

Green Purchase Behavior–A Conceptual Framework of Socially Conscious Consumer Behavior

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Abstract

Today's consumers are more aware of the environmental issues caused by heavy industrialization. They demand eco friendly products which will reduce the damages caused by industrialization. They are interested in buying eco friendly products and willing to pay more (Consumers who care). The willingness to pay more on eco-friendly products differs among demographic groups. This difference is caused or influenced by many factors like education, eco literacy, and geographical region. Many people are now expecting the corporate to be socially responsible and this responsibility expectation also varies among people.

Keywords: Consumer behavior, Green purchase, socially conscious consumers.

1. Green Marketing- Meaning and definitions

"Green Marketing" refers to holistic marketing concept wherein the production, marketing, consumption and disposal of products and services happen in a manner that is less detrimental to the environment with growing awareness about the implications of global warming, non biodegradable solid waste, harmful impact of pollutants etc., Both marketers and consumers are becoming increasingly sensitive to the need for switch in to green products and services.

According to the American Marketing Association, green marketing is the marketing of products that are presumed to be environmentally safe. Thus green marketing incorporates a broad range of activities, including product modification,

changes to the production process, packaging changes, as well as modifying advertising.

J. Polonsky defined green marketing as, “all activities designed to generate and facilitate any exchange intended to satisfy human needs or wants such that satisfying of these needs and wants occur with minimal detrimental input on the national environment” .

Environmental marketing (popularly known as Green marketing) refers to the process of selling products and/or services based on their environmental benefits. Such a product or service may be eco-friendly in it or produced and/or packaged in an environmental friendly way.

The term Environmental Marketing (popularly known as Green Marketing) came into prominence in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It began in Europe when specific products were identified as being harmful to the earth’s atmosphere. As a consequence, new “green” products were introduced that were less damaging to the environment. The American Marketing Association (AMA) held the first workshop on "Ecological Marketing" in 1975. The proceedings of this workshop resulted in one of the first books on green marketing entitled "Ecological Marketing".

2. Socially conscious consumers

Webster (1975) found that the socially conscious customer feels strongly that he/she can do something about pollution and tries to consider the social impact of his/her buying behavior. One type of environmentally conscious behavior is environmental consumerism (green buying)-purchasing and consuming products that are benign toward the environment. Some examples of these products are household items manufactured with postconsumer plastics or paper, recyclable or reusable packaging, energy-efficient light bulbs, and detergents containing ingredients that are biodegradable, nonpolluting, and free of synthetic dyes or perfumes. These types of ecologically safe products are just a few of the many currently available items that can facilitate the long-term goal of protecting and preserving our natural habitat (Tina Mainieri et al 2010). Considering the issues in mind, this paper ventures a conceptual framework of factors influencing the consumers green purchase behavior.

According to Wiener and Sukhdial (1990), one of the main reasons that stop individuals from engaging in ecologically favorable actions is their perceived level of self-involvement toward the protection of the environment”. As the authors point out, many individuals may have high ecological concern, but feel that the preservation of the environment is the responsibility of the government and/or big corporations. We might expect this attitude to impact the willingness of consumers to spend more for environmentally friendly products.

3. Green as an Added Value

The core of the modern marketing practice is to understand and respond to consumers' values and needs. In order to succeed on the modern market, businesses place great focus on their customers and invest the majority of their resources into marketing activities. The main goal of the modern business is to understand and satisfy the needs of its buyers in well-defined target markets (Czinkota et al. 2001). Hence, green marketing from a business perspective should not be viewed as a way to support the environment but as a way to strengthen business position on the market by satisfying the needs of the growing amount of "green customers", providing them with the "extra ecological value" they expect and, by doing so, reinvigorating the customer relationship. At the same time, understanding customers' needs is only one pillar of modern marketing. Kotler et al. state (2008 p. 461). Kotler et al. (2008 p. 96) continue: "Many things marketers do—one-short sales promotions, minor packaging changes, direct-response advertising—may raise sales in the short run, but add less value than would actual improvements in the product's quality, features or convenience". By continually improving the value for customers, business can receive a long-run consumer loyalty in return and green could be seen as one of the value creating elements by addressing environmental problems. Green is especially relevant as green awareness is constantly growing.

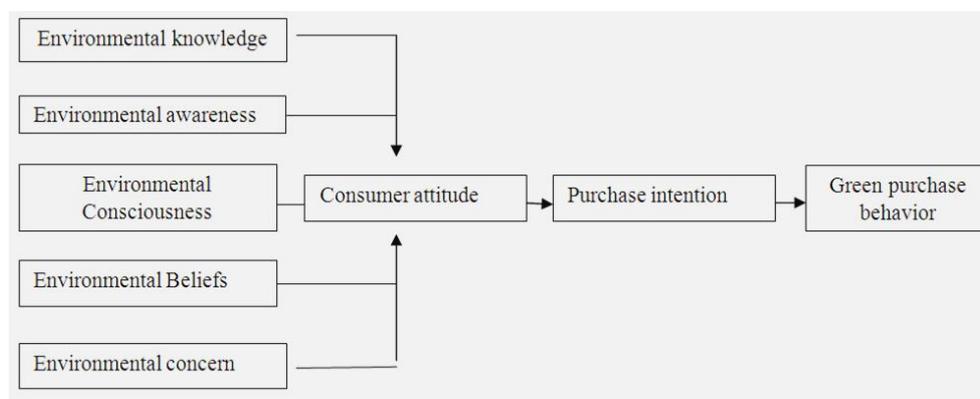
4. Green purchase behavior of socially conscious consumers

Green purchasing behavior can be translated to the act of consuming products that are conservable, beneficial for the environment, and responding to environmental concern (Lee, 2009). Webster (1975) found that the socially conscious customer feels strongly that he/she can do something about pollution and tries to consider the social impact of his/her buying behavior. A green consumer can be identified to be one who avoids any product which may harm damage to any living organism, cause deterioration of the environment during process of manufacturing or during process of usage, consume a large amount of non renewable energy, involves unethical testing on animals or human subjects (Elkington, 1994). He also states that "According to Wiener and Sukhdial (1990), one of the main reasons that stop individuals from engaging in ecologically favorable actions is their perceived level of self-involvement toward the protection of the environment". As the authors point out, many individuals may have high ecological concern, but feel that the preservation of the environment is the responsibility of the government and/or big corporations. We might expect this attitude to impact the willingness of consumers to spend more for environmentally friendly packaged products.

There have been a number of different factors which are instrumental in promoting green consumers to purchase green products. Extensive research over the years identify that heightened awareness of green issues; increased level of information availability on environmental sustenance; green advertising by corporations; increased concern for the environment; increase in popularity of green products by social and

environmental charities as some factors. This overwhelming increase in the overall environmental consciousness among different consumer profile there have been efforts undertaken by firms to "go green" by presenting the concept of corporate environmentalism (Banerjee, 2003). Today green development are identified as opportunities by business firms as opportunities to improve their marketing niche rather than just actions which need to be carried out.

5. Conceptual framework of factors influencing green purchase behavior of consumers



Factors that have been shown to exert influence on the ecological behavior of individuals have been classified as external (education, media, family, culture) internal (knowledge attitude, beliefs, awareness, consciousness, concern) and situational (economic rewards and legislation) (Carrette et al 2012).

(Kaufmann et al 2012, Ali et al 2012, Dunlap et al 1975, Roberts et al 1977, Tilikidou et al 2002, Snelger. R 1997, Clare D' Souza et al 2006) developed and used the items to measure and to analyze the environmental behavior of consumers namely Pro environmental consumer behavior, Environmental knowledge/Eco literacy , Altruism, Environmental awareness, Environmental concern and attitude, Environmental beliefs, Environmental information.

6. Conclusion

Consumers who feel man must live in balance with nature choose products that create less pollution, make efforts to recycle, limit their use of products made from scarce resources, and, in general, attempt to make ecologically correct decisions about the products they buy. These behaviors do not suggest the consumer is not using a product all together, but instead is choosing products and activities that will have less impact on the environment. This is consistent with the desire to preserve the balance of nature and fear for the results of not remaining in balance captured in the factor. Marketers

who want to sell products made (wholly or partially) from recycled materials are advised to stress that, as responsible consumers/citizens, we need to get more out of the precious natural resources that go into the products we use. This is consistent with the “limits to growth” sentiment captured by this factor. This approach could also be successfully implemented by selling products that can be refilled, reused, or require a returnable deposit for the container.

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