

Empirical Study of Consumer Perception and Buying Intentions for Eco-Friendly Products

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Abstract

Over the past few years, several companies have been under increasing pressure to communicate their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activity to their stakeholders. This is one of the important factors which may influence the market performance of a business concern. Environmental issues, these days, are very common to be addressed and communicated through their offerings in terms of eco-friendly products to the community. As awareness of the environmental issues and then impact on our life increases, more people are willing to change their behaviour and consumption habit in order to help improve the environment.

This research paper seeks to ascertain the consumers' buying motives and their awareness about eco-friendly products. It will help the manager in designing and positioning of consumer goods. Indian consumer market is one of the largest markets of the world and designing and positioning of an eco-friendly product as per the expectation of the consumer will definitely help them to succeed in the globally competitive market.

Key words Consumer perception, buying intentions, Consumption, Ecofriendly product

1.0 Introduction

The art of Consumer learning is a branch of consumer behaviour that focusses on the consumer's learning process. This subject has attracted attention of marketers, since it provides an important opportunity to teach individuals in their role as consumers. Marketers must ensure that their products and services are preferred over their competitors, by teaching to the consumers (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2008). The increasing volume and spread of marketing and advertising is creating a big challenge to the companies to either create awareness about the new products or to retain the consumer's interest in their product.

According to Polonsky (1994), green or environmental marketing includes all activities that are designed to generate and facilitate exchanges intended to satisfy human needs and wants, such that the satisfaction of these needs and wants occurs, with minimal detrimental impact on the natural environment. Ottman (1997) observed that marketers are incorporating green attributes of products into their existing product-lines as a marketing strategy to meet the demand of eco-friendly consumers. Grunert (1993) felt that since the industrial revolution, humans have done irreparable damage to the planet, which has been exploited beyond their regenerative capacity; the consumption activities of private households affected 30 to 40 per cent of environment. D'Souza, et al. (2007) observed that marketing practitioners and academics are making efforts to identify and understand green consumers and their needs, and developing market offerings to fulfill these needs.

Environmental marketing can be described as a shift in the managerial thought from viewing the natural and physical environment as an external influence on the

decision-making to viewing it as the centre of marketing and management strategy (Menon and Menon, 1997). Product and advertising are two key means of directly influencing consumer awareness (Shrum, *et al*, 1995; Prakash, 2002). They also have the potential to impact consumer purchase behaviour in different ways, since consumers react differently to different stimuli (McCarthy and Perreault, 2008).

2.0 Literature Review

Laroche, *et al*. (2002) reported that ecologically conscious consumers believed that current environmental conditions deteriorated and represented serious problems endangering the security of the world, whereas the consumers who were less sensible to ecological issues perceived that environmental problems would solve themselves. Consumer attitudes towards environmental issues do not necessarily lead to actual environment-friendly purchasing behaviour.

Gan, *et al*. (2008) found that consumers who were environmentally-conscious were more likely to purchase green products. Traditional product attributes, such as price, quality, and brand, are still the most important attributes that consumers consider while making green purchasing decision. Product attributes play a very important role in product development, since they affect consumer product choices and help marketers to satisfy customers' needs, wants, and demands. Ottman (1993) found that all types of consumers, both individual and industrial, are becoming more concerned and aware about the natural environment. Wessells, *et al* (1999) reported that environmental attributes of a product are more difficult for a consumer to be compared with other easily observable product attributes. According to Uncles, *et al*. (2003), consumer loyalty is the repeat purchase of a product, for that the consumers must find a level of satisfaction in order to purchase the product in future.

2.1 Consumer Environmental Values

The studies on green marketing have suggested the following environmental values that influence the consumer behaviour:

2.2 Consumption Values

Laroche, Bergeron, and Barbaro-Forleo (2001) stated that modern business firms and consumers are more concerned with the natural environment and realise that their production and consumption behaviour will have direct impact on the environment.

2.3 Emotional Value

According to Brown and Reingen (1987), the value which is associated with consumers' feelings (e.g., feeling good, excited) and affective states, resulting in consumer evaluation of a product, can be treated as the consumer's emotional value.

2.4 Social Value

Social values are the consumption motives of a consumer that hold beyond a product's function. Consumers use the products for social reasons to enhance their social status rather than their functional attributes (Leigh and Gabel, 1992). De Marez, *et al*. (2007) observed that the social status and image were reflected by the use of innovative green products.

2.5 Functional Value

It is the maximum benefit that a consumer seeks at the lowest possible cost, and the acquisition of a green product with the desired physical attributes. Sweeny and Souter (2001) defined the functional value as the major attributes, like price and quality of a product.

a) Price value: It is the utility derived from a green product for the reduction of its perceived short-term and long-term costs.

b) Quality value: Nowlis and Simonson (1996) described the quality value of a product as the utility derived from the perceived quality and expected performance of a green product in comparison to the consumer pre-purchase expectations.

Azjen (2002) Observed that behavioural intentions are guided by three considerations: behavioural beliefs, normative beliefs, and control beliefs; more favourable the attitude and subjective norm, the greater the perceived control; the persons' intention should be stronger to perform the action. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2009), at the evaluation stage, the consumer ranks brands and forms purchase intentions. Two factors can influence purchase intention and purchase decision: the consumer attitude and the consumer's expected income, price, and expected product benefits. Peattie (2001) observed that green consumers make green purchasing decisions, based on two purchase characteristics: the degree of compromise required to purchase a green product and the degree of confidence people have in the green product. Roberts (1996b) observed that consumer attitude or belief involved the perceived consumer effectiveness (PCE), which is positively correlated with ecologically-conscious consumer behaviour (ECCB). The PCE is the single strongest predictor of the ECCB, surpassing all other demographic and psychographic variables.

Researchers have analysed various stages of the product's life cycle and developed methodologies to improve the design of the product from an environmental perspective.

Consequently, eco-design was broken down into many stages, including product's manufacturing, use, and end-of-life (EOL). Horvath, et al. (1995) suggested three goals of eco-design: (a) minimise the use of non-renewable resources; (b) effectively managing renewable resources; and (c) minimise toxic releases to the environment.

Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) reported that the eco-sensitive consumer consciously seeks to minimise the negative impact of one's actions on the natural resources and minimise resource and energy consumption, use non-toxic substances, and reduce waste production. The researches described that environmental consciousness is influenced by two sets of determinants: (1) external determinants, like media, family, culture; and (2) internal determinants, includes demographics, psychology of a consumer. Consumer's ecological buying behaviour is influenced by four factors: environmental consciousness, willingness to pay higher price for eco-products, perceived environmental characteristics of a product, and company's environmental reputation. Nurse, *et al.* (2010) found that consumers' buying decision of green products depends on attitude, perceived social norms, perceived consumer effectiveness, availability, current purchase behaviour (willingness to pay higher price (WTP), and perceived behaviour control. Straughan and Roberts (1999) reported that the attitude or belief of a consumer is referred as perceived consumer effectiveness (PCE).

The following issues are extracted from the above studies:

1. Environment-conscious consumers are more likely to purchase green products.
2. Consumers' attitude towards environmental issues does not necessarily lead to their actual eco-friendly buying behaviour.
3. Eco-friendly attributes are more difficult to identify as compared to other observable product attributes.

4. Individual and industrial consumers are becoming more concerned to environment and are aware of natural environment.
5. Eco-friendly products have to go through different stages of their life cycle, i.e., Manufacturing -> Use -> End-of-life (EOL).
6. Eco-sensitive consumers minimise the negative impact of their action on the natural environment.
7. Consumers' buying decision of green products depends on their attitude and willingness to pay high prices for green products.

3.0 Objectives

The present study has the following objectives:

1. To ascertain the relationship between environmental values, consumer satisfaction, and brand loyalty;
2. To explore the ecologically-conscious consumer buying behaviour (ECCB); and
3. To investigate the future action of the consumers for the purchase of eco-friendly products.

4.0 Research Methodology

The survey questionnaire consists of four parts: (1) green consumption value, (2) satisfaction, (3) loyalty, and (4) information about green products. Green consumption value was measured by using multiple-item scales, modified from previous research studies (Sheth, *et al*, 1991; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). Assessment of customer satisfaction and customer loyalty were obtained on a 5-point Likert's scale, ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Satisfaction items reflect a person's positive and affective reaction to evaluations of consumption experiences (De Wulf, *et al*, 2001). The ecologically-conscious consumer behaviour (ECCB) measures the extent to which an individual respondent purchases goods and services believed to have a more positive (or less negative) impact on the environment (Roberts, 1996). He reported that the behavioural orientation of the scale helps to mitigate one problem widely noted in marketing research and green marketing research in particular, that attitudes often do not translate into behaviour. The ECCB construct was measured using the same 30-item scale used in the Robert's (1996b) study. The individual items were on a Likert's scale ranging from 'always true 5 to 'never true' (1). The demographic information was also collected.

4.1 The Sample

The data was collected from the university students. A structured questionnaire, consisting of the items related to consumption behaviour as well as the ECCB, along with the demographic details, was distributed to them. More than 130 questionnaires were distributed. However, only 105 questionnaires were found suitable for analysis.

4.2 Sampling Plan

The questionnaire was distributed to the students of Mahathma Gandhi University, Kottayam in Kerala. The students who were present in the class at the time of distribution of the questionnaire were included and their responses were recorded. The sample was collected from all category students, i.e., Science, Engineering, Management and Social Sciences streams.

4.3 **Reliability of the Scale**

In order to ascertain the soundness of the scale, its reliability was checked. It was found that the scale was reliable as Cronbach's Alpha of the scale was 0.876 for the consumption behaviour scale and the ECCB scale was also found to be reliable with the 0.755 value of Cronbach's alpha, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Reliability Scale

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Scale 1	0.876	19
Scale 2	0.755	30

4.4 **Respondents' Profile**

The demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Factors	Category	%
Age	16 to 19 years	8
	20 to 24 years	83
	25 and above	9
Education	Under graduate	25
	Post graduate	74
	Research degree holder	1
Gender	Male	64
	Female	36
Income (Family)	Upto Rs. 10,000	25
	Rs. 10,001- 50,000	35
	Rs. 50,001-1,00,000	27
	Rs. 1,00,001 and above	13
Marital Status	Married	11
	Unmarried	89
Family Occupation	Service	54
	Business	27
	Professional	17
	Farming	
Family Size	Up to 2 members	8
	3 to 5 members	33
	6 and above members	59

Age: While an overwhelming majority (83 per cent) of the respondents was from the young-age group of 20 to 24 years, 8 per cent were from the teen-age group, and only 9 per cent of the respondents were over 25 years of age.

Education: A large majority (75 per cent) of the respondents were highly educated, the rest (25 per cent) were only graduates.

Gender: Majority (64 per cent) of the respondents were male.

Family Income: One-fourth (25 per cent) of the respondents were from the low-income group, i.e., monthly income of up to Rs. 10,000, and more than one-third (35 per cent) were from the income group of Rs. 10,001 to Rs. 50,000, around one-fourth (27 per cent) of the respondents were from the middle-income group, i.e., Rs.50,001 to Rs. 1,00,000, and the rest (13 per cent) had a higher income of more than Rs. 1,00,000.

Marital status: An overwhelming majority (89 per cent) of the respondents were unmarried.

Occupation: More than half (54 per cent) of the respondents belonged to service class, around one-fourth (27 per cent) of the respondents' family had their own business, and the rest 19 per cent were from other professions or from farming.

Family Size: More than half (59 per cent) of the respondents were from large families, i.e., more than six members and one-third (33 per cent) had three to five members in the family, while the rest (8 per cent) were from small families, i.e., up to two-members or a single-member family.

5.0 Data Analysis and Findings

The data obtained with the help of both the scales were analysed with the help of the SPSS. The factor analysis of the scale was also conducted. The scale was found significant on KMO Bartlett's test. The data explained 67.212 of the variance (Table 3).

Table 3
KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of sampling adequacy		0.797
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-square	954.111
	<i>df</i>	171
	Sig.	0.000

The factor loading of the items indicate that all the 19 items were categorized into five factors. These factors are referred to as: Factor 1- consumer buying-decision of green products, Factor 2 - consumer satisfaction, Factor 3 - consumer emotional value, Factor 4 - product quality, and Factor 5 - consumer green values. Seven items were loaded in Factor 1, six items in Factor 2, two in Factor 3, two in Factor 4, and two items in Factor 5 (**Table 4**).

The ecologically-conscious consumer behaviour (ECCB) was also found significant on KMO Bartlett's test which explained 54.861 per cent variance of the data (**Table 5**).

The factor analysis of the data was conducted and seven factors of each of the 30 items were obtained (**Table 6**).

Table 4

Consumption Behaviour: Factor Analysis

Statements	Factors				
	1	2	3	4	5
'I would absolutely consider buying those products that are environmental-friendly'.	0.833				
'Everything considered, how likely you, in the future to purchase another new environmental friendly product, are'.	0.792				
'I would absolutely plan to buy the environmental friendly products'.	0.786				
'I definitely expect to buy those products that are environmental friendly'.	0.784				
'I would definitely intend to buy those products that are environmental friendly'.	0.753				
'There is a feeling of individuality about the eco-friendly products'.	0.730				
'Would you recommend those products that are environmental-friendly to a friend or relative'?	0.612				
I feel proud about my product'.		0.830			
'My product was a smart choice'.		0.817			
'Eco-friendly products are exciting'.		0.680			
'How would you rate your overall satisfaction with your environmental friendly products'?		0.501			
'Overall, how would you judge your satisfaction with your environmental friendly products' ¹		0.486			
I am satisfied with my purchase decision of environmental friendly products'.		0.458			
'There is a feeling of freedom in recycled products'.			0.807		
'My product is environmental and technical innovative'.			0.695		
'My vehicle reflects a sense of success'.				0.835	
'My product is environmental friendliness'.				0.807	
'There is a feeling of power in my green products'.					0.777
'There is a sense of prestige about my product'.					0.641
<i>Extraction Method:</i> Principal Component Analysis. <i>Rotation Method:</i> Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation.					
a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.					

Table 5

KMO and Bartlett’s Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of sampling adequacy		0.536
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi- square	1154.823
	df	435
	Sig.	0.000

5.1 Relationship with Consumer Satisfaction

The relationship between the consumer's age and his satisfaction was found significantly negative. However, other demographic factors, like income and family size had no relationship with the consumer satisfaction. This indicates that the new generation consumers are more conscious of their environment, irrespective of whether they belong to a large family or a small family, and whether they are from the lower or higher income-group. Consumer satisfaction was found significantly correlated with his emotional value and green value, but there was no relationship with the product quality. This trend indicates that environmentally-conscious consumers are not much concerned with the quality of the product, but they are not willing to compromise with their ecology. The ECCB factors also have positive relationship with consumer satisfaction. It is noticed that while Factors 1,2,5,6 and 7 have significant relationship with satisfaction, Factors 3 and 4 have no significant relationship with consumer satisfaction (Table 7).

5.2 Relationship with Consumers' Buying Intentions

The demographic variables, like age, family income, and family size, did not have any positive significant relationship with consumer buying decision. This confirms that the consumer's age, income, and family size were not a criterion for making a buying-decision of eco-friendly products. Consumer buying-decision was having significant relationship with satisfaction, emotional value, and green value of the consumers, but it has no significant relationship with product quality. This indicates that the quality of a product is not a determinant of consuming a green product. The consumer may ignore the quality if it is eco-friendly, but they were found to have brand loyalty about the green products. Further, consumer buying-decision was also found to have significant relationship with the five factors of the ECCB, except two factors (Factors 1 and 6). These factors were found to have significant relationship with buying decision of a consumer (see Table 7).

Table 6
Ecologically Conscious Consumer Behavior: Factor Analysis

Statements	Factors						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
'I have switched products for ecological reasons'.	0.682						
'I have convinced members of my family or friends not to buy some products which are harmful to the environment'.	0.627						
'I do not buy products in aerosol containers'.	0.624						
'I have replaced light bulbs in my home with those of smaller wattage so that I will conserve on the electricity I use'.	0.520						
'I will not buy a product if the company that sells it is ecologically irresponsible'.	0.487						
'To save energy, I drive my car as little as possible'.	0.485						
'I do not buy household products that harm the environment'.		0.699					
'I make every effort to buy paper products made from recycled paper'.		0.696					
'I try to buy energy efficient household appliances'.		0.532					
'I use a recycling center or in some way recycle some of my household trash'.		0.375					
'I buy Kleenex made from recycled paper'.			0.778				
'I buy paper towels made from recycled paper'.			0.591				
'I usually purchase the lowest priced product, regardless of its impact on society'.			0.577				
'I buy toilet paper made from recycled paper'.			0.528				
'Whenever possible, I buy products packaged in reusable containers'.				0.781			
'I normally make a conscious effort to limit my use of products that are made of or use scarce resources'.				0.691			
'When I have a choice between two equal products, I always purchase the one which is less harmful to other people and the environment'.				0.473			
'When there is a choice, I always choose that product which contributes to the least amount of pollution'.				0.441			
'To reduce our reliance on foreign oil, I drive my car as little as possible'.					0.832		

T try to buy products that can be recycled'.					0.686		
T have purchased a household appliance because it uses less electricitv than other brands'.					0.394		
'When I purchase products, I always make a conscious effort to buy those products that are low in pollutants'.						0.778	
'If I understand the potential damage to the environment that some products can cause, I do not purchase these products'.						0.513	
I buy high efficiency light bulbs to save energy'.						0.50b	
I always try to use electric appliances (e.g. dishwasher, washer and dryer) before 10 a.m. and after 10 p.m.'.						- 0.476	
I have purchased light bulbs that were more expensive but saved energy'.							0.628
I have tried very hard to reduce the amount of electricity I use'.							0.566
I will not buy products which have excessive packaging'.							-0.528
I have purchased products because they cause less pollution'.							0.513
I use a low-phosphate detergent (or soap) for my laundry'.							-0.463
<i>Extraction Method:</i> Principal Component Analysis.							
<i>Rotation Method:</i> Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation.							
a. Rotation converged in 18 iterations.							

Table 7

Relationship of Consumer’s Buying – Decision with Demography, Consumption Behavior and ECCB

1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Age	1														
Family income	-0.101	1													
Family size	0.204*	0.207 _s	1												
Buying decision	0.048	0.099	0.076	1											
Satisfaction	-0.460**	0.119	-0.106	0.480**	1										
Emotional value	-0.205*	-0.157	-0.140	0.256**	0.383**	1									
Product quality	0.054	-0.102	0.087	0.141	0.150	0.211*	1								
Green value	-0.060	-0.170	-0.153	0.379**	0.471**	0.292*	0.280**	1							
Factor 1	-0.236*	0.006	0.111	0.003	0.263**	0.206*	0.088	0.002	1						
Factor 2	-0.080	0.096	0.067	0.393**	0.369**	0.087	0.166	0.124	0.233*	1					
Factor 3	0.189	0.003	-0.007	0.274**	0.176	0.006	0.016	0.074	0.216*	0.265**	1				
Factor 4	-0.048	-0.182	0.116	0.257**	0.103	0.101	0.129	0.238*	0.343**	0.311**	0.108	1			
Factor 5	-0.0054	-0.034	-.213*	0.341**	0.276**	0.070	0.141	0.319**	0.154	0.324**	0.255**	0.216*	1		
Factor 6	-0.086	-0.011	-0.309*	0.180	0.273**	.254*	-0.230*	0.138	0.268**	0.131	0.303**	0.190	0.125	1	
Factor 7	0.066	0.004	0.039	0.223*	0.297**	-0.002	-0.065	0.214*	0.462**	0.387**	0.230*	0.363**	0.378**	0.306**	1

5.3 Prediction of Consumer Buying-decision

Consumer satisfaction, along with consumption value, as well as the ECCB had 42 per cent contribution in the consumer's buying decision. This trend indicates that the

consumer in the society are ecologically conscious and they wish to consume such products which are eco-friendly or less harmful to the environment. This supports the findings of Klein (1990), that 60 to 90 per cent of consumers in North America were concerned about the environmental impact of their purchases. While Factors 1,3, and 4 of the ECCB were found to have a significant relationship with consumer buying-decision, the other factors evinced no significant relationship with the buying-decision.

(Refer Table 8).

6.0 Conclusion

The study confirms that the consumer buying and consumption decision is eco-conscious. The younger generation is highly concerned with ecology. The growing age of the consumer has negative relationship with his satisfaction. It indicates that the younger generation is more satisfied with the eco-friendly products. This may be because of the high promotion campaign and excessive product-positioning of the eco-products which has created awareness and changed the cognition of the target customer. But the age had no significant relationship with buying decision which confirms that the consumer buying-decision is based on the product performance and not on the consumer's demography. If the performance is satisfactory, then only the consumers will intend to buy the same product again in future. The family income and size also did not have any relationship with satisfaction and buying decision of the consumers. This supports the similar findings of earlier studies conducted by Bearden and Teel (1983), Miller (1972), and Oliver (1980) that consumers perceived product performance as the factor to satisfy their and satisfaction led to brand loyalty.

Consumer satisfaction had positively significant relationship with the buying-decision for green products and consumer consumption values, like emotional and green value, along with the ECCB factors except the two factors that had significant relationship with consumer satisfaction. This indicates that the consumers are emotionally attached with the green products where the quality may be ignored or compromised for the sake of environmental issues, but they intend to consume eco-friendly products and save their environment. The marketers should identify the green attributes of their products as it is more difficult in comparison to the observable product attributes (Wessells, *et al*, 1999) and position the eco-friendly products to address or target the consumer. Then only, they will be able to succeed in this globally-competitive ecologically-conscious market, as this is an opportunity to the companies to increase their market-share by introducing eco-friendly products.

Table 8
Prediction of Consumer Buying Decision

Model	Beta	f	Sig.	R2	F
1	Buying Decision			0.418	6.084
	Satisfaction	0.320	3.024**	0.003	
	Emotional Value	0.130	1.391	0.167	
	Product Quality	-0.002	-0.021	0.983	
	Green Value	0.072	0.702	0.484	
	Factor 1	-0.276	-2.764**	0.007	
	Factor 2	0.169	1.749	0.084	
	Factor 3	0.174	1.977*	0.051	
	Factor 4	0.184	1.979*	0.051	
	Factor 5	0.116	1.257	0.212	
	Factor 6	-0.009	-0.094	0.925	
	Factor 7	0.027	0.252	0.801	

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