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**Green Consumerism: Current Scenario and Future Prospect**

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**ABSTRACT**

Green consumerism refers to a state in which consumers demand products and services that have undergone an eco-friendly production process or one that involves recycling and safeguarding the planets' resources. The "Green Marketing" is a holistic marketing concept which creates a broad range of activities, where the manufacturing, promotion, utilization and disposal of products and services happen in a way that is less harmful to the environment and society.

Data monitor's latest survey titled "Green Consumers in India" (2009) finds that making green choices is a high priority for around 60% of Indian consumers and 95% of consumers who make the green choices claim to do so to protect the environment. The report provides an analysis of the Indian consumers' attitude towards green practices, products and services across mainly, 3 sectors energy, retail and transport. The public's attitudes toward green consumerism are generally favorable but green consumer behavior remains a minority activity. Social movements, boycotts, fair trade initiatives, and government legislation, has shown that these activities affect green consumerism in important ways.

Major environmental problems and depletion of natural resources forced human civilization to focus on environmentally responsible consumption. Major environmental problems and depletion of natural resources forced human civilization to focus on environmentally responsible consumption.

**Consumerism**

Consumerism is the concept that consumers should be informed decision makers in the marketplace. The consumer movement is the social movement which refers to all sections and all entities within the marketplace which give consideration to the consumer. The consumers are to be protected against useless, inferior or dangerous goods, misleading advertisement etc. Consumerism also means "high levels of consumption" which is supposed to be economically desirable.

### **Reasons for buying any product/ service by the consumer**

1. Necessity driven buying behaviour- Every human being has certain basic needs and to fulfill these basic needs, one has to buy the required products. Such buying behaviour is said to be necessity driven and varies from person to person.
2. Impulsive buying behaviour- Sometimes, there is no preconceived notions about the purchase in the minds of the consumers. Certain product features, packaging, promotional schemes etc. force the consumers to buy them on the spur of the moment.

### **Variables influencing green consumer behavior**

1. External Environmental Variables: These are the factors controlled by external environments such as:
  - Culture and sub culture
  - Social class and social group
  - Family and inter- personal influences
  - Other influences (like geographical, political, economic and religious environment etc)
2. Individual determinants of behaviour- These variables are personal in nature and they are influenced by the above set of external factors and in turn influence the way consumers proceed through a decision making process are: goods and services. They are –
  - Personality and self-concept
  - Motivation and involvement
  - Perception and information processing
  - Learning and memory
  - Attitude

### **Environmental concerns and consumer decision making**

Population explosion at an alarming rate, rapid movement towards urbanization and industrialization, increasing needs of energy and fast scientific and technological advancement have resulted in depletion of environmental resources and the contamination of planet earth. Some environmental problems have been linked to individual consumption and this has brought the environmental problem down to the consumer level. Due to the environmental concern of consumers, Green Consumerism evolved and it is practiced through 'positive buying' in that green products are favored, or 'moral boycott' i.e. Negative purchasing of the products that harm environment.

Antonio *et.al* (2009) suggested that due to environmental consciousness that has evolved over time, studies on green consumerism will be the main focus point in future leading to identifying the consumer attitudes, behaviors and intentions. Cherian and Jacob (2012) found that consumers lack green knowledge and because of this low awareness, organizations are still not focusing towards development of green products. Bhatia and Jain suggested that Overall green values, awareness

about green products and practices and the perception regarding seriousness of marketing companies towards green marketing had positive significant impact on consumer persuasion to buy and prefer green products over conventional products. Ottman, (1998) suggests that from an organizational standpoint, all aspects of marketing including new product development and communications should be integrated with environmental considerations. Herbes *et al.* (2018) consider that consumers focus mainly on end-of-life attributes of packaging and are less concerned with renewable origins, evidencing that there is some misunderstanding of renewable energy sources (e.g. green gas). Singh and Mehra (2020) Consumers are more concerned towards environment and health issues as they are more focused on green marketing & green products purchasing.

### **Green consumerism**

Green consumerism refers to a state in which consumers demand products and services that have undergone an eco-friendly production process or one that involves recycling and safeguarding the planets resources. In other words, green consumerism entails the production, promotion, and advancement of the utilization or use of goods and services based on their pro-environment benefits. Economic, social, and cultural forces have set the framework for green consumerism. This is because it is a social attitude and movement in the modern era, especially aimed at encouraging people to be more aware of the firms' production processes and only to buy or use products and services that do not harm the environment. Pollution, global warming, climate change, loss of biodiversity etc. are some of the major environmental hazards threatening the existence of mankind.

### **Importance of Green Consumerism**

Green consumerism is a holistic and responsible process of management that satisfies, identifies, fulfills and anticipates the needs of the stakeholders in maintaining the natural well-being of the environment and one that does not endanger the health of humans. The importance of green consumerism, therefore, include:

#### **1. Reduced waste in packaging**

Green consumerism advocates for frugal packaging option. It has social attitudes such as the preference to purchase loose products like vegetables and fruits instead of pre-packaged products. Also, it encourages reuse of paper and plastic packaging bags and tins that often cause environmental degradation.

#### **2. Increased energy efficiency**

Green consumerism attitudes advocate for the efficient use of energy, which ultimately helps in saving money, reducing utility bills, lowering emissions of greenhouse gas and enabling economies to meet the growing energy demands.

#### **3. Decreased release of emissions and other pollutants during production and transportation processes**

Emissions from the transportation sector and industries have been considerably reduced green consumerism. Also, because of green consumerism advocacies and programs, stringent standards against emission have been put in place thus lowering emissions from engines and motors and the advancement of clean-burning fuel options.

#### **4. Consumption of more healthy foods**

Through green consumerism advocacies, there has been an increasing need for eco-friendlier food production. As a result, people are gradually developing a culture of buying more organic and local food, which is arguably healthier as they are not cultivated or produced using artificial chemical fertilizers, antibiotics, hormones, or pesticides.

#### **How to Become a Green Consumer?**

Although the depletion of the green cover and its effect on the natural habitat may look ordinary and less important now, in many years to come, people will realize how beneficial it would have been to conserve the planet. It is mandatory to conserve the green cover and other natural resources by becoming green consumers. There are following possible ways anyone can transform into a green consumer:

##### **1. Saving energy consumption in surroundings**

Though it is challenging to conduct a door-to-door alert on saving energy, a lot can still be done at a personal level, that is, saving as much energy as possible while at home and work. This involves switching off lighting and other sources of power when they are not in use both at work and in our homes.

##### **2. Change of mindset**

It is difficult to force people to consume products or use services that prevent the depletion of natural resources and that result in habitat loss or environmental degradation. As such, every person needs to change their mindset regarding green conservation and know the dangers of environmental degradation by taking it a daily green habit.

##### **3. Use of solar products and renewable energy sources**

Using solar products that rely on the sun's energy rather than electricity is a major way to prevent environmental depletion. Some of the products include solar heaters, solar streetlights, solar backpacks, solar geysers and solar bulbs. Although some of these products cost more than traditional products, they tend to be more environment-friendly and last longer as they utilize natural energy.

##### **4. Checking energy labels in daily utility products**

One can become a green consumer by checking the energy labels on appliances before purchases. Products that consume too much energy ought to be boycotted and replaced by equipment that uses less energy. Additionally, a green consumer should prioritize green energy and use as much green electricity as he or she can.

##### **5. Recycling and using eco-friendly products**

One can easily become a green consumer by opting for the recycling of the products or using those that are eco-friendly. Instead of buying bottled water, for instance, one can opt for a water bottle to carry water. Generally, attaining this should also involve the purchase of eco-friendly products.

## **6. Buy locally grown and organic foods**

Buying locally grown and organic foods significantly contribute to lowering the effects of carbon emissions during transportation and the effect of artificial pesticide or fertilizer used in the environment.

## **7. Purchasing a hybrid car**

These cars hardly use fuel or have minimal fuel needs. Using hybrid cars relieves the environment from high carbon emission that is a primary contributor to climate change and global warming, which is also a contributing factor to biodiversity loss and habitat destruction.

## **Green Products/ Ecofriendly products**

The term 'green' or 'sustainable' often refer to products, services or practices that allow for economic development while conserving for future generations. A green product is one that has less of an environmental impact or is less detrimental to human health than the traditional product equivalent.

## **Companies producing Green products**

Until recently, there have been few ways to measure not only how brands are performing environmentally but also how the public perceives that performance. Fortune published the 50 Best Global Green Brands in 2014 in conjunction with the consulting firm Deloitte and Interbrand. In the 2014 Global Green Brands list, Ford replaced Toyota as the number 1 brand. In 2014, Ford offered seven electrified models, six being hybrids and the seventh, the Focus Electric, being a pure battery electric car. The Best Global Green Brands list also posts a score for each brand that represents the gap between its overall performance score and its overall perception score. A positive score indicates a brand is doing more than it is given credit for, while a negative score indicates that a brand is being given more credit than its actions merit. Panasonic, for e.g., had a high positive gap score. In other words, the brand is doing a lot of impressive work to become more sustainable but is not getting credit for it from the public. Apple has a negative gap score. While the company is definitely doing more to improve its environmental performance, consumers believe that Apple is greener than it actually is.

## **Green products in India**

Wipro Info tech (Green It) was India's first company to launch environment friendly computer peripherals. Samsung was the first to launch eco-friendly mobile handsets (made of renewable materials) – W510 and F268 – in India. Reva, India's Bangalore- based company was the first in the world to commercially release an electric car. Honda India introduced its Civic Hybrid car. ITC has introduced Paper Kraft, a premium range of eco-friendly business paper. Indus Ind Bank installed the country's first solar powered ATM. Suzlon Energy manufactures and markets wind turbines, which provide an alternative source of energy based on wind power.

### **Green Production processes**

Green production processes seek to minimize the impact of the manufacturing process on the environment at every stage. Hart and P. Srivastava defined "green production" as follows "Green production focuses upon three fundamental goals.

1. Minimize emissions, effluents and accidents.
2. Minimize the use of virgin materials and non- renewable forms of energy.
3. Minimize the life-cycle cost of products or services.
4. Reliance on recyclable or renewable materials, new energy and material conservation initiatives and 'replenishment' programs are all considered as effective tools in establishing processes that do not unduly harm the environment.
5. Again, information from industry studies and consumer research is being used to develop new products and to redesign existing products and services in order to reduce their impact on the environment and virtually eliminate pollution.
6. Some businesses have altered their product and packaging designs to use fewer materials or to be easily disassembled so that high- value components can be recycled more readily.
7. Also, product packaging is an important element of an environmentally sensitive production operation. Examples of green packaging include the use of recycled content in packaging materials, source reduction and refill alternatives.
8. Whatever form the packaging takes, it should clearly state whether green claims pertain to the product or to its package.

### **There are quite a few companies worldwide that have consciously adopted eco- conscious production processes-**

1. **IKEA:** IKEA uses lot of lumber to make its furniture. However the company uses sustainable forestry techniques and also invests in solar and wind energy to an unprecedented degree. The company plans to hit 100% clean energy by 2020.
2. **NIKE:** Its head quarters in Netherlands use recycled aluminum frames and underground energy storage. It also enforces strict emission standards at all of its factories and has been able to reduce its overall carbon footprint by approx 80% since the late 90's.
3. **Johnson & Johnson:** Is has begun switching much of its energy dependency over to solar power and his now the second largest user of solar power in the US.
4. **QMI services:** QMI is a company that designs automated handling equipment for use in factories around the world.
5. **Philips Electronics:-** Not only does Philips strive to drastically increase its energy efficiency in its production process but it also invests billions of Euros into green research , so that every company on earth can someday be as eco friendly as it is trying to be.

6. **Earth Tec:** - Usually companies recycle materials into new products. Earth Tec takes it a step further by using recycled products in the production process.
7. **Schott:** Schott manufactured the world's first glass-ceramic cook top without using heavy metals – arsenic and antimony as additives.
8. **Dell:** A company pledge to reduce its total manufactory emission.
9. **Tupperware:** Initiatives to reduce pollution, consume energy and recycle are standard in the Tupperware of plants around the world.

### **Green labeling or eco labeling & green washing**

As businesses have come to recognize that environmental concerns may be translated into a market advantage for certain products & services, various environmental declaration, claim and labels have emerged, such as natural, recyclable, eco-friendly, low-energy , recycled content etc. These have attracted consumes looking for ways to reduce environmental impacts through their purchasing choices. But they have also led to some confusion & skepticism. Unproven or irrelevant claims have been branded 'green wash'.

Green labeling or eco labeling is a voluntary method of environmental performance certification & labeling that is practiced around the world. An eco-label identifies products or services proven environmentally preferable overall, within a specific product or a services category. In contrast to 'green symbols' developed by manufacturers & service providers, the most credible labels are awarded by an impartial third party for specific products or services that have been independently determined to meet transparent environmental leadership criteria, based on life cycle consideration.

The International Standards Organization (ISO) has classified label into three typologies:

1. Type I (Eco label)
  2. Type II (Green claims)
  3. Type III (Environmental impact labels)
1. **Type I- Eco labels (ISO 14024:1999)** Only independent and reliable labels that consider the life –cycle impact of products & services are called 'eco labels'.
  2. **Type II- Self environmental claims (ISO 14021:1999)** These labels are developed internally by companies and are not independently verified. If the information conveyed in claims is vague, misleading or inaccurate (green washing), the consequence can be loss of trust in claims and labels in general.
  3. **Type III- Environmental impact labels (ISO 14025:2006)** Environmental parameters are fixed by a qualified third party, then companies compile environmental information into the reporting format and these data are independently verified. This type of environmental labels only shows the objectives data and their evaluation is left to the buyers.

## **Eco labeling in India**

The Government of India launched an Eco mark scheme in 1991 to increase consumer awareness in respect of environment friendly product.

## **Green Consumer Behaviour**

'Green consumption' on the other hand, is normally related to environmentally responsible consumption where consumers consider the environmental impact of purchasing, using, and disposing of various products, or using various green services (Moisander, 2007). Hughner (2007) found that while many consumers showed a positive attitude towards purchases of organic food products (67%), only a small number of consumers (4%) actually purchased those products. Similarly, Defra (2006) found that 30% of the consumers in UK have reported their concern towards the environment, but rarely translated their concern into a green purchase. This discrepancy or gap between consumers' favourable attitude towards, and actual purchase behaviour of green products is referred to as 'green purchasing inconsistency' or 'green attitude-behaviour gap'. It signifies that consumer positive attitude towards green products does not always translate into action. Recently, Rokka and Uusitalo (2008) claimed that even consumers with the highest level of environmental consciousness do not always purchase green products; their choice of products depends on both ecological perspectives as well as their evaluation of the various product attributes. Various factors can also hamper environmentally responsible purchasing and lessen the influence of a positive environmental attitude.

## **Factors Affecting Green Purchase Behaviour**

**Individual factors:** This category includes variables specifically related to an individual decision maker and affect an individual's decision making process.

**Emotions:** It can be said that consumer emotions, specifically environmental concern, has a positive and direct impact on consumer green purchase intention and behaviour.

**Habits:** Habit and past behaviour guide consumer preferences and influence their purchasing behaviour, making it difficult to change.

**Perceived consumer effectiveness:** Perceived consumer effectiveness was also found to indirectly influence consumer purchase intention since it significantly affected consumer attitudes.

**Perceived behavioural control:** Perceived behavioural control is the perceived control one has over one's actions.

**Values and personal norms:** social and ethical values of consumers and their purchase behaviour toward green products. It was further found that individualistic values such as health and safety, and hedonistic values such as pleasure in eating positively affected purchase behaviour of green products.

**Trust:** In the context of green products, trust is defined as a belief or expectation about the environmental performance of such products (Chen., 2010).

**Knowledge:** Knowledge about the green products also influence consumer behavior.

**Price:** Price of product is an important factor which influence green consumerism.

**Product attributes and quality:** Product attributes positively influenced purchase of green products.

**Brand image:** Brand image in terms of green products can be defined as "a whole range of impressions, conceptions and apprehensions towards a brand in the customers' memory which is correlated to the sustainability and eco-friendly concerns" (Chen, 2010).

**Eco labelling and certification:** Eco-labelling or eco-certification informs consumers about the green characteristics of the product and motivates them to purchase green products (Young et al., 2010).

**Other situational factors:** Environmental structures and services, a consumer's local environmental involvement and consumer exposure to environmental messages through media influenced pro-environmental consumer behaviour (Lee., 2010).

### **Evolution of green marketing**

Green marketing term was first discussed in a seminar on Ecological Marketing organized by American Marketing Association (AMA) in 1975 and took its place in the literature. The term green marketing came into prominence in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The first wave of green marketing occurred in the 1980s.

- First phase was termed as "Ecological" green marketing.
- Second phase was "Environmental" green marketing.
- Third phase was "Sustainable" green marketing.

### **Green Marketing**

The "Green Marketing" is a holistic marketing concept which creates a broad range of activities, where the manufacturing, promotion, utilization and disposal of products and services happen in a way that is less harmful to the environment and society.

### **Green Marketing Challenges**

Although a large number of firms are practicing green marketing, it is not an easy job as there are a number of problems which need to be addressed while implementing Green marketing. The major challenges which Green marketing have to be faced are:

**1. New Concept:** New concept for the masses. The consumer needs to be educated and made aware of the environmental threats.

**2. Cost Factor-** Green marketing involves marketing of green products/services, green technology, green power/energy for which a lot of money has to be spent on R&D programmes for their development and subsequent promotional programs which ultimately may lead to increased costs.

**3. Convincing customers-**The customers may not believe in the firm's strategy of Green marketing, the firm therefore should ensure that they undertake all possible measures to convince the customer about their green product, the best possible option is by implementing Eco-labeling schemes.

**4. Sustainability:** Initially the profits are very low since renewable and recyclable products and green technologies are more expensive.

**5. Non Cooperation:** The firms practicing Green marketing have to strive hard in convincing the stakeholders and many a times it may fail to convince them about the long term benefits of Green marketing as compared to short term expenses.

### **Benefits of Green Marketing**

Green Marketing has a lot of important benefits for those communities whose accept these new concepts. First important benefits are revenue increased. Consumers prefer every new and positive concept, so that innovator plays an essential role in this segment. A successful product that fulfills consumer satisfaction will definitely have an increase in sales and revenue. Second important benefits are cost reduced. In green marketing, the cost of raw materials is low thus it will increase the productions and save money. On top of that, green marketing can build brand value. A great green practices company will get a good brand value in the heart of the consumers.

### **The four p's of green marketing**

**1. Product: Entrepreneurs** want to exploit emerging green market either by identifying customer's environmental needs or by developing environmentally responsible products to have less impact than competitors.

**2. Price: Pricing** is a critical element of the marketing mix. Most customers are prepared to pay a premium if there is a perception of additional product value. This value may be improved performance, function, design, visual appeal or taste.

**3. Place:** The choice of where and when to make a product available has a significant impact on the customers being attracted. Very few customers go out of their way to buy green products merely for the sake of it.

**4. Promotion:** Promoting products and services to target markets includes paid advertising, public relations, sales promotions, direct marketing and on-site promotions. Smart green marketers will be able to reinforce environmental credibility by using sustainable marketing and communications tools and practices.

### **Green Consumerism: The Indian scenario**

Data monitor's latest survey titled "Green Consumers in India" (2009) finds that making green choices is a high priority for around 60% of Indian consumers and 95% of consumers who make the green choices claim to do so to protect the environment. The report provides an analysis of the Indian consumers' attitude towards green practices, products and services across mainly, three sectors energy, retail and transport. Over 85% of consumers in India consider human activities to be the primary factor driving climate change. Over half of the consumers feel that India's automotive industry has the greatest potential to make an impact on the environment by reducing carbon emissions. Women and urban dwellers are more inclined towards adopting green behaviour across the three sectors as compared to men and rural population. As per the Data Monitor Green Scores, India scores higher than most Asia-Pacific countries except China.

### Future prospects

The public's attitudes toward green consumerism is generally favorable but green consumer behavior remains a minority activity. Social movements, boycotts, fair trade initiatives, and government legislation, has shown that these activities affect green consumerism in important ways. On the level of the individual, it is important to recognize that green consumer behavior constitutes a constellation of behaviors that are most likely to be enacted as part of a specific life style in which the individual is supported by social networks and appropriate facilities in her environment. A more inclusive approach to green consumer behaviors would involve shifting the focus from an individual consumer as the decision-maker to a family, a community or other unit of actors. The conceptualization of green consumerism needs to be broadened. Diversity of cultural, socio-economic and ideological backgrounds will enable green consumerism to contribute to a sustainable environmental future.

### CONCLUSION

Major environmental problems and depletion of natural resources forced human civilization to focus on environmentally responsible consumption. More and more organizations are producing environmentally friendly products today and consumers are also showing increased willingness to purchase such products. However, a majority of previous studies report that consumers' favourable attitudes do not translate into actual buying actions and most of the consumers do not purchase green products. Environmental concerns, product attributes, environmental knowledge and subjective norms emerged as major drivers whereas high price, low availability and lack of consumer trust in green products emerged as major barriers towards purchase of green products. This 'green thinking' should be a part of an organization's work culture and ethics. The company should make products that are safe for the environment and accessible to everyone. At the same time, retailers should not stock one or two green products in their stores just as a formality.

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