

Green Consumerism: The Need of the Hour

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Abstract

Reckless pollution, exploitation of the Earth's natural resources, improper manufacturing and irresponsible trade practices has put a lot of stress on the sustainability of the resources and natural harmony of flora & fauna; endangering many species and causing the extinction of many. There is a gradual realisation that mankind's fate is in danger and has made us rethink our outlook toward future. If we want to survive into the next century and beyond, then environmentally sound and socially responsible behaviour of the consumer is the need of the hour. Consumer needs to become green from non-green behaviour. They should promote Green consumerism as green consumerism is not just what consumer's purchase; rather it indicates the lifestyle of consumers. Keeping in mind the growing importance of Environmentalism, the author highlights the different issues related to Green Environment.

Keywords: Green Product, Green Consumer, Green Consumerism, Environment friendly products, Triple Bottom Line

Introduction

Throughout ancient times mankind has been thriving towards a sustainable lifestyle, i.e. food, security, energy, water, health, etc. In past few thousand years, technology evolution and religious practices had enabled a harmonious balance between nature and human needs. Industrial revolution of the past century put things into overdrive, though there are still vast pockets of human civilisation that are still in poor situation and lack basic amenities. The super-rich and emerging economies are the major consumers of natural resources, often at the cost of third world countries. Reckless pollution, exploitation of the Earth's natural resources, improper manufacturing and irresponsible trade practices has put a lot of stress on the sustainability of the resources and natural harmony of flora & fauna; endangering many species and causing the extinction of many. There is a gradual realisation that mankind's fate is in danger and if we want to survive into the next century and beyond, then Ethical Management of Resources, Green Practices and Green Consumerism is need of the hour.

Green consumerism is not just what consumer's purchase; rather it indicates the lifestyle of consumers. Green consumerism is the scenario where customers ask for those products that have been produced in environmental friendly manner. Modern Day Business cannot afford to function blindly, and have to realise the fact that today's consumer is educated and empowered. Consumers are

demanding for green products i.e. there has been a rise in the demand of green products. Slow movers can't survive in the market for a long time. Business organisations that are innovative and respond quickly to consumer preferences/demands survive in the market for a long time period. Today's consumer has understand that he/she is not purchasing 'a' good, but everything that involves into its production, and everything that will occur in the future as a resultant of the good. Businesses are considering the green process i.e. they generate corporate environmental profiles, monitor and appraise green performance, and witnessed an improved corporate image as a result of going green. Government needs to appreciate and support the efforts undertaken by businesses for protecting the natural environment. Mankind can go for sustainable development by making intelligent life choices, using human power to bring positive change and understand the big picture. All products have an environmental impact, however small. The idea is to reduce it to the minimum.

The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) - people, planet and profit are gaining more attention day by day, green is becoming the new mantra of success. Moreover, TBL provides the potential framework for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). This CSR agenda includes social, economic and environmental factors leading finally to sustainability. On the other side, a new trend of green consumerism is also emerging, in which consumers are becoming more aware and concerned about the environment and looking for environment friendly products. Now the consumers are interested more and more in environment friendly products and companies are also doing their bit by adopting green production process, using recyclable paper and other packaging material and going for paperless offices. Thus it is creating a virtuous circle of consumption and production, which is driving the green culture.

Green Consumer

Green consumers are the one who demand product/service, which are green in nature. Green consumer is proactive and act as change agent. Green consumer is concerned about environmental issues and obligations. He/she supports the environment to a large extent that he/she can even switch from one producer or supplier to another even if it cost higher. Recent researches have marked that green consumers are committed towards green lifestyles; sincere in purchase intentions, and they adjudge their environmental practices as inadequate. These people are the driving force behind environmental performance of many firms and organisations. Green consumers are altruistic by nature, and consider environmental issues, like energy saving, recycling as important matter (Green Consumerism, n.d.). In comparison to traditional consumers, green consumers easily control their consumption pattern and hence their impact on environment is direct.

In developed countries, two out of every three consumer is green in nature while in developing countries one in every six is a green consumer (Shamsuddoha, 2005). The environment concern motivates the adult consumer

to become green consumer. The simple abstract call “to save the environment for the future” will not work anymore; more convincing like “to save the environment for your children” will be the key to success (Iyer, 1994).

If consumers show a concern for environment and exhibit it through pro-environmental buying acts, then it will motivate the profit-driven businesses to adopt green behaviour in their operations. This buyer seller interaction will lead to the betterment of natural environment.

Green Products

Green products are those goods or services whose effect on human health and environment is less in comparison to the effect caused by competing goods or services serving the same function (Yunus and Rahman, 2014). In other words, green product is any good or service which is not detrimental for customers as well as for natural environment. It stresses the tangible and viable advantages provided by green design e.g. Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) used in vehicles as substitute of petrol & diesel; tidal waves used for electricity generation as substitute of thermal power generations etc (Shamsuddoha, 2005). Green product provides not only utility but psychological satisfaction too. Customers will pay premium prices for green products when its value outrightly exceeds its cost prices (Grove *et al.*, 1996). Thus, a conventional product cannot become a green product because green is a factual evaluation, not an image value like “classic” or “cool”.

The green behaviour of consumer generates a number of private and public benefits. For example, the organic skin-care products like organic soap, organic shampoo are less harmful to human skin/hair as compared to conventional soap/shampoo containing synthetic ingredients/chemicals. Another example is organic food which is perceived to be very healthy and nutritious, side lining the health risks arising from pesticides and herbicide residues (Chander and Muthukrishnan, 2007). A number of researchers (Anton *et al.*, 2004; Khanna and Damon, 1999; Henriques and Sadorsky, 1996; Arora and Cason, 1995, 1996) highlight that private benefits arising from the use of green products encourage consumers to pay more for it and induce firms to invest in eco-friendly technologies.

Key Impacts Of Green Products

- Corporate houses are working towards green production process i.e. generating environmental profile of corporates, close monitoring, evaluating green behaviour and consequently promoting the corporate image.
- A number of corporate are going for green products, thus the competition is increasing to produce pro-environmental goods/services.
- Many countries have developed eco-labeling networks to observe and assess green products. These networks undertake life cycle analysis to understand the impact of green products/services.

- Government have initiated a number of measures to promote the production of green products/services (Global Development Research Center, n.d.).

Green Consumerism

Green consumerism is defined as “an attempt by individuals to protect themselves and the planet by buying only green products on the shelves” (Ottman, 1992). It includes 3 “R” like Reduce, Re-use and Recycle. Reduce consumption means turn-off lights, recyclable packaging, reduce car use, etc. Re-use means repurchase rechargeable batteries, washable towels, re-useable shopping bags, etc. Recycle means re-blending, reprocessing, and recyclable products, recycle papers, etc. It has been observe that cans bottles, plastics, paper, cardboard can all be recycled easily (Yunus and Rahman, 2014).

Green consumerism aims at environmental protection by striking a balance between the expected behaviour from consumers and profit motive of businesses. Under green consumerism, consumers make rational decisions regarding the product purchase, usage and its disposal (Grunert, 1988). From the environmental point of view, recyclable products are preferred to unrecyclable products because the later’s production is much harmful to the environment. The recyclable product can be used and disposed of in an eco-friendly manner (Pettit and Sheppard, 1992).

Brundland Report highlighted the global ecological crisis and that is the starting point of Green consumerism (Gosden, 1995). Green consumerism is now growing and being adopted by more and more consumers. Now a day’s consumers are asking for environmental acceptable products/services, rejecting what market is offering. Green consumerism is becoming more effective with the collective efforts of the private class, the civil society and the government.

Examples Of Green Consumerism

Globally a struggle is going on, to make the world an environmentally sustainable place. And in this struggle well-informed consumers emerged as a new force. The well-informed consumers are ‘voting with their wallets’ for green products/ services that promote the sustainable development of environment. Not only this, consumers are demanding actual information about the social and environmental impact of the products they might consume. That’s why now more and more companies are joining the green league of business (Global Development Research Center, n.d.). Following are the examples of businesses that have taken a lead in sustainable development:

- The Body Shop, a British company received the UK “Company of the Year” Business Enterprise Awards in 1987 for “riding high on a wave of green consumerism”. The Body Shop had been positioned as an outlet for “cruelty-free, minimally packaged and natural ingredient soaps” (Gosden, 1995).
- The Mexico-based Forest Stewardship Council has certified over 25 million hectares of commercial forest in 54 countries for meeting social and

environmental standards for sustainable forestry. The present reserved area is double than the area reserved in 1998.

- Energy-saving compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) have substituted nearly 40 medium-sized coal-fired power plants.
- Consumers can see Marine Stewardship Council's logo at sea food counter. Marine Stewardship Council's logo at cockles, herring, rock lobster, salmon, mackerel, and hoki ensures that these have been harvested with proper environmental management.
- With the help of appliance-labeling program, Thai consumers have driven the market share of energy efficient, single-door refrigerators to 96 percent (in 1998) from 12 percent (in 1996).
- Beachgoers of 21 European countries preferred beaches and marinas with high environmental standards, sanitary and safe facilities. Beachgoers are following the ratings of the European Blue Flag campaign to find the environmental standard of 2,750 beaches.
- U.S. and Canadian coffee drinkers are demanding coffee that brewed from beans imprinting the Bird Friendly seal of approval from the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center. Bird Friendly seal signifies that coffee beans follow standards of shade farming and organic production.

Factors Influencing Green Purchasing Behaviour

Green consumer behaviour differs from country to country. Thus it is imperative to understand their behaviour towards green issues, which in turn help in understanding their behavior towards green purchases. Following are the factors which influence the green purchasing behavior of customers:

1. **Green purchasing intention:** Desire to "selectively choosing products with less environmental impact when purchasing goods" is called green purchasing intention. Consumers are aware about the environmental consequences, so they are more involve in purchasing green products. Research shows that green purchase intention was formed, as the end result of the trade-off between individual consequences and environmental consequences (Anand, 2013).
2. **Environmental Concern:** Environmental concern is found to be a strong attitude towards preserving the environment. It is a degree of emotionality towards environment. It represents the amount of factual knowledge, level of willingness and actual behaviour of consumers towards pollution-environmental issues. In other words, environmental concerned consumers are more likely to have positive attitude towards environment (Anand, 2013). Environmental concern is also called "ecological concern" and is an important determinant influencing the purchase intention for environmental sound products.

3. **Social influence:** Social influence changes the belief or behavior of customers when they observe the attitudes or actions of others. Social influence is an important determinant in green purchase decisions. Generally an individual is influenced by the behaviour of others. That's why, companies use celebrity endorsers and the product gets consumed in social settings. Several studies have highlighted that parents and peer group influence the buying behaviour of individual. In the same way attitudes towards consumption of green products is largely influenced by social environment i.e. family, friends, and peer group (Bush *et al.*, 1999; Laczniak *et al.*, 1995). These influences are critical consumer socialization agents among adolescents and may often impact whether or not the young will buy green products or brands. Now a day, social media has also become a big influencer, which impacts purchasing intentions. Social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter are increasingly used by marketers to reach consumers (Anand, 2013).
4. **Self image:** Self image is the perceptions of self as a certain kind of person, with certain traits, habits, possessions, relationships and ways of behaving. 'Self concept' or 'self image' is an important determinant of individual behaviour, which affects the purchasing behaviour of the consumer. 'Self-image' is influenced by social interaction and people make purchases that are consistent with their 'self-concept' in order to protect and enhance it (Lancaster and Reynolds, 2005). Consumers frequently try to preserve, enhance, alter or extend their self-images by purchasing products or services and shopping at stores believed to be consistent with the relevant self-image and by avoiding products and stores that are not. Recently some researchers found that self-image dimension can be useful in studying motivations to become pro-environmental. Moreover, the image of an environmental-friendly person could project a good image of oneself to others (Anand, 2013).
5. **Man-nature orientation:** Man-nature orientation is constituted by the relationship between human beings and natural environment (Chan and Lau, 2000). Values are enduring beliefs that guides a given behaviour for being desirable or good. It includes valuing the environment also. Environmental values are very important for a marketer, as it may lead to influence the green purchasing behaviour. Man-nature orientation concerned with man's relation to natural environment. There are three potential types that exist between human and nature: man's mastery over nature, man's subjugation to nature and man's harmony with nature. In the Western countries, people tend to view themselves as separate from nature. However among Asian people including Indians, it is viewed that man lives in harmony with nature. Man is a part of nature and therefore, man should not try to overcome or master nature, but has to learn to adapt to the environment. In other words, man should live harmoniously with the nature. In African countries also, the same is followed (Anand, 2013).

The 4A Framework for Green Consumerism

The 4A framework provides a starting point to make the enterprise sustainable and future-proof. The four A's are:

- **Aware**
- **Appreciate**
- **Aspire**
- **Align**

Aware: The first step in the framework would be to get a better awareness of what has been happening in the sustainability movement. The information can be gathered from conferences, print media which will give a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Appreciate: Going green is not just another tweak required for business, but this is something that will touch the lives of the people & environment and make a profound difference to them. Businesses must learn that awareness is not appreciation. Most CSOs (chief sustainability officers) are quite aware of the components of sustainability, and they appreciate it.

Aspire: After appreciation, next thing is to plan the big picture of sustainability movement/ green consumerism. Before planning, it is important to aspire for the right goals; it can make a difference to eco-system while at the same time it makes the most positive impression in the consumer's minds. This is not an easy step, and requires an excellent intersection of understanding of both the business operations and its customers. Even if there is an excellent understanding, formulating the right "aspiration goals" can still be elusive. Aspirational goals are far more difficult to achieve than commodity goals, but once an operational framework is set up for the aspirational goals, the changes would be transformational across the business value chain.

Align: The last and toughest part is to align the company's operations to the environmental goals (aspirational goals). For this managers needs to make fundamental tweaking in their business processes. Managers have to convince the CFO that an investment is required for an addition or modification even though its benefit is intangible and indirect (Narsi, 2013).

The Cost of being Green

Consumer pays a slightly higher cost when they change their behaviour from non-green to green. Green behaviour demands sacrifices, which are as follows:

- (1) green alternatives are quite expensive,
- (2) expend effort required by some behavioural changes,
- (3) accept imperfect substitutes for a product/service or
- (4) lessen the consumption of a product/service.

In the first two cases, the consumer needs to pay a high cost where as in the last two cases, the offered advantages are less. In short, green consumer needs to sacrifice which ultimately reduces his/her satisfaction level (Pettit and Sheppard, 1992).

Conclusion

The global environmental crisis has attracted the attention of individuals, corporate, NGO's and government. Pro-environment is the need of the hour. Well-informed consumers are environmentally sound and behave in a socially responsible way by purchasing green products/services. Green consumers are forcing firms to develop and adopt environment- friendly goods which are recyclable, reusable, less polluting, more fuel efficient, and bio-degradable. Today's consumer has understand that he/she is not purchasing 'a' good, but everything that involves into its production, and everything that will occur in the future as a resultant of the good. Now it's firm's part to realize that all products have an environmental impact, however small. The idea is to reduce it to the minimum. Thus, whatever industry firm belongs to, whichever is the product firm produce and whoever is the target audience, expect that firm's success will depend at least partly on how "green" and sustainable its business is. Environmentalism demands an important role from government and NGO's. They need to advertise green ideas so that the awareness and knowledge of consumers increases about environmental issues and problems. Every section of the society should work for Green consumerism, a scenario where customers ask for environmental friendly products/services. Green consumerism will leads to a new breed of green minded consumers who are moral, economically viable and pro-environment. Green consumers works for sustainable development by making intelligent life choices, using human power to bring positive change and understand the big picture. They will not keep themselves healthy but put a great deal of efforts to preserve the planet healthy for the coming generations.

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