

Green Buying Behavior of Consumers: A Cross City Exploratory Study

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Abstract

Sustainable consumption specifies have preference products that do the least harm to the milieu as well as those that support ethical conduct. The contemporary world has led consumers to become increasingly apprehensive about the environment. Such apprehensions have embarked on to be exhibited in their purchasing patterns, with consumers increasingly preferring to buy so-called 'environmentally friendly products'. The authors examine the green and ethical purchases of consumers in an exploratory and cross-city base. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out with 48 Kanpurites and Luck now consumers. Results reveal that both Kanpur and Lucknow consumers believe that greenness is a part of ethical behavior and convert their knowledge of corporate ethics into ethical purchase. Kanpur consumers have been aware of green issues much longer than Lucknow consumers have. The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the relative effects of environmental concern (a general attitude) and social norms pertaining to concern for the environment on three consumer behaviors and six behavioral intentions. Research points out that the environment has had a specific impact on consumer behavior whereby signifying to target consumers according to their environmental beliefs. It attempts to construct a model that may facilitate the better understanding of green consumers' market segments. The model is designed to incorporate knowledge, beliefs, demographic profiles and situational variables.

Key words

Environment, green consumer behavior, environmental concern, Kanpur, Luck now.

Introduction

The concern of environment has developed vital over the past few years, though the important part of this issue relics that the rate at which the troubles connected to environment are rising and is quite advanced than the rate at which the proceedings are taken to resolve these troubles. The postulation of green marketing is that probable consumers will view a product or service's "greenness" as an advantage and support their buying choice accordingly. Green marketing is rising to a great extent as rising numbers of consumers are enthusiastic to back their ecological awareness with their dollars, it can be hazardous.

Follows & Jobber (1999) in their study to develop a model to predict environmentally purchase behavior found that there will be a positive relationship from attitude towards environmental consequences & a negative relationship from attitude towards individual consequences to environmentally responsible purchase intention. Their study also indicated that motivation to promote & enhance the

welfare of others underlies positive environmental attitudes. Environmentally responsible consumption originated condemnation that the marketing concept ignored the impact of individual use upon society as a whole (Feldman, 1971; Kotler, 1972; Lavidge1970)The present theory of attitude (Bagozzi &Warsaw, 1990) differentiates between attitude, intention & behavior. In theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991) the strength of behavioral intention is the antecedent of behavior. This behavioral aim is further shaped by the combination of a positive or negative approach towards the behavior, a subjective norm to perform the behavior, and perceived control over the behavior. Moreover, the approach is determined by strengths of beliefs about consequences of the behavior & evaluations of these consequences. Consumers' buying behavior is not consistent with their positive attitude toward ethical products (De Pelsmacker, Driesen and Rayp, 2005). The present research paper assesses Indian consumers' pro-environmental concerns,

knowledge of environmental issues, awareness of green products, effects of income level and educational levels and any potential effect that these factors may have on green buying behavior. "Green" is an umbrella term that refers to products and practices that are organic, sustainable and/or otherwise environmentally friendly.

Why Is Green Marketing Chosen By Most Marketers?

Most of the companies are endeavoring into green marketing because of the following reasons: Opportunity in India, around 25% of the consumers prefer environmental-friendly products, and around 28% may be considered healthy conscious. Therefore, green marketers have diverse and fairly sizeable segments to cater to. The Surf Excel detergent which saves water (advertised with the message—"do bucket paani roz bachana") and the energy-saving LG consumers durables are examples of green marketing. We also have green buildings which are efficient in their use of energy, water and construction materials, and which reduce the impact on human health and the environment through better design, construction, operation, maintenance and waste disposal.

b. Governmental Pressure Various regulations are framed by the government to protect consumers and the society at large. The Indian government too has developed a framework of legislations to reduce the production of harmful goods and by products. These reduce the industry's production and consumers' consumption of harmful goods, including those detrimental to the environment; for example, the ban of plastic bags in Mumbai, prohibition of smoking in public areas, etc.

c. Social Responsibility Many companies have started realizing that they must behave in an environment-friendly fashion. They believe both in achieving environmental objectives as well as profit related objectives. The HSBC became the world's first bank to go carbon-neutral last year. Other examples include Coca-Cola, which has invested in various recycling activities. Walt Disney World in Florida, US, has an extensive

waste management program and infrastructure in place.

d. Cost decline of harmful waste may lead to substantial cost savings. Sometimes, many firms develop symbiotic relationship whereby the waste generated by one company is used by another as a cost-effective raw material. For example, the fly ash generated by thermal power plants, which would otherwise contributed to a gigantic quantum of solid waste, is used to manufacture fly ash bricks for construction purposes.

e. Competitive Pressure Many companies take up green marketing to maintain their competitive edge. The green marketing initiatives by niche companies such as Body Shop and Green & Black have prompted many mainline competitors to follow suit.

The focus of this study has two dimension: (1) to get a more holistic understanding of consumer buying practice by engaging them into ethical and green purchasing behavior, (2) to describe sustainability awareness in a more similar and comprehensive way, we evaluate by comparing two different cities representing Kanpur and Luck now markets. For this purpose, the study explains the stability of ethical insight and green use of consumers based on: (1) How well learned and aware they are on moral and green issues; (2) what sways them and obstruction of sustainable use are; (3) to what extend customers are eager to refuse a firm based on ethical subject.

Literature Review

Motivation for green buying behaviour develops through good attitude towards the environment and social responsibility that people relate to. (Kotler *et al* 2009)⁶. Green purchase behaviour is direct outcome of consumers green attitude enhanced by green awareness, government initiatives Ooi Jen Mei et al (2012)⁷. Simmons *et al* (1990)⁸ postulated that knowledge about environmental issues lead to effective and favourable attitudes

Consumer choice for products not only reflects price and quality preferences but social commitment through purchase of environmentally friendly products. This

increased concern and sense of social responsibility has led to remarkable growth in the global market for environment-friendly products (Hunt & Dorfman, 2009).

Environmental marketing, more popularly known as green marketing can be defined as the attempt by a concern to plan, endorse, value and distribute goods in a way which endorse ecological protection (Polonsky, 2011). Green marketing has been defined as 'all activities designed to generate and facilitate any exchanges intended to satisfy human needs or wants such that the satisfaction of these needs and wants occurs, with minimal detrimental impact on the natural environment' by Polonsky (2011).

Environmental concern can be taken as an attitude towards facts, one's own actions or other's conduct with consequences for environment (Weigel, 1983). This implies that environmental concern may refer to both a definite attitude directly determining intentions or more broadly to a general attitude or value orientation (Fransson & Gorling, 1999).

Consumerism can perhaps be recognized as a movement which primarily begun as a procedure which was presented to protect consumers against follow of unethical marketing. Over time this has comprehensive and become broader in nature. When today's agenda with regard to consumer activism is taken into consideration it can be observed that protection of the environment is the most imperative aspect (Dono et al., 2010). There is a resulting increase in the concern expressed towards environmental protection leading to "green consumerism" (Eriksson, 2002).

Information and Awareness of Green & Ethical Issues Involved

Clearly today's consumer has access to a countless of information sources, thereby promoting more knowledgeable purchase decision-making. According to Alexander and Nicholls (2006), consumers appear to have become more interested in obtaining genuine and trustworthy information about the environment of purchased products in their quest for "ethical consumption". Specifically, information such as country of origin and the procurement strategy of

the retailer have become more important to a growing number of consumers for certain product categories (see Balabanis and Diamantopoulos 2004; Davidson, et al 2003). Additional research suggests that consumers are interested in ethical behavior issues throughout the supply chain and would be more discerning in their purchases if they had more access to information about firms' ethical and socially responsible activities and practices (Simon 1995). The increased demand for eco-friendly products and the green marketing concept in the modern era is primarily driven by rising consumer awareness about environment. Therefore, consumers forced to accept eco-friendly products. In addition, growing environmental crises have increased the environmental awareness and consciousness of both firms and consumers. Because of environmental awareness, environmental information can effect and direct consumers to make knowledgeable purchasing choices (Leire and Thidell, 2005). One of the ethical issues surrounding marketing ethics studies is the awareness of consumers about ethical marketing activities of firms. According to Alexander and Nicholls (2006), in order to behave in ethical manner, consumers appear to have become more involved in achieving information about the production of purchased products. Therefore, for the companies producing ethically may attract today's knowledgeable and conscious consumers who tend to behave much more ethical ways during consumption (Wherever, 1992).

Influences and obstruction on Green Buying Behavior

Green consumption behavior can be affected from some factors. For instance, consumer's green value, purchase experience, time for research, knowledge about environmental issues, affordability and green product's availability are listed as the key factors that will help green purchase (Young, Hwang, McDonald and Oates, 2009). As Leire and Thidell (2005) indicate, 20-50% of the consumers give priority to environmentally related issues of the products they purchase. However, it is also stated that consumers are often found to overestimate their

use of product-related environmental information. Grankvist and Biel (2001) reveals that; increased awareness about environmental problems, price and perceived norms are three critical initiating factors of organic food purchases. (Asikainen, 2000 and Björk, 1997). Therefore, there is usually a gap between consumers' attitudes toward green issues and green purchasing behaviors

Objectives The aim of this study is to find out how consumer behavior is influenced by Green Marketing by Companies.

1. To exhibit the challenges being faced by companies pursuing green marketing.
2. To study the relationship between consumers' attitude and perception towards green marketing
3. To analyze consumer's willingness to pay high for green products.

Methodology

Research Questions: The study explores views of consumer experiences based on following key research questions, which are closely linked, to a qualitative research design:

Table 1 : Characteristics of the sample

Characteristics	Kanpur		Lucknow	
	#	%	#	%
Education				
High school	2	4	6	13
Senior Secondary	22	46	24	50
Master	16	33	14	29
PhD	8	17	4	8
Age				
20-25	4	8	4	8
26-35	8	17	10	21
36-45	10	21	8	17
46-55	8	17	12	25
56-65	8	17	6	13
66-75	10	21	4	17
Gender				
Female	28	58	26	54
Male	20	42	22	46
Income				
Low	8	17	8	17
Medium	22	46	20	42.5
High	18	38	20	42.5

RQ1: How are consumers informed about green products, and are they aware of green products sufficiently?

RQ2: How well informed are the consumers on ethical issues and how much are they aware of ethical issues?

RQ3: Are consumers willing to boycott or purchase according to ethical issues of a firm?

RQ4: What is the relationship between ethical issues and green buying behavior of Kanpur and Lucknow consumers?

RQ5: What are the aspect of influences and barriers about green product purchase?

Sampling: In total, 96 respondents, 48 from Kanpur and 48 from the Lucknow, were interviewed and their responses were transcribed. Primarily participants were selected conveniently from individuals who recognized themselves as green and ethical consumers. After that, sample size was increased through snowball sampling method representing different age, income and education groups (Table 1), since I aimed to have a general overview and differences between two Cities.

Method:

This article modified semi-structured, in-depth interview which was handy to find out respondents' point of view about an idea. Specifically, the first part of the interview was about green consumption. Researcher prepared 13 base questions including knowledge, consumption, information sources and barriers of being green. The second part includes nine base questions about ethical issues including ethical behaviors of company, embargo conduct of participants, information sources, and influences of being ethical consumer. The interviews were conducted simultaneously in Lucknow and Kanpur. Interviews typically lasted about 40-50 minutes and were conducted by the researcher of this study. Since the expression of the ideas, attitudes and beliefs is important and easier, in both cities.

Reliability and Construct Validity: For the reliability of the study (Seidman, 2006; Wagner-Tsukamoto, 2009), all parts of the interviews was written with the permission of participants. The interview data was transcribed word-by-word and outlined in detailed how the coding and interpretation were done. Hence, in total 96 (48 for each city) interviews were conducted. Further, for the sake of validity, we separated the process of gathering and analyzing data (Seidman 2006), and started to analyze the data after interviews in both cities have been completed.

Analyzing

Wagner's (1997) qualitative research analysis process was followed for the interpretation of interviews. According to this process, first we transcribed recorded interviews into words and named each participant. The Kanpur participants were named as KNP1, KNP2, KNP48; and the Lucknow participants were named as LKO1, LKO2, and LKO48 chronologically. After transcribing, we used bracketing framework to analyze the data. For this framework, variables and codes are selected in line with the interview questions and research questions under investigation. In this stage, the interview data was read repeatedly and searched for coded groups. By noting iterations, key phrases, thematic patterns and similarities were described.

After a separate investigation of two cities, the data was re-searched for the cultural variances

Results

As a general overview, entire findings are given by considering the differences between two cities. Therefore, the study revealed that there are some identifiable differences between Kanpur (KNP) and Lucknow (LKO) consumers in terms of both green and ethical issues. Here are the findings and related discussion of our in-depth interviews mainly focusing on the differences between two cities

Information and Awareness of Green Issues: It is seen that one of the most significant differences between two-cities consumers is the level of consciousness about green issues. While 66%, of Lucknow, consumers have an idea and consideration about green issues more than 10 years, this ratio is 30% for KNP consumers. Moreover, while 40% of Lucknow participants actively purchase green products for more than 5 years, this ratio is almost half of that for KNP consumers. Thus, we can conclude that LKO consumers are more conscious and active in buying green products than KNP consumers.

- (LKO2): *It has been a long time... since I was 24. My mother had a small recycling center. I buy green products since early 2007s. I try to buy laundry soaps; it was probably the first green product.*
- (KNP02): *It is a new issue for me, before the last 5 years I did not know anything about green or organic products. Five years ago, I started to buy green detergent.*

Further, relatively small volume of green market share may be one reason for KNP consumers' lack of knowledge and green behavior:

- (KNP14): *It is hard to find green products because not every supermarket is selling them.*

About the market share, following example may give an idea of LKO consumers' consciousness level:

- (LKO36): *Most people do not have the money to buy organic foods because they are expensive. Everybody should keep 15% of their food budget and buy as much organic food as they can. Because the only way green products to get cheaper is farmers to have*

more market. If everybody in the Lucknow city spends 15% of their food budget to organic foods, the market will increase and prices will come down.

Most of the interviewees use internet and newspaper respectively as information sources of being green in addition to product is itself. Word of mouth among their friends and family was the third information sources. They do not trust television commercials and salespeople.

- (KNP36): *The first and the most important source of information for me is the internet. I always use user forums appearing in the internet. In addition, idea of my friends and family means a lot to me. However, I do trust a little to television.*
- (LKO18): *I definitely collect information, I use internet. First, I go online and read consumer reports. They are useful. I ask my friends or people who have knowledge. I probably absorb information from advertising or salespeople, but I am skeptical about these kinds of information sources. About supermarket, that depends on the reputation of the supermarket.*

Consumers learn ethical events mostly from TV news and newspapers, from internet and from their own experiences. When we examine the barriers of being an ethical consumer, *lack of knowledge* was appeared as the most important reason for not considering ethics during purchasing decision. Most of the participants do not have the knowledge of distinguishing ethical and unethical firms. More importantly, participants from both cities believe that this lack of knowledge cannot be fulfilled totally, since the firms can control the information shared with public.

- (KNP16): *If the media gives this kind of information, I could know it and pay attention. Otherwise, we have no chance to have this kind of ethical information.*
- (LKO13): *It is hard to know what the companies are doing. I really know they do lots of thing that are secret but they try to keep it quite. They hire lawyers and PR*

people to protect them. It is hard to know what is going on.

Influences and Barriers on Green Buying Behavior:

Supporting previous studies (i.e. Young et. al. 2009), our interviews show there is about a 20% attitude-behavior gap in green issues. Consumers report that they concern or have consciousness about environmental issues, yet they struggle to translate into behavior:

- (LKO14): *Well, for thinking I would like to think I concern environment 90%, but for acting I know I am probably somewhere on 50%. In addition, I can say the same think for thinking and behaving as an ethical consumer.*

We believe that the reason for this gap may be some influences and barriers of green buying habits. Given their expressed interest in green purchasing, it was interesting to find that when asked “what is the most important influence on their purchase behavior?”; price, needs, quality and value are still the most important factors of buying behavior for both countries.

- (KNP07): *Need for this product is essential. I buy a product if it is functional and if the product fulfills my need.*
- (LKO05): *Quality is a big factor. I guess I also have to say value. Paying the money for getting the best quality.*
- (LKO14): *In general, need, affordability would be top two concerns. Others would include the quality of the product, cost-benefit; I mean value of the product.*

Consumers are not willing to purchase green product if price and quality are significantly affected.

- (KNP20): *Recycled products seems less competent to me.*

Most of the participants agree that green consumption is a hard work because of some barriers. Some of them believe that it is a very *time consuming* process since they need to search for the options, they need to find out the places that sell green products, and they feel lack of knowledge about the firms and products.

- *(LKO1): It is expensive to be a green consumer ...and recycling, flatten the boxes; going to green supermarkets, that entire green staff is time consuming. Many people do not want to take that time.*
- *(LKO19): I do have to say that time is a factor in buying green products. Because sometimes I do not have the time to go to local market for buying vegetables for example, and I just buy from the supermarket. In addition, cost is really a factor for especially vegetables because they are three times more expensive.*
- The other significant barrier emerged was *lack of choice and knowledge*. More than half of the participants in both countries feel lack of choice when they think about green products and they find it difficult to understand whether a product is green or not.
- *(KNP20): If it does not write that product is a green version than I could not understand if the product is green or not.*
- *(LKO3): ... I think I understand the labels. However, I feel lack of choice when I think about green products.*
- The other significant barrier was *lack of habit* for both countries. Consumers just buy the same brand they are used to, they do not think about it so much.
- *(KNP13): To be a green consumer is not so hard, but purchasing a green product is hard because green products are much more expensive than other products. In addition, it has to be a habit; in Kanpur, we do not have such kind of habit. People typically prefer low-priced products.*
- *(LKO12): It is hard to be truly green. Our culture has big cars; lots of packaging so design of the community sometimes makes it difficult. Not set up to be green.*

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to examine (1) How well educated and conscious they are on ethical and green issues; (2) what the influences and obstacle are of sustainable consumption are; (3) to what extend consumers are willingness to boycott a firm based on ethical issues. To capture a important insight into green and ethical consumer behavior the findings of this

exploratory study provide a cross-city focus. First, overall results in both cities show consumers believe that green purchasing is a part of ethical behavior. Especially the majority of Kanpur participants consider being a green consumer same as being an ethical consumer. Therefore, marketing managers should use their ethical and green issues together while shaping their marketing strategies and try to convince shoppers that sustainable consumption including both green and ethical behavior brings long-term profit. The level of consciousness about green issues is more evident for Lucknow consumers than for Kanpur consumers. To answer why Kanpur consumer has a low level of consciousness about green issues, this study reveals some reasons: In Kanpur, green issues are still not at the primary level of needs of hierarchy.

Moreover, Kanpur consumers have less trust to green issues, due to the lack of availability of specialized information sources, green labels and formal or informal education about green issues. These are relatively new issues in Kanpur and therefore there is a lack of necessary infrastructure for being green consumer. For instance, recycling is not systematic and can be very time consuming. Relatively small volume of green market share may be another reason for Kanpur consumers' lack of knowledge and green behavior. Therefore, firms should be aware of green consciousness of the nation and generate their green marketing strategies according to this consciousness level. If a nation has little consciousness and knowledge about green issues, it would be better to generate an education program on marketing strategies of green products first.

The findings also suggest that although consumers believe they should consider ethical and green issues during their purchasing decisions; they hardly translate their sustainable consumption knowledge into behavior. It will be meaningful for marketers to emphasize that green products are high quality enough to purchase, and their purchase behavior can make a difference in ethical terms. Marketers also need to increase consumers' awareness level for green products and they need to offer green consumption as a part of ethical consumer

behavior, which needs special strategies to make consumers feel rewarded when they make sustainable consumption. The willingness to purchase green products but do not wish to be inconvenienced in order to do so. Further, consumers find being green is a time consuming activity, and they feel lack of alternatives when they think about green products. To become a significant influence on sustainable consumer behavior, firms need to increase knowledge of labels, develop more effective distribution zones, and provide more choices of green products. In this way, barriers of sustainable consumption, such as lack of knowledge, time and choice, can be reduced. Therefore, firms should make their customers feel rewarded when make purchases on ethical reasoning and encourage them to build healthier ethical decisions as a habit in the society.

Limitations and Future Research

The first limitation of this study is low significance level of the effect of environmental concern or attitude this may be due to small sample size and quantitative method. Further, individual factors such as gender, age, income and life-style may play an important role and require attention in future research.

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