

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE BHARAT@2047: A STUDY OF CONSUMER'S PERCEPTIONS & AMP; PREFERENCES TOWARDS GREEN MARKETING IN SELECTED CITIES OF INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: *In an era marked by increasing environmental consciousness, understanding how consumers engage with and prioritize eco-friendly attributes in their purchasing decisions is pivotal for businesses striving to align with shifting market dynamics. The present paper aims to investigate the evolving landscape of consumer's perceptions and preferences concerning green marketing, with a specific focus on the pursuit of sustainable choices.*

Methodology: *The research methodology involves a comprehensive exploration of pertinent literature to establish a theoretical foundation. Subsequently, empirical evidence is gathered through a survey conducted among a diverse sample of 50 consumers, to discern their attitudes, perceptions, and preferences regarding green marketing practices. The study also incorporates a qualitative dimension through in-depth interviews with select participants to capture nuanced perspectives on the interplay between environmental consciousness and purchasing decisions.*

Findings: Consumers exhibited a strong inclination towards incorporating green practices in their lifestyle with a particular emphasis on the significance of education in fostering environmentally friendly product usage. Adopting green marketing strategies not only allows organizations to fulfill consumer expectations and address environmental concerns but also presents an opportunity to acquire a competitive edge and establish a robust consumer base.

Limitations The study has been done on a limited scale. Replicating the study on a larger scale would offer a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior and further contribute to our knowledge of the green phenomenon & sustainable events.

Originality/ Value of the paper: *Environmental awareness has become more pronounced in both the business sphere and public life worldwide. Contemporary consumers express heightened apprehension about environmental degradation and the negative impacts of product and service consumption on the environment. Organizations can adapt their offerings to align with evolving consumer preferences by identifying shifts in consumer behavior.*

KEYWORDS: *Consumers, Environmental, Green Marketing, Perceptions, Preferences*

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary landscape of global consumption, the imperative for sustainable practices has become increasingly apparent. As India strides towards its centennial year in 2047, the necessity for sustainable practices becomes increasingly paramount. Environmental considerations have gained growing importance in both the business realm and global public life. As environmental concerns intensify and the consequences of unchecked consumerism loom large, there is a growing recognition of the necessity for a paradigm shift in the way consumers approach purchasing decisions. Contemporary consumers express heightened apprehension about environmental degradation and the negative impacts of product and service consumption on the environment. This heightened concern may be attributed to dramatic climatic changes, global warming, and the escalating rates of air and water pollution. This study delves into the intricate realm of consumer behavior, aiming to unravel the intricate tapestry of perceptions and preferences that shape individuals' choices within the framework of green marketing. As the world grapples with pressing ecological challenges, understanding the dynamics influencing consumers toward sustainable options is paramount.

In contemporary times, green marketing has emerged as a focal point of interest for marketers, offering potential competitive advantages over industry rivals. However, embracing green marketing necessitates investments in technology enhancements, process modifications, and effective communication of benefits to customers. In India, various companies have begun positioning themselves as environmentally conscious entities, driven by governmental

regulations and global shifts in consumer preferences. Numerous cosmetic brands, such as Biotique and Forest Essentials in India, have responded to this shift by introducing environmentally friendly product lines. Even majority of the consumer durable companies are currently promoting their products featuring the Energy Star Label, asserting that utilizing these products will diminish energy consumption. Consequently, consumers can accrue substantial savings on electricity expenses over time. A notable example is the Godrej Group, which employs green marketing strategies to promote its consumer products. The company offers additional incentives to customers who choose to exchange their older products for the newest environmentally friendly alternatives.

In India, with its profound cultural heritage, there has been a notable transformation in consumer awareness over the years. The country, deeply tied to Ayurvedic traditions, places considerable importance on embracing natural and herbal products. The country's consumers have a robust appreciation for holistic health practices, exemplified by their engagement in activities like yoga and a preference for natural food consumption. In these regards, it can be inferred that consumers are already well-informed and likely to be receptive to environmentally friendly products. Despite this, questions persist regarding the perceptions and preferences of Indian consumers towards green products, as well as the intricate relationship between these attitudes and consumer behavior. Most existing studies on green consumers and green marketing predominantly originate from developed countries, with a limited representation from developing nations. This gap in research is particularly evident in the Indian landscape. In response to this void, this study surveyed Indian consumers to gauge their attitudes towards green marketing.

A LITERARY BACKGROUND

Green Marketing

Green has evolved into a universal symbol of environmental awareness. The concept of green marketing has garnered recognition on a global scale and has been defined in various terms across scientific discourse. In 1994, Michael J. Polonsky delineated "green marketing" as encompassing all endeavors aimed at initiating and facilitating transactions to meet human needs or desires while minimizing adverse effects on the natural environment. He asserted that organizations perceive environmental marketing as an opportunity to fulfill their objectives, a viewpoint supported by Keller (1987) and Shearer (1990).

Polonsky (1995) characterizes green marketing as a strategic effort by marketers to develop approaches targeting environmentally conscious consumers. It encompasses a holistic management process, as articulated by Peattie & Crane (2005) and Crane (2016), responsible for identifying, anticipating, and satisfying customer and societal needs profitably and sustainably. Ottman (1992) extends the definition to encompass products that are less toxic, more durable, and incorporate reusable or recyclable materials.

The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines green marketing as the marketing of products presumed to be environmentally safe, covering a range of activities, from product modification to changes in production processes and advertising practices, all aimed at reducing negative environmental impacts. Mudhassir (2010) aligns green marketing with a holistic marketing concept, emphasizing environmentally conscious production, marketing, consumption, and disposal of products and services. The rise in awareness regarding global warming, non-biodegradable waste, and pollutant impacts has led both marketers and consumers to exhibit increased sensitivity toward adopting green products and services. Phillip Kotler (1999) posits that green marketing emerges from societal marketing, presenting a holistic approach that minimizes the environmental impact across the entire product life cycle.

Green Consumers:

According to Peattie and Peattie (2003), green consumers are individuals whose motivation stems from environmental concerns influencing their daily lives, purchasing behavior, and lifestyle choices. In a similar vein, Polonsky (1994) characterizes green consumers as those actively seeking to minimize environmental damage in the products they purchase and use. Ottman (1992) identifies green consumers as individuals who actively seek products presumed to be environmentally preferable. The goods and services produced ultimately cater to the consumers' needs and desires. The efficacy of the green marketing concept hinges on the extent to which consumers derive satisfaction and benefits from their environmentally conscious product choices. Success or failure in this context is determined by the perceptions and preferences of consumers towards green products.

Shrum et al. (1994) outlined green consumers as those who deliberately incorporate environmental concerns into their purchase decisions, reflecting a conscious decision-making process. D'Souza et al. (2006) conceptualize green consumers as individuals actively seeking products with minimal adverse effects on the environment throughout the entire life cycle, emphasizing consideration from production to disposal. Grunert et al. (1993) define green consumers as those who choose products with the least environmental impact within the constraints of price and quality. For example, eco-friendly products include those with minimal or no packaging, items crafted from natural ingredients, and products manufactured without causing pollution. Collectively, these diverse definitions highlight the commitment of green consumers to integrating environmental considerations into their consumption choices, whether driven by values, proactive decision-making, or a desire to minimize ecological impact.

Green Values:

Green values encompass the application of environmental principles to foster the well-being of both individuals and the planet. While the interpretation of the term "green values" varies, it

generally signifies a collection of principles, beliefs, and ethical considerations that individuals prioritize in their interactions with the environment. According to Gifford and Nilsson (2014), green values entail inherent and deeply rooted motivations that direct decisions and actions concerning environmental matters. De Groot and Steg (2008) define green values as the significance individuals place on environmental protection and sustainability within their value system. Dunlap et al. (2000) outline green values as “ecocentric values,” indicating an individual’s concern for the environment and the ecosystems in which they coexist. Schultz (2001) characterizes green values as the extent to which environmental concerns become ingrained within an individual’s fundamental belief system and moral identity. Examples of such values include environmental preservation, fair trade practices, ecological design, organic products, sustainable development, holistic health, renewable energy, and clean technology. These values reflect a commitment to practices that positively contribute to the environment and society, showcasing a broader ethos of responsibility and sustainability.

In essence, the definitions collectively convey the concept that green values constitute an individual’s deeply rooted beliefs, motivations, and ethical considerations regarding environmental protection and sustainability. The nuanced nature of these definitions underscores the multifaceted ways in which individuals integrate ecological concerns into their core values and decision-making processes.

Green Purchasing

The last line of the previous paragraph ‘individuals integrate ecological concerns into their core values and decision-making processes’ gives rise to the concept of Green Purchasing. Green purchasing, also known as environmentally responsible or sustainable purchasing, involves the procurement of goods and services that prioritize environmental considerations. Carter and Rogers (2008) define green purchasing as the acquisition of products and services that exert a lower or diminished impact on human health and the environment compared to alternative products or services. Green purchasing involves the acquisition of environmentally friendly products while avoiding those that harm the environment (Chan, 2001). Zeng and Tam (2008) describe green purchasing as the practice of buying products that are environmentally friendly, energy-efficient, and produced with a minimum impact on the environment.

The terms “green” or “sustainable” refer to products, services, or practices that facilitate economic development while conserving resources for future generations. For example, a green product can be described as one with a lesser environmental impact or harm to human health than its traditional counterpart. Green products are energy-efficient, durable, often low-maintenance, free of ozone-depleting chemicals, and made from recycled or renewable materials. They may be obtained from local sources, biodegradable, and produce limited carbon footprints.

In Charter's perspective (2009), Green purchasing is described as the process of selecting and obtaining products and services that inflict minimal harm to the environment over their entire life cycle. According to Walker et al. (2008), green purchasing involves the choice and procurement of products and services that exhibit a diminished environmental impact when compared to alternative options. Hawkins and Shaw (2012) conceptualize green purchasing as the deliberate action of acquiring goods and services that embody environmental responsibility and sustainability considerations.

Consumer Preferences for Green Products:

The concept of Green Purchasing gives rise to the concept of consumer preferences for Green Products. Consumers, crucial drivers of economic activity, exhibit diverse perspectives and preferences that influence their decisions to embrace green products. The term "green" lacks a universally accepted definition, but based on various definitions of green marketing, common characteristics of green products include energy efficiency, water efficiency, low emissions, safety, recyclability, durability, and the use of renewable resources. In essence, a green product is designed or manufactured to minimize environmental impact throughout its life cycle, employing recyclable materials and biodegradable components. Criteria for green products include reusability, use of natural or renewable resources, containing recycled content, ease of recycling, biodegradability, energy efficiency, and durability with low maintenance requirements.

Schultz (2011) articulates that consumer inclination toward green products encompasses the decisions made by individuals who integrate ecological concerns into their decision-making process. According to D'Souza et al. (2006), Consumer preference towards green products is framed as individuals proactively choosing products that exert minimal adverse effects on the environment across their entire life cycle. Grunert et al. (1993) define consumer preference for green products as the deliberate choice of products with the least environmental impact, considering constraints such as price and quality. These perspectives collectively underscore that the preference for green products involves a purposeful selection driven by motivations, lifestyle choices, and a dedication to minimizing environmental impact.

Consumers base their purchasing decisions for green products significantly on their environmental concerns, values, and interests. This study posits the hypothesis that consumers' intent to purchase green products is deliberate, rational, and follows a sequential process in decision-making.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To explore consumer perceptions of green marketing and environmental concerns.
- To assess consumers' willingness to purchase green products.
- To analyze the perception of consumers towards green marketing practices

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The focus of analysis in this research is at the consumer level. The data collection method employed for this study is a questionnaire survey designed to gather information directly from consumers. To ensure the clarity and effectiveness of the questionnaire, a pretest involving 5 consumers was conducted, aiming to identify any ambiguities in terms, meanings, or issues. Consumers staying in Delhi-NCR, Bangalore, Bhubaneswar, Kolkata, and Guwahati were chosen as the population for the study. The initial phase of collecting primary data comprised administering the questionnaire using the convenience sampling method to 50 consumers through Google Forms, which yielded 48 valid responses. The research adhered to ethical principles, including the voluntary participation of respondents and the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality. These measures were implemented to guarantee the authenticity of responses and protect the privacy of participants.

Parameters of Interest:

The primary parameter of interest in this study is the subgroup of individuals residing in India.

Scale:

The structured questionnaire utilizes a five-point balanced Likert Scale to measure consumer attitudes towards green marketing. Open-ended questions are incorporated to allow respondents to articulate their perspectives, facilitating a more in-depth analysis of their responses. Respondents were instructed to rate statements on a 5-point scale, ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree.' With the neutral point on the scale designated as 3, a mean score above 3 indicates an overall agreement with the statement, while a mean score below 3 signifies disagreement. The analysis is based on the 48 valid responses received.

DATA ANALYSIS & KEY FINDINGS

I) Demographics/Profile analysis of Respondents

Table 1 shows the demographic details of the respondents in terms of different variables. The table shows the diverse nature of the sample and the representation of all people in terms of age, gender, educational background, marital status, occupation, and income level.

II) Consumers' Responses About Environmental Issues

Among the 48 respondents, 32, constituting 66.7% of consumers, expressed a strong agreement that environmental degradation has increased over the past decade (refer to Figure 1). The mean score for their perception was determined to be 3.33 on a 5-point scale.

$$\text{Mean Score} = (\text{Total Number of Respondents} / \text{Total Agreement Score}) \times \text{Scale}$$

Total Agreement Score = Percentage of respondents strongly agreeing × Total Number of Respondents

Table 1: Demographics of the Respondents/Survey Participants

VARIABLE	MEASURE	FREQUENCY	%	VARIABLE	MEASURE	FREQUENCY	%
GENDER	MALE	15	31.3%	AGE (IN YEARS)	BELOW 18	01	2.08%
					18-25	20	41.66%
	FEMALE	33	68.8%		26-40	18	37.5%
					40 & ABOVE	09	18.75%
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION	NON GRADUATE	02	4.16%	OCCUPATION	STUDENT	18	37.5%
	GRADUATE	40	83.33%		EMPLOYED	26	54.16%
	POST GRADUATE	06	12.5%		OTHERS	04	8.33%
MARITAL STATUS	SINGLE	25	52.08%	ANNUAL INCOME (IN RS.)	0-3 LAKHS	04	8.33%
					3- 5 LAKHS	10	20.83%
					5-10 LKHS	05	10.41%
	MARRIED	23	47.91%		10 LAKHS & ABOVE	07	14.59%
					NOT APPLICABLE	22	45.83%

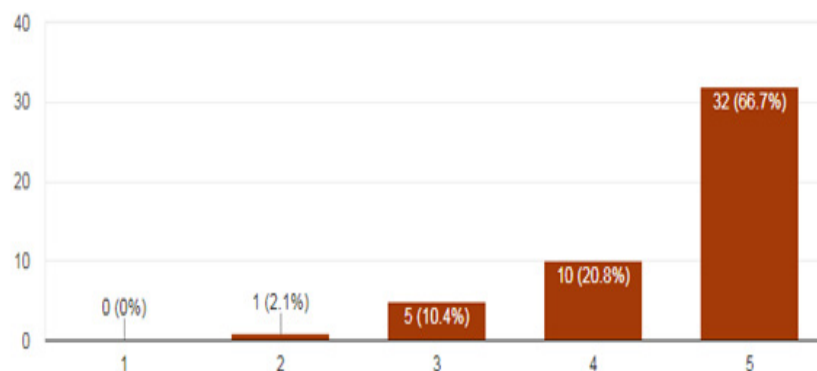


Figure 1: Graph showing respondents' responses regarding Environmental Degradation

Consumers universally expressed heightened concern across various factors associated with environmental issues, indicating a strong inclination towards prioritizing environmental considerations. The consensus among consumers regarding the gravity of environmental degradation suggests a potential inclination toward choosing green products over conventional alternatives to contribute to environmental preservation. Particularly noteworthy is the consumers' heightened concern for industrial air pollution and drinking water contamination,

reflected in the highest mean scores of 4.50 and 4.33, respectively (Refer Table 2). This collective sentiment opens avenues for marketers to innovate and introduce new green products while effectively communicating their benefits to consumers. The respondents' consistently high ratings for the gravity of varied environmental issues bear significant implications for marketing strategies. These findings emphasize the significance of customizing marketing communication campaigns to align with heightened consumer concerns, thereby strengthening the promotion of environmentally friendly products."

III) Consumers' Preferences towards Green Products

Given that 77.1% of the 48 respondents are familiar with environmentally friendly or green marketing products/practices, and only 4.8% have not heard about them, it can be deduced that there is a notable level of awareness among individuals regarding green marketing. This awareness extends to efforts made by both state/central governments and various businesses. According to the respondents' feedback, the primary source of acquiring information on green marketing practices is their educational curriculum, including books studied in schools, universities, and institutions. Additionally, newspapers and magazines emerged as the predominant channels for information among the majority of respondents. These findings suggest that leveraging these print media platforms could be more effectively employed to communicate with consumers regarding green products & practices.

Table 2: Mean score of Environmental concerns of the Respondents

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS	MEAN SCORE
1 Destruction of Ozone	3.90
2 Industrial Water Pollution	4.10
3 Industrial Air Pollution	4.50
4 Pesticides on Food	3.85
5 Hazardous Waste	3.85
6 Drinking Water Contamination	4.33
7 Warming up of Earth	3.89
8 Ocean Contamination	2.29
9 Endangered Species	3.76
10 Destruction of Rain Forest	3.08

Figure 2 provides insight into the likelihood of consumer buying patterns for green products within their preferred product category. Specifically, 52.1% of consumers are inclined to consider buying the green product, while 41.7% express a definite intention to acquire the product.

Consumers expressed the perception that green products tend to have higher prices in contrast to traditional products, as indicated by a mean score of 3.77. Despite this, their inclination towards purchasing green products is apparent, evidenced by a mean score of 3.87. Additionally,

consumers highlighted their consideration of the adverse impacts of manufacturing & consumption on the environment, with respective mean scores of 3.62 and 3.60. These findings suggest that incorporating green marketing practices not only promotes social responsibility but also harmonizes with sound business sense, as consumers are actively mindful of environmental impacts in their purchase decisions.

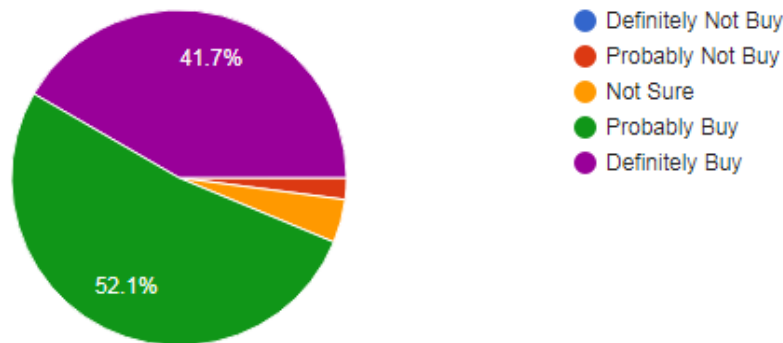


Figure 2: Consumers' Preferences towards Green Products

IV) Consumers' Perceptions towards Green Marketing Practices

Consumers expressed strong agreement regarding the significance of green marketing practices. Among these practices, "Educating customers on environmentally friendly product usage" ascended as paramount, earning a mean score of 4.33. Following closely is the practice of "Modifying product packaging to align with environmental considerations," which received a notable mean score of 4.29. Notably, all surveyed green marketing practices were deemed important by consumers, with none scoring below 3.91, as outlined in Table 3. This collective sentiment indicates a consumer concern for the environmental state and an expectation for organizations to actively adopt green practices in the pursuit of environmental protection.

TABLE 3: Perception of Consumers Regarding Significance of Green Marketing Practices

GREEN MARKETING PRACTICES	MEAN SCORE
Producing Eco-friendly Product	4.20
Producing products through environmentally friendly processes	4.22
Promoting products through environmentally friendly communication channels	3.95
Establishing product branding associated with green marketing practices	3.91
Adapting products to enhance environmental friendliness	4.18
Modifying product packaging to align with environmental considerations	4.29
Educating customers on environmentally friendly product usage	4.33
Implementing green supply chain for procurement and distribution.	4.10

OVERALL MEAN SCORE

4.14

CONCLUSION

Consumers exhibited a strong inclination towards incorporating green practices in their lifestyle, with a particular emphasis on the significance of education in fostering environmentally friendly product usage. Notably, the unanimous acknowledgment of the significance of diverse green marketing practices indicates a collective consciousness among consumers regarding environmental concerns. The study not only underscores the need for organizations to adopt and promote green practices but also emphasizes the potential for such initiatives to resonate positively with consumers.

The study highlights a low percentage of individuals exclusively buying green products, presenting an opportunity for marketers to diversify their product portfolios & position themselves as environmentally conscious. The findings not only have implications for marketers but also signal the onset of a green marketing era in India.

Adopting green marketing strategies not only allows organizations to fulfill consumer expectations & address environmental concerns but also presents an opportunity to acquire a competitive edge and establish a robust consumer base.

IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

As India progresses towards the envisioned Sustainable Bharat@2047, the study's implications extend to policymakers, businesses, and marketers. Implementing sustainable practices, leveraging consumer preferences, and fostering awareness through targeted educational campaigns emerge as pivotal strategies in steering India towards a greener and more sustainable future.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIMENSION

The research prompts further exploration into regional nuances and diverse consumer segments to formulate comprehensive and effective green marketing strategies tailored to the Indian context. Replicating the study on a larger scale would offer a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior and further contribute to our knowledge of the green phenomenon & sustainable events.

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