



RESEARCH ARTICLE

WHAT WILL DRIVE CONSUMERS TO BUY GREEN PRODUCTS: A STUDY OF REINFORCEMENT SCHEDULES TO BE APPLIED IN MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

Background: Worldwide consumer's consumption patterns are one of the prime cause of environmental deterioration. It is a threat to social and economic stability and sustainable human existence. As the environment continues to worsen, it has become a crucial concern across the globe for environmentalists, organizations, governments and people in general to encourage and adopt green behavior. Much has been done in this direction starting from national level policies to organizations making green products. Eco-conscious business leaves no stone unturned in providing eco-information to the prospective customers through ad-campaigns, usage of various eco-labels. Yet literature suggests that it seems to hardly affect consumer's purchase decision. Eco-information is considered to be a definite concern but purchase is guided by personal interest. This situation is a call for now applying behavior modification techniques to pull customer towards purchase of environment friendly products. **Objective:** This study is an attempt to understand how reinforcement schedules can be used by marketers to modify consumer behavior towards green products. The study aims at using empirical methodology in identifying pull factors to motivate green behavior through reinforcement schedules. **Method:** For this study, A self administered questionnaire with 15 items was developed to collect data from 184 respondents to analyse the different reinforcement schedules with respect to green products. **Results:** The results of our study reveal that although it is only the customer's psyche that makes him switch to green products, but there are a few reinforcement schedules that can be used to induce the same. **Conclusion:** Companies should advertise their green products to not only increase awareness, but also to make the product familiar to customers and also provide discounts to induce the sale of green products. Also, government should support the companies producing green products and should positively and negatively motivate customers to purchase green products.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, consumer consumption of goods and services has increased tremendously across the world, leading to depletion of natural resources and severe damage to the environment. Some of the serious consequences of environmental damage are global warming, increased environmental pollution, and decline in flora and fauna (Chen and Chai, 2010). These hazardous results from the Destruction of Natural resources has raised the issues of environmental protection and environmental consciousness in consumer behaviour. Awareness and concern about environmental issues hit the industry, retailers and consumers and is gaining worldwide more and more space in business and academia. This, in turn, has increased the demand for green products in the market worldwide. A green product is defined as "a product that was manufactured using toxic-free ingredients and environmentally-friendly procedures, and which is certified as such by a recognized organization" (Gurau and Ranchhod, 2005).

Even so, it is seen that environmental concerns does not mean that people necessarily consume the green products, as has been shown by some studies linking environmental concerns with the purchase of green products (Braga Junior and Silva, 2013; Braga Junior et al., 2014). Environmentally responsible purchasing is vital as unplanned purchasing of goods can severely damage the environment. Grunert (1995) reported that consumer household purchases were responsible for 40% of the environmental damage. Consumers possess the capability to prevent or decrease environmental damage by purchasing green products. Previous research indicates that consumers have a positive attitude towards environmental protection (Arvola et al., 2008; Ellen, Webb and Mohr, 2006; Liu et al., 2012; Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006). In fact, consumers have, in the past, expressed their demand for green products to companies (Bockman, Razzouk and Sirotnik, 2009; Schmeltz, 2012). Although the number of individuals willing to purchase green products has increased in the last few years, there is little evidence to suggest that purchase of green products has increased; despite environmental concern and positive attitude of customers towards sustainability and green products, market share of green products remains confined to just 1-3% of the entire market (Bray, Johns and Killburn, 2011).

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This suggests that environmental considerations play a minor role in consumer purchasing decisions and people generally overlook environmental impacts of their purchases (Mohr, Webb and Harris, 2001). There exists a gap between the consumers' thinking and actual actions (Chen and Chai, 2010; Wheale and Hinton, 2007) which was also seen in a study by DEFRA (2006) of UK where 30% of the consumer showed their concern towards environment but rarely bought green products. Previous studies have clearly shown that even though individuals understand the seriousness of environmental issues, their environmental attitudes do not necessarily lead to green purchasing (Bamberg, 2003; Kilbourne and Beckmann, 1998; Nordlund and Garvill, 2002). Recently, Rokka and Uusitalo (2008) claimed that even consumers with the highest level of environmental consciousness do not always purchase green products. It is essential to examine why environmental conscious individuals still have weak green purchase behaviour; there might be possible factors such as price and availability of the product, and social influences among others that lead to the discrepancy between consumer attitude and purchase behaviour. Once these factors are determined through proper research, steps can be taken to address these issues and encourage consumers to actually purchase green products.

It is observed that in Indian market the environmental consciousness has improved with time, making India a potential market for green products (Singh, 2004, 2013). So there is a need to understand the factors motivating the purchase of green products. The purchase of green products can be highly influenced by different reinforcement schedules. Reinforcement schedules are rules which state the instances of behaviour to be reinforced. Reinforcement can be both positive and negative depending upon the situation. But the main aim of reinforcement is to strengthen the behaviour and increase the likelihood that it will occur again in the future. Different reinforcement schedules can be used in the marketing of green products. These can be Direct Positive Reinforcement by Company (DPRC); Direct Positive Reinforcement by Government (DPRG); Direct Negative Reinforcement by Government (DNRG); Indirect Positive Reinforcement by Company (IPRC); Indirect Positive Reinforcement by Government; Indirect Negative Reinforcement by Government; and Extinction. This paper aims to identify the influence of reinforcement schedules on the customer's drive to purchase green products.

Literature Review

Chen and Chai (2010) conducted a study on 184 undergraduate business students to identify the effect of gender on attitude towards environment and green products. They also reviewed the relationship between attitude towards environment and attitude towards green products. The results of their study concluded that there is no significant difference between gender on their attitudes for green product and environmental attitude. They construed that environmental attitude consists of government's role, personal norms and environmental protection. Also, it was found that government role and personal norms significantly contribute to attitude towards green product in comparison to environmental protection. Gugkang, Sondah and Tanakinjal (2014) conducted a study on environmental values, attitude on purchase intention and consumption values in the context of green products on 300 respondents from East Malaysia.

The results of the study revealed that there is a significant relationship between all other dimensions except consumption values and attitude. Braga Junior et al. (2015) surveyed 811 environmental concerned respondents and evaluated their buying behaviour of green products in the retail sector. In the results it was found that attitude and consumption habits does not change and rely on past experiences. Maichum, Parichatnon and Peng (2016) investigated 483 Thai consumers for their purchase intention for green products using the Theory of Planned Behaviour. The findings of the study indicated that the environmental concern have significant effect on attitude and the purchase intention for green products. But environmental knowledge had indirect effect on the attitude towards the purchase of green products and no significant effect on the purchase intention for green products. Nguyen, Lobo and Greenland (2017) investigated the influence of long term cultural values of consumers' on their purchase intention of green products. They surveyed 682 shoppers in popular Vietnamese electrical appliance store and found that people with strong long term cultural values tend to engage in purchase of green products. Arisal and Atalar (2016) analysed the relationship between Environmental Concern and Ecological Purchase Intentions by surveying random sample of 304 respondents. The results of the study established significant relation between environmental concern and environmental concern and ecological purchase intention and further it was found that gender had significant effect on individuals purchase behaviour of green products.

Kar Yan, Yeow and Yazdanifard, Dr. Rashad. (2014) focused on the green product development and green marketing and examined the problems faced by the firms in implementation of green product development and green marketing. D'Souza, Taghien, Lamb and Peretiakos (2013) examined the influence of multiple factors on the green purchase intention of customers in Australia. In the results it was found that the consumers had only negative perception towards green product and were least tolerant towards higher prices and lower quality of green products. Lin and Huang (2011) applied the theory of consumption values and identified the influencing factors on consumer behaviour towards green products and also examined the difference between behaviour and consumption values towards green products. Their study indicated that the main factors that influence the consumer behaviour towards green products include psychological benefit, desire for knowledge, novelty seeking, and specific conditions, and do not include functional values, price and quality.

Gan, Wee, Ozane and Kao (2008) examined the factors impacting purchase behaviour towards green products by surveying 2000 households. Their studies revealed that environmentally conscious consumers were more likely to purchase green products and their purchase decisions included attributes like quality, price and brand. Mainieri, Barnett, Valdero, Unipan and Oskamp (2010) investigated 201 respondents and identified the variables that predicted green buying which included variables like awareness about environmental impacts of products, specific environmental beliefs of consumers, demographic variables. The results of their study revealed that Specific consumer beliefs predicted several green-buying variables as well as general environmental attitudes. It was also found that on environment attitude scale women were significantly higher than men on green buying.

Mishal et. al. (2017) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between environmental consciousness, green purchase attitude, green purchase intention, green behavior, green purchase behavior and perceived customer effectiveness. They concluded that green consciousness has an effect on the perceived customer effectiveness and green purchase attitude; green purchase attitude has an effect on green behavior and perceived customer effectiveness; green purchase intention has an impact perceived customer effectiveness and green behavior has an impact on green purchase behavior. They also construed that there is a lack in conversion of environmental consciousness to green behavior and green purchase behavior which can be attributed to cost, branding, availability and variety of green products. Teng, Ow, Sandhu, Kaur, Kassim and Kalsom (2018) determined the relationship of subjective norms and consumer purchase intention and perceived behavioral control towards environmental friendly food products. Simple random sampling was used in this study and 151 respondents were interviewed and the results concluded that the consumer attitude is a moderator in the relationship between subjective norms and their intention to purchase environmental friendly food products.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Objective of the study

- To understand the reinforcement schedules which can be used to motivate consumers for green products.

Sample: This study was conducted on people from different background in the national capital region of India. Responses were collected from 184 respondents. These people were from different backgrounds such as working professionals, home makers and students. The demographic profile of the respondents is, as mentioned in Table 1. The sample consisted of 72 Males and 112 Females. According to Age there were 160 respondents in the age range of 18-35 years termed as Young Adults and there are 24 respondents in the age range of 36-55 years termed as Mid Age Adults. Marital status wise there are 126 respondents who are Unmarried and 58 respondents who are Married. According to Family type, there were 64 respondents from Joint Family and 120 respondents from Nuclear Family. Socio Economic status of 20 respondents is High, 160 have Middle Socio Economic Status and 4 respondents have Low Socio Economic Status. 76 of the respondents are Undergraduate, 86 of the respondents are Post Graduate and 22 respondents belong to others. Income group of 74 respondents are up to 5 Lakhs, 72 respondents belong to income group of 5.1-10 Lakhs, 26 respondents have annual income between 10.1-20 lakhs and 12 respondents have an annual income above 20 Lakhs. There are 34 respondents who have done schooling from Government School, 36 of the respondents have done their schooling from Convent School and 114 of the respondents have done their schooling from Public School. A self administered questionnaire with 15 items was developed to analyse the different reinforcement schedules, i.e., Direct Positive Reinforcement by Company (DPRC); Direct Positive Reinforcement by Government (DPRG); Direct Negative Reinforcement by Government (DNRG); Indirect Positive Reinforcement by Company (IPRC); Indirect Positive Reinforcement by Government; Indirect Negative Reinforcement by Government; and Extinction with respect to green products.

The cronbach alpha score of the entire questionnaire came out to be 0.874. The various reinforcement schedules are defined as under

- **Direct Positive Reinforcement by Company (DPRC)** is defined as rewards offered by company to purchase green products, regular awareness campaigns, and cheaper prices.
- **Direct Positive Reinforcement by Government (DPRG)** is defined as regular awareness campaigns, Rewards on purchase of green products by government to customers
- **Direct Negative Reinforcement by Government (DNRG)** is defined as punishment induced by government of purchasing non green product, banning all other variants of green products.
- **Indirect Positive Reinforcement by Company (IPRC)** is defined as rewards offered by company to sellers for selling green products.
- **Indirect Positive Reinforcement by Government (IPRG)** is defined as rewards offered by government to sellers for selling green products.
- **Indirect Negative Reinforcement by Government (INRG)** is defined as punishments to sellers by government on not selling green products
- **Extinction** is defined as complete removal of non green products from markets and closure of any such production.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data from 184 respondents was collected and analysed using paired 't' test to compare the different reinforcement schedules. The mean calculations of all the respondents taken together shows that respondents believe that high Direct Positive Reinforcement by Company (DPRC) Direct Positive Reinforcement by Government (DPRG); Direct Negative Reinforcement by Government (DNRG); Indirect Positive Reinforcement by Company (IPRC); Indirect Positive Reinforcement by Government and Extinction have a high influence green product purchase behaviour. While, Indirect Negative Reinforcement by Government shows and average influence on green product purchase behaviour. (Table 2). Since not much can be inferred from the mean score therefore paired t test was used to make a comparison as to which reinforcement schedules are best for influencing green product purchase behaviour. For this comparison was made between all the different reinforcement schedules considering a pair of schedules at a time.

Thus, 21 pairs were analysed and found the difference in reinforcement schedule. It is evident that there is a significant difference between Direct Positive Reinforcement by Company and Indirect Positive Reinforcement by Company; Direct positive reinforcement by Company and Extinction; Direct Positive Reinforcement by Company and Direct Negative Reinforcement by Government; Direct Positive Reinforcement by Company and Indirect Negative Reinforcement by Government; Direct Positive Reinforcement by Government; Direct Positive Reinforcement by Government and Direct Negative Reinforcement by Government; Direct Positive Reinforcement by Government and Indirect Positive Reinforcement by Company; Direct positive reinforcement by Government and Direct Negative Reinforcement by Government; Direct Positive Reinforcement

Table 1. Showing Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Gender	Males	Females		
	72	112		
Age	Young Adults (18-35 Years of Age)	Mid Age Adults (36-55 years of Age)		
	160	24		
Marital Status	Unmarried	Married		
	126	58		
Family Type	Joint Family	Nuclear Family		
	64	120		
Socio Economic Status	High SES	Middle SES	Low SES	
	20	160	4	
Education Background	Undergraduate	Post Graduate	Others	
	76	86	22	
Income Group (Annual Income)	Up to 5 Lakh	5.1-10 Lakh	10.1-20 Lakh	Above 20 Lakh
	74	72	26	12
Type of Schooling	Government School	Convent School	Public School	
	34	36	114	

Table 2. Showing Comparison of Mean score of all Respondents against Criterion Norms

Sr. No.	Factors	Very High (4.3-5)	High (3.5-4.2)	Average (2.7-3.4)	Low (1.9-2.6)	Very Low (1-1.8)
1	Direct Positive Reinforcement by Company (DPRC)		4.07			
2	Direct Positive Reinforcement by Government (DPRG)		3.97			
3	Direct Negative Reinforcement by Government (DNRG)		3.71			
4	Indirect Positive Reinforcement by Company (IPRC)		3.76			
5	Indirect Positive Reinforcement by Government		3.86			
6	Indirect Negative Reinforcement by Government			3.37		
7	Extinction		3.84			

Table 3. Showing the results of paired ‘t’ test between different pairs reinforcement schedules

Pairs	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
DPRC - IPRC	2.846	182	.005
DPRC - IPRG	1.739	182	.085
DPRC - DPRG	1.240	182	.218
DPRC - EXTIN	2.243	182	.027
DPRC - DNRG	4.299	182	.000
DPRC - INRG	7.289	182	.000
DPRG - EXTIN	1.099	182	.275
DPRG - DNRG	2.770	182	.007
DPRG - IPRC	2.353	182	.021
DPRG - IPRG	.983	182	.328
DPRG - INRG	6.182	182	.000
EXTIN - DNRG	1.284	182	.203
EXTIN - IPRC	.690	182	.492
EXTIN - IPRG	-.192	182	.848
EXTIN - INRG	4.239	182	.000
DNRG - IPRC	-.484	182	.630
DNRG - IPRG	-1.334	182	.185
DNRG - INRG	3.470	182	.001
IPRC - IPRG	-1.174	182	.243
IPRC - INRG	3.873	182	.000
IPRG - INRG	4.969	182	.000

Table 4. Summarized results of T test

	DPRC	DPRG	DNRG	IPRC	IPRG	INRG	Ext.
DPRC	----	X	*r	*r	X	*r	*r
DPRG	X	----	*r	*r	X	*r	X
DNRG	*c	*c	----	X	X	*r	X
IPRC	*c	*c	X	----	X	*r	X
IPRG	X	X	X	X	----	*r	X
INRG	*c	*c	*c	*c	*c	----	*c
Ext.	*c	X	X	X	X	*r	----

by Government and Indirect Negative Reinforcement by Government; Direct Negative Reinforcement by Government and Indirect Negative Reinforcement by Government; Extinction and Indirect Negative Reinforcement by Government; Indirect Positive Reinforcement by Company and Indirect Negative Reinforcement by Government; and lastly, Indirect Positive Reinforcement by Government and Indirect

Negative Reinforcement by Government. While there is no difference between Direct Positive Reinforcement by Company and Indirect Positive Reinforcement by Government; Direct Positive Reinforcement by Company and Direct Positive Reinforcement by Government; Direct Positive Reinforcement by Government and Extinction; Direct Positive Reinforcement by Government and Indirect Negative

Reinforcement by Government; Extinction and Direct Negative Reinforcement by Government; Extinction and Indirect Positive Reinforcement by Company; Extinction and Indirect Negative Reinforcement by Government; Direct Negative Reinforcement by Government and Indirect Positive Reinforcement by Company; Direct Negative Reinforcement by Government and Indirect Negative Reinforcement by Government; Indirect Positive Reinforcement by Company and Indirect Negative Reinforcement by Government. Further, comparisons were made between the pairs of reinforcement schedules that showed significant difference (Table 3). Table 4 shows the result of the comparison of all the reinforcement schedules. Both rows and columns are denoted by reinforcement schedules. To show significant difference between the two pairs of reinforcement schedules ‘*’ is used while ‘x’ depicts that there is no difference. The terms ‘r’ and ‘c’ in each of the significantly different pair shows which of the two has a better mean value row (r) or column (c). The results reveal that the best reinforcement style to influence customer purchase intentions for green product is Direct positive Reinforcement by Company, thus companies should run better campaigns for green products and provide rewards to motivate people to buy more green products.

The second best reinforcement style is Direct positive Reinforcement by Government wherein government should take the initiative to make people aware of the green products and motivate them by offering some rewards or subsidies. Results show that Direct Negative Reinforcement by Government and Indirect Positive Reinforcement by Company holds equal importance in influencing the customers to purchase green products. Therefore, either government should ban the other variants of products for which green products are available or companies should make efforts in motivating sellers to sell more green products by giving them rewards. In fourth place, Extinction is preferred wherein it is assumed that customers would purchase green products only when no other products are available i.e. government should take steps to remove all the other non-green products from the market. Indirect Positive Reinforcement by Government and Indirect Negative Reinforcement by Government have the least influence on the customers to purchase green products as customers are unable to shift to green products by the indirect efforts made by the government like offering rewards and imposing punishment on sellers to sell green products does not have great impact on customers to purchase green products.

Conclusion

Since there is an increasing pressure to protect the environment of the entire world, companies, to sustain, are constantly making efforts towards exploring new ideas and developing new ways and implementing new strategies come up with green products and market them in such a way that customers are attracted to buy them. The Government is also making efforts to make customers aware of the benefits of green products and the hazards of using other products. The results of our study reveal that although it is only the customer's psyche that makes him switch to green products, but there are a few reinforcement schedules that can be used to induce the same. It is clear from the results that, Direct reinforcement, whether positive or negative, by the company or government has a major impact on the customer's decision to buy green products.

And Extinction is another style of reinforcement that which can be used to effectively induce the sale of green products. While, indirect reinforcements, whether positive or negative, by the company or the government does not make much difference in the customer's decision to buy green products. Thus, companies should advertise their green products to not only increase awareness, but also to make the product familiar to customers and also provide discounts to induce the sale of green products. Also, government should support the companies producing green products and should positively and negatively motivate customers to purchase green products. Further, if the results are seen from reverse psychology point of view then the reinforcement schedules least preferred will work in driving people to buy green products. Positive or Negative it is such reinforcements by companies and by government can go a long way in making the environment healthy for living.

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