



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### GREEN MARKETING PRACTICES AS A SOURCE OF SUSTAINABILITY AND COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE: INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

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#### ABSTRACT

Increased industrialization and ever growing consumerism has led to a situation where industrial pursuits of mankind have started to cast an unfavorable impact on environment that may prove self-destructive for the future. Earlier Developed countries, in their pursuit of economic development and progression to their current economic status, showed little respect for environmental concerns. But as on today, there is an increased awareness on part of their industries, governments and even consumers for conserving environment and cutting down on pollution. Nevertheless, it is just a beginning and there is a long, long-way to go. The growing awareness for environmental concerns led to adoption of Green marketing practices, which though, of relatively recent origin has gained worldwide popularity and recognition in a brief time period. In Indian Perspective, during the last few years, hundreds of studies have been carried out on the subject, addressing the various facets of the concept. Thus the purpose of this paper is to understand the perception of industries in India towards green marketing practices- a fast growing economy, towards green philosophy and to investigate further what initiatives those industries have taken for becoming green. To create a sustainable environment, the aim of this study is to explore and identify the components of environmental attitude that can drive the specific ecological behavior of Indian organizations. Most of the industries had the perception that Adopting green marketing practices would ensure them competitive advantage over their competitors. Therefore, these days' concepts of green marketing are taking shape as one of the key business practices of the companies for gaining the competitive advantage, ensuring sustainability. This research is a step to fill up this gap. The findings of the study demonstrate that these days' industries are having high concern about environmental protection and are willing to produce those products which are environmentally friendly i.e. green in nature. The companies who offer green products will definitely enjoy a competitive advantage over their competitors.

#### INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, increasing attention has been given world over to the natural environment. Several studies have highlighted the threatening challenges posed by the growing human population, industrial production, and the consumption of goods and non-renewable resources, with a consequent impact on environment and sustenance. Global warming is a problem characterized by uncertainties, but this cannot be taken as an excuse for inaction. Thus Sustainability issues, green brands, and environmental consciousness are on rise in emerging economies. Government and organizations are becoming conscious about environment-related problem (Khare, 2015). As such environmental pollution/conservation has become a buzz word in today's business which has made it imperative to adopt such developmental models which are environmental friendly and self-sustaining.

The emerging business culture of social responsibility drives corporations to become proactive toward sustainable innovation. Being environmentally responsible helps corporations reduce their exposure to social criticism and appeal to the customers looking for green products and services (Yoon, E. and Tello, S, 2009). Thus Green marketing has gained momentum, primarily with the change in attitude and behavior of the commercial activities. Although environmental issues influence all human activities, few researchers have integrated green issues in the literature (Chen and Chang, 2012) (Cronin et al, 2011). As the society is more concerned with the natural environment, businesses have begun to modify their behavior in an attempt to address new societal concerns. Some businesses have been quick to accept concepts like environmental management systems and waste minimization, etc. and have integrated environmental issues into all organizational activities (Saxena and Khandelwal, 2012). The companies that calculate these uncertainties effectively can explore ample of new opportunities and can minimize the future risks and threats to their businesses. Many companies in the industrialized nations

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are into the environmental revolution since last three decades and have recognized that they can reduce pollution and increase profits at the same time. But beyond corporate "greening" lies the enormous challenge – and opportunity to develop a sustainable global economy, one that the planet is capable of supporting indefinitely (Hart, S.L. and Milstein, M.B., 1999). The fact is, that challenges posed by global warming or problems emerging from environmental uncertainties do not automatically create opportunities to grow or booking more profits. It needs a strategic approach to calculate risks and to explore new opportunities, including strategic investment planning and a long-term vision. Thus there is a need of stable development which can lead to sustainability. Thus "Sustainable development as per the "Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (United Nations, 1987)" can be viewed as a pattern of resource use that aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but in the indefinite future. Sustainable consumption and sustainable development are the two faces of the same coin and are closely related for attaining sustainable growth. Sustainable development refers to maintaining long-term economic, social and environmental capital.

While sustainable consumption becomes the way of life and adds a new dimension in socio-economic development. Sustainable consumption is using resources in a way that minimizes harm to the environment while supporting the well-being of people. One of the key business strategies for sustainable growth has taken the shape of green marketing. It is also believed that the companies who will provide green offerings will give them a competitive advantage over their competitors as people these days have a positive attitude for green products. Green marketing can be a profitable endeavor for sustainable growth. This research is an attempt by the authors to understand the attitude of Industries in India towards green marketing. Are they concerned about the environmental protection as the industries in developed countries are? Do they also feel that by practicing green philosophy they will gain competitive advantage and will ensure sustainable development? Thus Green marketing is a phenomenon which has developed particularly important in the modern market and has emerged as an important concept in India as in other parts of the developing and developed world to achieve sustainability.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of green marketing is evolved from the traditional marketing concept since 1980s (Peattie, K. and Crane, A., 2005). According (Prakash, 2002) to relationship between marketing discipline and natural environment is important as organizations perceive it as an opportunity that can be used to achieve their objectives. This relationship has been described by many terms: that is, environmental marketing (Coddington, 1993) ecological marketing (Henion and Kinnear, 1976), green marketing (Mishra and Sharma, 2010) (Ottman, 1992) Environmental Marketing management (Peattie, 1995) sustainable marketing (Fuller, 1999) and greener marketing (Charter and Polonsky, 1999). The green marketing or environmental marketing encompass all activities related to product modification, production process and packaging changes, as well as modifying advertising, etc. These activities are designed to generate and facilitate any

exchanges that intend to satisfy the needs or want of customers and society and also simultaneously pave way for organizational growth in a profitable manner with minimal negative impact on the natural environment, the American Marketing Association (Welling, M.N. and Chavan, A.S., 2010). Although the green marketing concept has evolved since 1960s and early 1970s with increasing concern about the impact of consumption and production patterns on the environment (Cohen, 2001). However, it has received significant attention from late 1980s with an increase in the level of green consumerism (Mishra and Sharma, 2010). Until today, the concept has not been developed comprehensively. (Lee, K., 2008) Remarked that the companies which initially produced green products were not successful in their ventures. Limited availability, limited functionality features and high price were found to be major reasons for the failure of such products (Grant, 2007). This, consequently, reduced the demand for green products and hence, the green marketing concept lost some prominence in the debate. Later, companies again took the initiative to produce green products but after considering thorough research on four P's (product, price, place and promotion). (Ottman, 1992) Argue that such companies should emphasize identification of the nature of customer expectations of product, price and the marketing approach that helps in the ease of accessibility of the product. Further, researchers such as (Grant, 2007) and (Peattie and Crane, 2005) argued that for companies to establish a green image they need market presence and must undertake research to understand and to educate their customers to build brands, products and services that are environmental- friendly.

The concept later expanded to include not only environmental-friendly activities but also activities which are healthy, conducive, encouraging, advantageous and favorable for the overall benefit of the stakeholders. Further, (Prakash, 2002) explained green marketing as a composite of broad range of activities which include recycling, construction and renovation of building with the marketing mix elements in the manufacturing sector. Later, (Cronin et al., 2011) (Ottoman, 2011) underscored the fact that an organization, to achieve its goals, must pursue green strategies which pave ways for addressing the needs of the various stakeholder groups. They identified three main types of green strategies from the literature: that is, green innovation, greening the process and green alliances. The first strategy (green innovation) is the development of new or innovative green products. It is believed that the development of new products or services send a positive signal to each stakeholder that the organization is a green company. Another potential strategy (greening the process) is to focus on environmental aspects within the firm itself. In this case, the initiatives are more focused on greening the processes associated with the production of a good or the delivery of a service. Beyond producing new, green products or greening the organization's processes, a company can also choose to utilize an alliance or partnership to enhance the green orientation (green alliances). While, other researchers such as (Ottoman, 2011) and (Grant, 2007) put forth that the green marketing concept not only emphasizes on product improvement but also improves the life style of the people by changing their behavior which ultimately enhances the marketability and the overall performance of the firm.

This ultimately can result in a new source of innovation (Ottoman, 2011). An examination of literature revealed that there are several studies on green marketing in both developed and emerging countries. Studies in emerging economies, especially China, have discussed role of culture, social influence, ecological knowledge, and green brand image (Chen, 2010). In comparison to other emerging economies, research on environmental issues in India is still in nascent stages. Press releases suggest that ecological concerns and green manufacturing is on increase in the country (Sally, 2013) and consumers are willing to pay more money for green products. Few studies have examined green marketing and production initiatives taken up by Indian companies (Shrikanth and Raju, 2012). Indian companies are pursuing green practices to differentiate themselves from competitors (Saxena and Khandelwal, 2012).

However Indian consumers' knowledge about green products, organic and recyclable brands, and green production processes is limited. In recent years, there is increase in efforts by government to protect environment. (Ishawini and Datta, 2011) posit that Indian consumers' involvement in green products and environmental concern are important in predicting their intention to buy green products. Pro-environmental awareness and concerns influence consumers' attitude towards green products; however, consumers were not confident about quality of green products. They lacked knowledge about green products and felt it was responsibility of government and companies to follow green practices ((Jain and Kaur, 2004) (Mishra and Sharma, 2010) (Maheshwari, and Malhotra, 2011) (Roy, 2013) (Khar, 2015) Unavailability of information about quality, composition, performance, and benefits of green products negatively influence purchase and consumption of green products. Drawing from these studies, factors relevant for understanding Indian companies towards green marketing practices were identified.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the need & importance of Green marketing practices in India.
- To examine the reasons & problems that organizations face while adopting green marketing philosophy.
- To study the present scenario and potential of Green marketing practices in
- India.
- To design the strategies for successful Green marketing practices in India.

## NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF GREEN MARKETING PRACTICES IN INDIA

World over green marketing has recently achieved attention of scholars and practitioners to address the increasing concern of environmentalist and human activities about the adverse effects of production and consumption of industrial goods and services. Various studies are being conducted particularly in developed countries to understand the impact of business activities on environment. However in India, such initiatives are yet to match the global or required pace. Issues like Global warming and depletion of ozone umbrella are the main for the healthy survival.

Every person rich or poor would be interested in quality life with full of health and vigor and so would the corporate class. Financial gain and economic profit is the main aim of any corporate business. But harm to environment cost by sustain business across the globe is realized now though off late. This sense is building corporate citizenship in the business class. So green marketing by the business class is still in the selfish anthropological perspective of long term sustainable business and to please the consumer and obtain the license by the governing body. Industries in Asian countries are catching the need of green marketing from the developed countries, but in India still there is a wide gap between understanding green marketing practices and its implementation.

According to a report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Bank and the United States, prepared for the G20 Summits (Mexico, 2012), without any new policy action, it has been projected that there will be about 50% increase in greenhouse gas emissions and a significant worsening of urban air pollution by 2050 (OECD, 2012). Condition of the environment is expected to worsen in the years and decades ahead. Despite conflicting reports and opinions, most scientists still predict that the average temperature will rise between 1.8 and 4.0 degrees Celsius during the 21st century solely due to the burning of fossil fuels. By 2030, climate-change-induced calamities alone are projected to account for 500,000 deaths and \$340 billion in damages, up from 315,000 and about \$125 billion today.

Global water demand is projected to increase by 55% by 2050, with competition for water intensifying. As a result, it is projected that almost 40% of the world's population would be living in areas categorized as suffering from severe water stress by 2050. Over the past 25 years 60% of the world's major ecosystems have been degraded or used unsustainably, including through declining soil quality, land degradation and deforestation. By 2050, global terrestrial biodiversity is projected to decline by a further 10% (OECD, 2012). In agriculture, productivity increases have helped to limit natural ecosystem loss in many countries, but poorly managed intensification has also exacerbated agro-chemical and water pollution, soil exhaustion and salinity (World Bank, 2012). The costs and consequences of inaction on these environmental challenges are enormous, both in economic and human terms, and could jeopardize further progress in economic prosperity and poverty reduction (OECD, 2008). Future generations could find themselves significantly disadvantaged and their overall welfare compromised. (Choudhary.P and Gokarn.S, 2013)

## GREEN MARKETING- CHALLENGES

Although a large number of industries are practicing green marketing, it is not an easy job as there are a number of problems which need to be addressed while Implementing Green marketing. The major challenges to Green marketing which have to be faced are: Need for Standardization-It is found that only 5% of the marketing messages from "Green" campaigns are entirely true and there is a lack of standardization to authenticate these claims. There is no standardization currently in place to certify a product as organic. Unless some regulatory bodies are involved in providing the certifications there will not be any verifiable means. A standard quality control board needs to be in place for such labeling and licensing.

New Concept-Indian literate and urban consumer is getting more aware about the merits of Green products. But it is still a new concept for the masses. The consumer needs to be educated and made aware of the environmental threats. The new green movements need to reach the masses and that will take a lot of time and effort. Cost Factor- Green marketing involves marketing of green products/services, green technology, green power/energy for which a lot of money has to be spent on R&D programmers for their development and subsequent promotional programs which ultimately may lead to increased costs. Convincing customers-The customers may not believe in the firm's strategy of Green marketing, the firm therefore should ensure that they undertake all possible measures to convince the customer about their green product, the best possible option is by implementing Eco-labeling schemes. Eco-labeling schemes offer its approval to environmentally less harmless products. In fact the first eco-label program was initiated by Germany in 1978. Sometimes the customers may also not be willing to pay the extra price for the products.

Sustainability- Initially the profits are very low since renewable and recyclable products and green technologies are more expensive. Green marketing will be successful only in long run. Hence the business needs to plan for long term rather than short term strategy and prepare for the same, at the same time it should avoid falling into lure of unethical practices to make profits in short term. Non Cooperation- The firms practicing Green marketing have to strive hard in convincing the stakeholders and many a times it may fail to convince them about the long term benefits of Green marketing as compared to short term expenses.

Avoiding Green Myopia- Green marketing must satisfy two objectives: improved environmental quality and customer satisfaction. Misjudging either or over emphasizing the former at the expense of the latter can be termed —green marketing myopia. In short firms using green marketing must ensure that their activities are not misleading to the consumers or the industry, and do not breach any of the regulations or laws dealing with environmental marketing.

#### **WHY FIRMS EMPHASIZING ON GREEN MARKETING?**

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. In India, the green building movement, spearheaded by the Confederation of Indian industry (CII) - Godrej Green business Center, has gained tremendous impetus over the last few years. From 20,000 sq. ft. in 2003, India's green building footprint is now over 25 million sq. ft. 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 year 2012. 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. Governmental-Pressure-Variou regulations rare 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 and Kashmir, prohibition of smoking in public areas, etc.

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. Cost-Reduction-Reduction 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.

#### **STRATEGIES FOR GREEN MARKETING PRACTICES:**

Marketing literature on greening products, firms builds on both the societal and social marketing research. Social marketing focuses on designing and implementing programs that increase the acceptability of a social idea, cause, or practice in (a) target group(s). (Peattie and Crane, 2005) defined environmental marketing in terms of customer satisfaction in a sustainable fashion which refers as 'the holistic management process responsible for identifying, anticipating, and satisfying the requirements of the consumers and society, in a profitable and sustainable way'. It implies that organizations (governments, businesses and nonprofit organizations) need to determine the needs of target markets and to deliver the desired satisfactions in a way that enhances the consumers and the society's wellbeing. Green marketing involves focusing on promoting the consumption of green products. (Prakash, 2002).

Has classified the different ways in which businesses can move towards greenness. According to him, green initiatives include changes in the value addition processes, changes in the management systems and changes in the products or modification of inputs. Changes in the value addition processes would include introduction of new technology for production, or modification of existing methods of production to reduce their environmental impact. Firms can also establish and ensure implementation of management systems designed to promote environmental, health and safety norms. Further several benefits are offered due to implementation of green marketing strategies such as reduction of trade barriers, few health and safety impacts; improve community and employee relation, environmental

improvement and accurate information (Kuhre, 1995). In this context, (Menon and Menon, 1997) suggest that firms could adopt entrepreneurial marketing strategies. The processes for formulating and implementing entrepreneurial and environmentally beneficial marketing activities with the goal of creating revenue by providing exchanges that satisfy firms economic and social objectives. According to (Kumar.P and Ghodeswar.B.M, 2014) marketers willing to re-orientate themselves towards green marketing should cultivate an environmentally-friendly corporate culture in their companies in which green marketing activities are supported at all strategic levels. They need to direct their efforts in such a manner that each marketing activity has an environmental orientation that produces profitable exchanges through increased levels of satisfaction for customers. Green marketers in consumer goods companies need to focus on interaction of all parts of a product system with the environment. They should demonstrate their commitment towards environmental protection by waste reduction, pollution prevention and energy conservation. It comprises of material and energy flows throughout the 'life cycle' of the product, including raw material extraction, suppliers' plants, manufacturers' plants, transport and distribution networks, waste treatment and disposal.

Green marketers may develop guidelines and policies that promote the use of materials with national and international environmental standards, and recycled/recyclable materials, and ban the use of environmentally harmful ingredients in manufacturing of green products. Similarly, they may collaborate with their suppliers to develop packaging technologies and environmentally-friendly manufacturing processes. Packaging changes in products are important to make them stand out on shelves in retail stores. It also allows green marketers to make environmentally-friendly changes in distribution and transportation, storage facilities and shelf-life of products. In pricing of green products, green marketers may adopt benefit-based positioning and offer comparative analysis for a green product against their substitutes for prices, features, technical specifications, pictures and reviews. They should also effectively communicate that green products may not perform as equally as their traditional substitutes because altering the product composition changes their performance.

Further, setting prices inversely proportional to environmental impact of green products is another significant approach for pricing of green products. For example, refrigerators can be priced differently for different levels of savings offered in energy consumption. Similarly, lubricants and grease can be priced differently for different levels of improvement in engine efficiency, fuel efficiency and reduction in waste, and personal care products can be priced differently for different levels of their impact on human health. These approaches enable green marketers to cater to different segments of the consumers based on their affordability. They should also develop distinct ways of retailing and distribution for green products which may reduce cost of operations and further reducing the prices of green products. Green marketing communication has to take a different direction towards more environmentally oriented that will intend to satisfy different consumer needs and to foster environmentally-friendly corporate image. Green marketers for consumer products need to so advertise green products that consumers develop rich knowledge base for environmental

features of the products and value for money. They are suggested to relate company's innovative green practices with their environmental performance such as longer life, low power consumption, and lesser weight for consumer electronics products, and improved performance of engine for lubricants. They should also advertise code of conduct, certifications, honors and awards for their environmental performance, and membership and affiliations to environmental organizations. Further, they should engage consumers by facilitating them to write reviews, comments and feedback. They should also discuss with consumers about green products through several modes such as discussion board, group chats, moderated group chats (moderated by green marketers), and interactive platforms on social networking websites. This will enable them to gauge the potential existence of market segments based on several criteria such as product environmental features and value for money. These practices help green marketers to improve their competitiveness in the market.

Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of the companies to adopt creativity and insight, and be committed to the development of environment-friendly products. This will help the society in the long run. There are few examples of firms adopting both strategies. Body Shop heavily promotes the fact that they are environmentally responsible. Coca-Cola, Tata group, Colgate Palmolive etc. have invested large sums of money in various recycling activities, as well as having modified their packaging to minimize its environmental impact. The Government regulations relating to environmental marketing are also designed to protect consumers in several ways;

- To reduce production of harmful goods or by-products.
- To modify consumer and industry's use and/or consumption of harmful goods. or
- To ensure that all types of consumers have the ability to evaluate the environmental composition of goods.

## Conclusion and Limitations

As the demand for green products undoubtedly exists, Green Marketing provides an opportunity to the companies to increase their market-share by introducing eco-friendly products. Stricter environmental regulations across the world, growing consumer preference for eco-friendly companies, and the inherent cost advantages in lowering toxic waste, are encouraging industries big and small to clean up. Researcher found that, consumers are not overly committed to improving their environment and may be looking to lay too much responsibility on industry and government. Though it's the responsibility of the firm to produce products, which are having minimum impact on the environment, but ultimately it's the consumer who is having responsibility to use eco-friendly products. Consumers are not too much concerned about the environment but as they have become more sophisticated, they require clear information about how choosing one product over another will benefit the environment. Consumer education results in their empowerment. Empowered consumers choose environmentally preferable products when all other factors are equal.

Ultimately green marketing requires that consumers Think Green, Think clean, Think Eco-friendly i.e. they want a cleaner environment and are willing to “pay” for it, possibly through higher priced goods, modified individual lifestyles, or even governmental intervention. Until this occurs it will be difficult for firms alone to lead the green marketing revolution. The study contributes to green marketing literature by exploring companies’ green marketing practices and identifying factors determining Sustainability. The conceptual development incorporates possible directions to develop green marketing inclination and thus, offers a practical framework to manage organizational viability and long run survival. It is seen as a philosophy that explains companies’ behavior in their relationship with the environment. It can be described as marketing response to the design, production, packaging, use and disposal of products. It addresses entire life cycle of a product consumed in the society and development of marketing mix for green products to strengthen beliefs regarding the environmental performance of products and to cater to market needs. Thus, it is a universal way of adding social and environmental values to the products consumed in the society. This work develops and validates a scale to capture green marketing practices that develops green marketing inclination. The main theoretical contribution of the study is proposing novel constructs for studying green marketing practices. It is an innovative synthesis of both existing and new elements of green marketing that can support future research in this direction to understand companies’ real behavior towards green marketing. Although the study adds to the existing literature, the conceptual nature of the study is the major limitation. The research propositions formulated need to be empirically tested across various sectors.

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