Green Marketing: A Study of Consumers’ Attitude towards Environment Friendly Products

Dr. N. Srinivas kumar,
Professor, SRTIST, NALGONDA

ABSTRACT

Green marketing incorporates a broad range of activities, including product modification, changes to the production process, packaging changes, as well as modifying advertising. “Green or Environmental Marketing consists of 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.” Increasing awareness on the various environmental problems has led a shift in the way consumers go about their life. There has been a change in consumer attitudes towards a green lifestyle. People are actively trying to reduce their impact on the environment. However, this is not widespread and is still evolving. Organizations and business however have seen this change in consumer attitudes and are trying to gain an edge in the competitive market by exploiting the potential in the green market industry. This paper focuses on the concept of green marketing and looks into the various ways in which the different consumer attributes are related to the concept of green marketing.

Keywords: Green marketing, Green products, Consumer attitude, competitive market and consumer attributes.

Introduction

Today the concept of sustainability is almost ubiquitous by showing application in corporate strategy, consumer choice, student education and academic research. The need for sustainable business practices by corporations around the world is identified to be a result of overall increase in the consumer awareness of lack of environmental protection and social inequities. Over the last decade environmentalism has emerged to be a vital aspect due to increasing issues related to acid rains, depletion of the ozone layer, and degradation of the land and many more pressing environmental issues.

The growth of green marketing research dates back to 1980s when there was emergence of concept of green marketing. Early literature indicates green marketing to be an approach which indicated signs of shift in consumer attention to green product. At that time green marketing research concentrated on the shift in consumer consumption of green products.

Green marketing approach was researched from a corporate interest point of view in the early 90s. Research indicated that 92% of MNCs from Europe changed their products to address growing concerns of environmental pollution. (Vandermerwe and Oliff, 1990). Green marketing research has come a long way since then. Consumers from the developed countries including USA and Western Europe were found to be more conscious about the environment (Curlo, 1999).

Global Scenario in Green Marketing

“Green’ is the buzzword that is gaining popularity among the current generation. A number of businesses right from private entities such as Wal-Mart trying to push the concept of organic food to public entities like the London governments congestion charge are all aimed at improving the environment by promoting ‘Green’ products and issues. 87% of people from various nations like
Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, the UK and the US have shown an interest in reducing their impact on the environment, according to a survey by (McKinsey, 2007). However, showing interest and actually acting on the interest are two different deeds. This fact is proved by a survey that was conducted on a global scale, which was repeated in 2008 with the help of BBC World, which showed that not a lot of people were actually doing something to move their lifestyle to a green lifestyle.

The overall market for green marketing is said to be worth $ 3.5 trillion by the year 2017, according to a report by Global Industry Analysts Inc. of 2011. The report also states that increasing awareness about the environmental issues among the people, businesses and the governments is one of the main reasons for such market potential. Another research study by Mintel, clearly showed that 12% of the American population actively sought green products. There is a growing need to switch over to green products and services by both marketers and consumers. Even though the shift to ‘green’ will be expensive to both the consumers as well as businesses, it will most definitely pay off in the long run. There are a number of literatures that focus on various aspects related to green marketing and also delves into the various inter relationships between the customers attitudes and environmental strategies in relation to the organizations use of marketing. Environmental issues are addressed in green marketing efforts.

The core idea of green marketing is to create awareness among people on the environmental issues and how consumers would be helping the environment if they switch over to green products. Thus green marketing aims to provide more information to people and also gives those more choices to switch over to green lifestyle.

**Green Marketing: Consumer Attitude–Behavior Link**

- **Consumer Attitude towards the Environment**
  Environmental attitude is identified as the judgment an individual has towards the protection and promotion of the environment. Conflicting results have been published with regards to the relationship that currently exists between attitude towards the environment and the resultant behaviour (Kotchen and Reiling, 2000). There has been other empirical research which has concluded that the relationship is moderate at best (Davis, 1995). Green marketing depends on the consumer’s attitude towards the environment. If there is no strong demand for such a shift in consumer attitude, businesses will not put in the extra effort to move towards introducing green products and services. Based on this evidence three different aspects can be arrived at in terms of identifying the relationship between environmental attitude and behavior:
  1) Need for more specific studies identifying the relationship between attitude and behavior.
  2) Need to identify other variables which have a mediating effect on both these attributes.

- **Perceived Seriousness of Environmental Problems**
  There have been a number of studies that have dealt with the topic of perceived seriousness of environmental problems. According to (Dunlap, 1994), most of these studies concentrated on determining the subjects view of the problem, its seriousness and how is differs from the numerous cultures. The studies found that some of the most common problems were air quality, sewage treatment and water quality. People living in the Asian nations were found to be more concerned with such problems when compared to their counterparts from other Western nations. One reason for this is that the Asian community tends to perceive their local communities in a negative manner than their Western or European counterparts (Dunlap, 1994).

In recent times a lot of attention has been paid to the effect that mass media has on the audience’s perceived seriousness of environmental hazards. An example of one such study is the research done by Moser and Uzzell (2003). In that study, the authors stated that the audiences are influenced by the way the mass media interprets the pollution levels. A study on perception of environmental risks by (Bord and O’Connor, 1997) revealed that women were more perceptible to the risks involved in global
warming and other related hazardous wastes when compared to the males. Furthermore the study also found that women were more worried about the various negative impacts that global warming could have on their health on their family’s health. Businesses have started to understand consumer’s attitude towards environmental problems and have therefore started to provide ‘Green’ products/services that provide an alternative to consumers. Green marketing is done by businesses to increase awareness levels and to show that people worried about the environment can do something to solve some of the issues.

- **Consumer Behavior towards Eco Labeling**
  One important tool of green marketing involves the promotion of eco labels on environmentally friendly products (D Souza et al., 2006). Eco labeling is an effective measure which helps in bridging the gap between sellers and buyers by providing information on two aspects: Information function presenting intangible quality measures including product quality and Value function which presents the recyclability and CSR related brand prestige (Sammer and Wustenhagen 2006). Empirical research has concentrated on the need to look for ways by which eco labels will directly impact consumer purchase intention of products which are deemed to environmental safe (D Souza et al., 2006; Sammer and Wu¨stenhagen 2006). There is a need to identify the impact eco labeling will have directly on the consumer environmental attitude in terms of decision making.

- **Consumer behaviour towards pro-environmental marketing**
  The formation of attitude and action is found to be dependents on the development of values (Rokeach, 1973) however the impact these may have on behaviour in a real life condition. Thoughts (cognitive function) and feelings (affective function) are directly impacted by the attitude people show hence impacting their overall perception of purchase related behaviour (Hoyer and MacInnis, 2004). This identifies with the idea that there is a need to change the overall attitude consumers have towards a product thereby impacting their decision making.

This scenario will apply to a green marketing context also. If one were to consider the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) into account then it can be postulated that marketers of green products change their method of evaluation of consumer attitude and intention to understand exactly what consumers really want. The new beliefs and normative beliefs of consumers can be identified in this manner.

**Conceptual framework**
Lack of communication is considered to be a major reason for commercial failures of environmentally sustainable products mainly because communication is a major step in the development of a positive behavior towards consumer’s consumption patterns. A number of studies have dealt with the value perception of a specific set of environmental attributes. Moreover, previous researches carried out in western nations supported that consumers have positive green perceptions on eco-branded products. However a number of studies have also depicted that people tend to have a negative view towards green products that according to them shows a marked tradeoff between its effects on the environment and the functional performance of the brand. Emotional brand benefits can therefore be stated as being an important factor in encouraging consumers to alter their actual buying behaviors and purchase eco friendly items.
Conclusion and Implications

One thing that is being reiterated is that the current consumption levels are too high and are unsustainable. Therefore there is a need for green marketing and a need for a shift in the consumer’s behavior and attitude towards more environmental friendly life styles. The current study is a compilation of various aspects related to green marketing. It is clearly evident from review of literatures and the conceptual model that the majority of the consumers still lack ‘green’ knowledge and because of such low awareness towards green products organizations are still not pushing towards developing more green products nor are they working hard on green packaging. Organizations still believe that marketing aspects such as developing a proper supply chain, packaging, pricing etc take precedence over green marketing initiatives. However, this is all changing. People are beginning to realize their role and responsibilities towards the environment. Although this change is not happening quickly, it is happening. Businesses are looking towards gaining an edge in the green market industry by trying to re-package their products into a more environmental friendly product. They are cutting down on extras and wasted materials and turning their operations into more efficient and green operation. Companies are also starting to educate the masses with an increase in advertising that puts emphasis on green products and how they are more beneficial for the consumers. This kind of advertising goes a long way in educating the masses and promoting the concept of green products among the people. With more and more consumers willing to pay a little extra towards green products, organizations are taking notice of the demands and behavior and attitude of the consumers.

Recommendations

Green marketing is a continuous process that requires constant inputs from the suppliers, government legislations and policies and the people. This is required so that the businesses green marketing strategy can be aligned to the target markets and so it can gain a sustainable competitive advantage. It is important that strategies and policies in relation to green products be developed and implemented so as to guide and help the retailers and customers towards a green change. Businesses should concentrate on focusing on developing a green product that have a demand from the general public and which also aligns to the company’s core positioning. Furthermore businesses should also present efforts in a manner that reduces the risk related to costs. In conclusion, creating and implementing a green
marketing strategy is not straightforward because it is not only complex, but also a relative concept that continuously varies over time.

References


