at green consumer and green marketing.

Atul Ch. Kalita

Assistant Professor,
Deptt. of Economics,
Diphu Govt. College,
Diphu, Assam

Green Marketing

The concept of green marketing started to appear already in the 1980s and especially in 1990s in European countries. In very simple terms, this is a type of marketing, which involves a group of products that are considered environmentally safe. In a broader sense, it also includes a wide range of activities relating to the manufacture, packaging, advertising, distribution, etc. Another term for this segment of marketing can also be environmental marketing (Ward, 2012).

The American Marketing Association (AMA) provides a definition for green marketing; the marketing of products which are presumably safe for environment, generate minimal harmful effects to the environment and efforts made by organizations to create products which are beneficial to the environment. It is also a firm's decisions on policies which influence the environment's quality and it shows a company's concern to the society and community (Yazdanifard & Mercy, 2011). Another definition provided by Yakup and Sevil (2011) is green marketing includes a wide range of activities consisting of product alteration, production process modification, packaging transformation, and also advertising revolution.

Environmental marketing, more popularly known as green marketing or sustainable marketing can be defined as the effort by a company to design, promote, price and distribute products in a manner which promotes environmental protection (Polonsky, 2011). Green marketing has been defined as 'all activities designed to generate and facilitate any exchanges intended to satisfy human needs or wants such that the satisfaction of these needs and wants occurs, with minimal detrimental impact on the natural environment' by Polonsky (2011).

Green marketing is a part of marketing and therefore shares a number of aspects with traditional marketing such as price, promotions, products and place. Even green marketing requires that businesses develop and maintain a strong relationship with all their suppliers, their market intermediaries and significantly with the consumers, according to (Chen et al. 2012).

Green marketing is a systematic and integrated process that aims to influence the details of customers driving them to ask for products that are not harmful to the environment and adjust their consumption habits in line with it. Furthermore, such process aims to provide the products that satisfy this trend so as the final outcome would be maintaining and keeping the environment, protecting consumers and achieving profitability for the company (Al-Bakri, 2006).

Green Consumer

In scientific literature (Roberts, 1990; Ottman & Reilly, 1998; Wind, 2004; Ščypa, 2006; Laurinénaitė, 2007) it is acknowledged that the discussion on the unanimous approach to the conception of a green consumer is still going on. Green consumer is defined differently in scientific works. According to Wind (2004) green consumer is an inhabitant who approves the principles of green marketing and advocates eco-friendly lifestyle. Ščypa (2006) has a notion that green consumer is a consumer who buys eco-friendly products not

because it is becoming fashionable, but because he cares about environmental issues. In other words, these are the consumers who search for evidence in the labels that the product is eco-friendly or environmentally-friendly. This definition of green consumers is also supported by Banytė, Brazionienė and Gadeikienė (2010). The conception of a green consumer formulated according to Ščypa (2006): green consumer is a consumer who constantly buys eco-friendly products and is actively concerned with environmental issues and solutions to them. Moreover, they are motivated to buy green products even if they are of lower quality and higher price in comparison to alternative products. These consumers make every effort to search for products that favour the environment (D'Souza, Taghian & Lamb, 2006).

Green consumer means the customer or the consumer who has a deep environmental awareness and who mainly depends on the values he believes in which drive him to avoid buying products whose environmental orientation is questionable not merely avoiding consuming goods that are harmful to the environment. (Al-Bakri, 2006).

Laurinénaitė (2007) refers to new consumers as the green consumer. The notion can be interpreted from two perspectives. First in a straight way, a new consumer is not necessarily a green consumer. On the other hand, new consumers are generally more concerned about the environment than traditional consumers, and thus it is more likely to find green consumers among new consumers (Wind 2004).

The green consumer is someone who voluntarily engages in consumer practices that are regarded as environmentally friendly (Peattie, 2001). Certainly, the green consumer is often subsumed under such terms as ethical consumerism (Connolly and Prothero, 2008). There are numerous studies about the characteristics of green consumers, aiming at identifying typical demographic qualities of green consumers. For instance, young people, females and people with a relatively high education and income were identified as most likely to engage in green consumer behavior (Straughan and Roberts, 1999; Diamantopoulos et al., 2003). But there are also studies that use psychographic characteristics, like political orientation and environmental concerns to identify a green consumer, which came out to be better at explaining dissimilarities in green consumer behavior than demographic criteria. The individuals' belief that their efforts will contribute to a difference has been indicated as being useful in predicting actual buying behavior and experiences of environmental-related problems are considered decisive to the buying behavior of green consumers (Rex and Baumann, 2006).

The typical green consumer is educated, affluent and politically liberal. She is likely to be between ages 30–49, (and) has children six years old and older (Ottman, 1993). Green consumers' demonstrate an interest in product's characteristics such as recyclability and chemical content, favorably discriminating consumption towards products that are organic, energy efficient or have biodegradable packaging (Leonidou et al., 2010). In order to trace the roots of the "green consumer", studies are commonly based on socio-demographic and

psychographic variables such as gender, marital status, age, etc. (Diamantopoulos et al., 2003; Kilbourne and Beckmann, 1998; Leonidou and Leonidou, 2011).

The effective and efficient use of the natural resources and preservation of it has led to consumers' segments to form green consumerism (Solomon, 2010). Vernekar and Wadhwa(2011) define the green consumer as a person "who adopts environmentally-friendly behaviors and/or who purchases green products over the standard alternatives".

Consumers who have positive attitude towards the environment are more willing to purchase green products (Balderjahn, 1988). As previously said, however it is also true that even if consumers are concerned about environmental issues; they will not necessarily purchase green products (Mc Eachern and Carrigan, 2010, cited in Solomon et al., 2010) The neoclassical view implies that people buy green products only for selfish reasons such as the taste, the superior quality or the fact that green products are healthier than conventional ones. But other studies show that there are selfish and unselfish reasons in green shopping (Thøgersen, 2011). Indeed according to a survey made on 4,000 European inhabitants in four countries (Denmark, Germany, the UK and Italy) more and more consumers purchase green products because that generates benefits for the society and the environment. They "buy these products primarily because they were persuaded by their documented benefits for the environment (unselfish reasons)" (Thøgersen, 2011).

Classification of Green Consumers

Introducing the findings of studies undertaken by Roper Starch Worldwide in 1990-1996, Ottman & Reilly (1998) identify five segments of consumers according to their disposition to contribute to environmental conservation:

-*Loyal green consumers* firmly believe that it is necessary to have environmental awareness and try to contribute significantly to environmental conservation.

-*Less devoted green consumers* are strongly concerned with environmental issues, yet they are too busy to change their lifestyle. Thus, such consumers only favour the activity of loyal green consumers but do not tend to be actively involved.

-*Consumers developing towards green* approve the activity of green consumers only sometimes and subject to the situation. They act in a similar way when purchasing eco-friendly products.

-*Conservative consumers unwilling to change* think that this should be the initiative and responsibility of the state and large companies. The majority of such consumers do not have sufficient information about environmental issues, yet the consumer group would buy eco-friendly products provided their price is the same as of non-eco-friendly products (Ottman & Reilly, 1998).

-*Consumers completely unwilling to change* do not consider environmental issues to be serious at all. Therefore, they do not take the initiative of environment protection since it does not matter to them on principle (Ottman & Reilly, 1998).

Analysing green consumer psychology, Ottman & Reilly (1998) maintain that green

consumers pursue to satisfy various needs when buying eco-friendly products. Classification of green consumers' on the basis of needs may be stated as-

-*Need for information.* M. Getzner & S. Grabner-Kräuter (2004) ground the need for information on green consumer's necessity to know. Knowing is a criterion that has an impact on green consumer behaviour in all the stages of decision making process on buying an eco-friendly product.

-*Need for control.* Ottman & Reilly (1998) notice that green consumers study the products that belong to the same group closely and pay special attention to the terms of their description. Consumers usually buy products of the green producers they can trust.

-*Need to change.* Green consumers want to feel able to change the world at least fractionally. Eco-friendly product purchase and usage expresses green consumers' wish to contribute to environmental conservation in such a way (Ottman & Reilly, 1998).

-*Need to express lifestyle.* Qualities and price of an eco-friendly product, as of any other product, has a considerable impact on consumers when deciding on buying them. No matter how favourable consumers are to eco-friendly attributes of a product, they want to buy the products that do not conflict with their established lifestyle (Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007).

Ottman & Reilly (1998) maintain that even loyal green consumers are not completely homogeneous. It is possible to discern three groups of green consumers according to the motives, which are explained below-

-Consumers concerned with planet environment protection **Belong** to organizations that deal with protection of important natural resources.

-Health fanatics **Belong** to organizations that care about healthy nutrition and lifestyle of a human being.

-Animal lovers **Belong** to organizations that fight for animal rights.

Ščypa P. (2006) suggests classifying consumers into types according to their environmental awareness level. It does not mean only the amount of possessed knowledge but also their rational and emotional usage that induces the consumer to take certain actions. The level of environmental awareness has an impact on a consumer's behaviour and demand for eco-friendly products. (Ščypa, 2006). Types are-

-*"Black" consumers* foster "the cult of material wellbeing" The most important needs are those that must be satisfied for the sake of society wellbeing. They are sure that behaviour of individual consumers does not influence ecological balance; they have a notion that current system of environment protection is reliable and not to be altered. They tend to buy things that are advertised and attractive.

-*"Grey" (normal) consumers* They think environmental impact on human health should be emphasized only in the most environmentally sensitive spheres. Behaviour of individual consumers does not have much influence on ecological balance. They tend to buy the same products as "black" consumers. They buy eco-friendly products rarely, usually because of information impact.

"Greyish green" consumers (want to create an image of green consumer, are concerned with personal health) They buy "clean" products (reasons – health and snobbery). They buy products advertised as eco-friendly, but rarely verify the information. They think the environmental impact on human health is huge and consumers' lifestyle is a good preventive measure to reduce the impact of civilization.

"Green" consumers (wish to live and live in environmentally friendly way) They want to live and live so that their lifestyle would favour environment. "Green consumers" think that environment is one of the major factors that have an impact on person's health and the best lifestyle is an eco-friendly one. "Green consumers" have a notion that behaviour of individual people has a crucial influence on ecological balance. They buy eco-friendly products of highest quality, suitable for secondary usage and in ecological packing. They satisfy their internal needs and not the ones imposed from outside.

Consequently, although consumers may be divided into various types according to different criteria (demographic and psychographic-behavioural variables) in terms of their needs and behaviour with respect to eco-friendly products, it may be assumed that green consumers are those who constantly buy eco-friendly products and are actively concerned with solutions of environmental issues. The study of the factors that determine the willingness of individuals to pay a higher price for environment friendly products, presented in the Conraud-Koellner & Rivas-Tovar (2009) article shows that they can be grouped in three categories: demographic characteristics, level of knowledge, and values and attitudes that consumers have (or adopt) towards environmental topics.

Objective

This study is carried out to examine the concept of green consumer through various classifications of green consumer and review of available literature.

Main objective of this research study will be to find out understanding of the concept of 'green consumer'.

Review of Literature

The literature on green marketing has attempted to profile green consumer segments using a variety of variables (Kilbourne and Beckmann, 1998). These include geographic measures (e.g., Tremblay and Dunlap, 1978; Samdahl and Robertson, 1989; Pickett et al., 1993; Gooch, 1995), cultural measures (e.g., Anderson et al., 1974; Webster, 1975; Murphy et al., 1978), personality measures (e.g., Kinnear et al., 1974; Crosby et al., 1981), and, last but not least, socio-demographic characteristics. However, most studies appear to indicate a limited or ambiguous value of socio-demographic characteristics for segmenting and targeting environmentally conscious consumers (Samdahl and Robertson, 1989; Scott and Willits, 1994; Stern et al., 1995).

Roberts J A. (1996), stated in his study that the passage of time and incipient change call for another look at the demographic and attitudinal correlates of ecologically conscious consumer behavior (ECCB). As concern for the environment becomes a universal phenomenon, surely the profile

of the ecologically conscious consumer has evolved along with this fundamental shift in public attitude. From the responses of 582 adult consumers to a nationwide survey ($n = 1,302$), a profile of the ecologically conscious consumer was developed. The findings suggest that ecologically conscious consumers of the 1990s differ from their predecessors. Demographics explained only 6% of the variation in the sample's ECCB. However, the addition of attitudinal variables increased R^2 to 45%. The consumers' belief that they, as individuals, can help solve environmental problems (perceived consumer effectiveness) was found to be the best predictor of ECCB.

Straughan R D., Roberts, J A. (1999) Looking to the future of green marketing, examines the dynamic nature of ecologically conscious consumer behavior. The study also provides a method of profiling and segmenting college students based upon ecologically conscious consumer behavior. Findings indicate that, despite a significant amount of past research attention, demographic criteria are not as useful a profiling method as psychographic criteria. Consistent with past findings, the study indicates that perceived consumer effectiveness (PCE) provides the greatest insight into ecologically conscious consumer behavior. Further, the inclusion of altruism to the profile appears to add significantly to past efforts. Additional constructs examined suggest that environmental segmentation alternatives are more stable than past profiles that have relied primarily on demographic criteria.

Paco, A M F and Raposo, M L B (2008), stated that the concern with environmental degradation favoured the sprouting of a new segment of consumers: the green consumers. This type of consumer has been described as one who avoids products that are likely to endanger health, cause significant damage to the environment during production, use or disposal, cause unnecessary waste, and use materials derived from threatened species or environments. As firms have recognised the strategic importance of marketing in finding responses to these consumers' "environmental needs", the green marketing started to become a prominent field of study. This study investigated several variables related with the environmental aspects. The aim is to group an extensive list of variables into a set of relevant dimensions that may be useful to profile the green consumer. The implications of these findings for the research of the green consumer characterisation are discussed.

Akehurst et al (2012) re-examined the determinants of Ecologically Conscious Consumer Behavior (ECCB) through building consumer profiles (socio-demographic and psychographic components). The study also explored about the determinant of effective green purchase behavior (GPB) through analyzing ECCB and Green Purchase Intention (GPI) from previous studies. Akehurst et al (2012) studied the impact of socio-demographic and psychographic variables on ecological conscious consumers. The study concluded with psychographic variables as more convincing towards affecting the behaviour.

According to Dua H. (2013), Indian literate and urban consumer is getting more aware about the

merits of Green products. But it is still a new concept for the masses. The consumer needs to be educated and made aware of the environmental threats. The new green movements need to reach the masses and that will take a lot of time and effort. By India's ayurvedic heritage, Indian consumers do appreciate the importance of using natural and herbal beauty products. Indian consumer is exposed to healthy living lifestyles such as yoga and natural food consumption. In those aspects the consumer is already aware and will be inclined to accept the green products.

Srivastava and Mishra(2013). In India, around 25% of the consumers prefer environmental-friendly products, and around 28% may be considered healthy conscious. Therefore, green marketers have diverse and fairly sizeable segments to cater to. Furthermore consistent with emerging countries, Indians are willing to pay a green premium price, with 48% of Indians willing to spend 10% more on a product simply because it is green. Consumers in India are trusting of green advertising compared to other countries, with 86% of Indian consumers reporting that advertising about green products help them in making choices.

According to Rezai G., Teng P. K., Mohamed Zainalabidin & Shamsudin Mad _asir (2012), in the present scenario consumers tends to be more environments friendly and the same is reflected in the consumption pattern of the individuals. Today people are consuming nutritious, healthy, safe and environment friendly food. This paper focuses on the consumers' awareness and intention towards green foods consumption in Malaysia. The results of the study suggests that the people are increasingly become aware of the green concept and socio-demographic variables such as education level, income and lifestyle have a strong relationship with the consumers' intention to purchase green foods. Findings of the study underpins that education an high income level are more important factors in driving purchase of green foods because of the fact that they are more aware of the advantages of consuming green foods such as the health, nutrition value, little or no use of chemicals, safe, environment friendly etc. The paper suggests that understanding consumers' awareness and intention towards green food consumption is of prime importance for food industry and food marketers before implementing green food production and marketing strategies.

Conclusion

A number of different criteria have been used in the various efforts to find out the profile of green consumer. These differ in terms of their implicit or explicit assumptions regarding the components or dimensions of different factors.

Finally, two additional aspects are worth emphasising: (1) Peattie (2001) builds on Kardash's (1974) economic rationale and argues that *ceteris paribus*, all consumers – not only green consumers – choose products that are perceived to be better for the environment. Differently put, when faced with products that have the same perceived characteristics (including appearance, performance, pricing and so forth) all consumers are expected to positively discriminate towards the product that is more environmentally friendly if this knowledge is available

in an intelligible way. (2) The disparity between "green attitudes" and inconsistent consumption behaviour could simply be due to the fact that green products are not meeting green consumers' needs. These are the relevant factors that help to grasp green consumer's behaviour on theoretical grounds.

Roberts (1996) found that the typical green consumer is "female", "middle aged", "well educated" and has "low income", while Zimmer et al. (1994) characterized the green consumer as "young", "urban", "educated" and "well-off". The discrepancy of previous studies led Diamantopoulos et al. (2003) to conduct a comprehensive empirical testing of the hypothesis that socio-demographics have influence on the components of consumer's environmental consciousness (e.g. knowledge, attitudes and behaviour). Based on the finding, the study concluded that such claims are "not supported by the data", "only partly supported" or "not particularly strong". Overall, socio-demographic variables are considered to be of limited use to characterize the green consumer.

By contrast, understanding the green consumer's psychographic variables such as "environmental knowledge" and "values" seems to be more successful in explaining green consumer's attitudes and, particularly, consumption behaviour (Bezenc, on and Blili, 2010; Follows and Jobber, 2000; Leonidou et al., 2010; Mostafa, 2007; Shaw and Shiu, 2003).

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