The Other Side Of The Coin: An Enquiry Into The Difficulties And Apprehensions Encountered By Consumers With Green Products

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Abstract

Every reality has its own positives and negatives. As the proverb goes coin has two sides. It is very much true in the case of green products too. There is no doubt that green products have many benefits and positives. Despite all the good things about green products, there exist a few glitches and shadows, thereby creating a few doubts and apprehensions in the minds of consumers. The present paper tries to understand these problems associated with green products from the perspectives of the consumers and analyses them with an intention of providing the green brands the means and ways to eliminate such anomalies. The study finds out that the unavailability of products is the most difficult thing the consumers have experienced while purchasing.

Keywords: Green Marketing, Consumers’ Apprehensions, Environmental Concern, Ecological degradation, Green Purchase

Introduction

Green marketing has been very powerful marketing strategy employed by various corporates and brands. It has indeed caught the attention of general public and consumers believe that becoming green is a win-win situation. The companies have been able to increase their market share with this magical word ‘Green’. The very success story of Pantanjali whose phenomenal growth from a humble beginning to a market giant worth Rs.11,000 crores in 2016=17 financial year\(^1\) bears witness to the popularity and acceptance that green products enjoy among the consumers.

Problem discussion

\(^1\)GST roadblocks hit Baba Ramdev-led Patanjali's growth in FY18, economictimes.indiatimes.com, accessed on 15/04/2019
It is quite evident that green marketing going to stay in the scheme of marketing wizards for ages. With the increasing concern over the environmental problems and health hazards associated with non-green products, the market is expected to grow more and more in the coming days. The consumers feel that green is the way forward to protect the fragile environment of the earth. They believe that by purchasing environmentally friendly products they can contribute to the preservation of the ecology. This is the reason why many consumers want to go green. Nonetheless, the recent studies have shown that though many want to purchase green products, but these positive attitudes and inclinations do not get converted into real purchasing of green products. Some of the challenges that many companies had to encounter in this matter are apprehension about green claims by brands, recent scandals of green products, misunderstanding about green products, premium price involved in green products, unavailability of green products etc. Hence it has become imperative to examine what are the difficulties, problems and apprehensions of consumers about green or eco-friendly products. The present paper makes an attempt to understand the above stated issues involved in green marketing and purchasing of green products.

Review of Literature

PremShandasani, et al (1993) in the study of Exploring Green Consumers in an oriental Culture: Role of Personal and Marketing Mix Factors, examined the differences between ecologically—concerned and non-ecologically concerned with respect to their personal and social characteristics and their perceptions about the marketing of eco-friendly products. They found out that the Green consumers are more inclined towards green products due to their concern of the environment than the non-green consumers. The green consumers were

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ready to give up their personal comfort for the sake of environment. They were also convinced that their contribution did matter in preserving the environment. It was found that the environment protection is a personal choice rather than the duty of any government or agencies. The researchers also came across another fact that green consumers are cosmopolitan and seemed to be globally oriented. They have a transcending attitude and believe that environmental crisis is a global issue and not a local one. Their research failed to find any significant difference between green consumers and non-green consumers as far as demography was concerned. As far as marketing mix was concerned, it was revealed that green consumers are ready to pay more for green products and not bothered about lack of product variety.\footnote{Chen and Chang (2012), Consumers’ purchase intention of green products: an investigation of the drivers and moderating variable, created a framework to analyse the impact of green perceived value and green perceived risk on green purchase intention. They also tried to figure out the effect of green trust on the above mentioned variables. They inferred through the data analysis that green perceived value has a positive influence on green trust and purchase intention. However, green perceived risk had a negative influence on green trust and green purchase intention. Furthermore, the research revealed that green trust moderately influenced green perceived intention and its antecedents i.e. green perceived value and green perceived risk. This prompted them to conclude that the companies should invest more and more resources in calibrating the green perceived value and reducing green perceived risk. This would be reflected in creating higher trust and green purchase intention.\footnote{PremShamdasani, Gloria Ong Chon-Lin, Daleen Richmond (1993), Exploring Green Consumers in an Oriental Culture: Role of Personal and Marketing Mix Factors, Advances in Consumer Research Volume 20, pp. 488-493}}

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**TriptiSahu** (2012), Green Marketing: An Attitudinal and Behavioral Analysis of Consumers in Pune, the main objective of the study was to evaluate the association between variables concrete to environmental consciousness and pro-ecological purchase and conservation behaviours. The study and the analysis of the consumers, who had concern for the environment, discovered that consumers were indeed concerned about the environment, but not to the extent of possibility of converting this concern into actual purchasing of eco-friendly products. It was also found out that there was an inconsistency between consumer attitude and behaviour.⁶

**Hans, Jim** (2007), observed that green brands have exploited the prevailing uncertainty in the market with regard to what constitute green products to their advantage. They propagate deliberately false or overstated green claims. This has alienated many from purchasing green products. Following the same logic it becomes possible to argue that green marketing leads to fantasy in the world where consumers need eco-friendly environment.⁷

**Methodology**

**Collection of Data**

Quantitative approach was selected for the study. Subsequently disproportionate stratified sampling was chosen. The researcher distributed 250 self-completion questionnaire among the target group. The questionnaire was comprised of ten variables pertaining to the aspects of green products and green marketing.

**Statistical Tool**

Friedman Test was employed to understand the difficulties and apprehensions of consumers about green products and green marketing.

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Friedman test for significant difference among mean of the difficulties faced by customers

H₀: There is no significant difference among mean ranks of the difficulties perceived by consumers while purchasing eco-friendly products.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Factors of effectiveness of Institute-Industry Collaboration</th>
<th>Mean Rank</th>
<th>Chi-Square value</th>
<th>P value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Green products are not easily available</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Green Products are not properly and adequately promoted</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Green products are priced very high</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I find it difficult to believe in the information relating to Green Products</td>
<td>5.23</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Information related to Green products are not clearly displayed on packages</td>
<td>5.37</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>False information is given to mislead the customers</td>
<td>5.68</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Majority of companies are not ready to implement green marketing concept</td>
<td>5.81</td>
<td></td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Not many companies produce green products, resulting in scarcity of such products</td>
<td>6.32</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>There is no standardization to certify that a product is organic or eco-friendly</td>
<td>6.58</td>
<td></td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Governments are not forcing companies to take up green marketing</td>
<td>6.72</td>
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Note: ** Denotes significant at 1% level, Source: Primary Source

Findings and Discussion

Since P value is less than 0.01, the null hypothesis is rejected at 1 percent level of significance. Hence concluded that there is significant difference among mean ranks of the difficulties faced by the consumers while purchasing eco-friendly products. Based on mean rank Green products are not easily available (4.26) is the most difficulty faced by consumers while purchasing eco-friendly products. As it is very much clear from the survey that all of the respondents are aware of green products and are willing to buy the same. But it seems they face this uphill task of getting them when they go shopping. Companies and brand dealing in FMCG sector may take a clue from and turn this into a marketing opportunity.
This is followed by Green Products are not properly and adequately promoted (4.28). The reason behind such a difficulty could be manifold. For example it may be possible that the green products are not displayed at the forefront of super markets or shops or sales wing or grocery keeper has not understood the marketing potential of green products, or there are not adequate advertisement spreading awareness about the benefits of green products.

Consumers ranked Green products are priced very high (4.75) as the third most difficulty while purchasing green products. There is a general feeling among the consumers that green products are priced high. Companies can solve this by trying to bring down the cost of green products by increased production and adequate promotion of the same which would lead to increase in the consumption. They can also try to educate the consumers by spreading the positive benefits they would gain in the long run compensating the high cost of eco-friendly products.

The difficulty in believing in the information relating to Green Products (5.23) ranks fourth. The main reason for such wariness may be due to the debacle such Maggi Noodle and over promise and under performance instances. The companies shouldn’t hyper-project the eco-friendly features but rather do it in reasonable and believable manner.

Information related to Green products are not clearly displayed on packages was ranked fifth (5.37). The ranking by the respondents shows that it is also an important aspect as far as the green products marketing is concerned.

The respondents felt that the companies are not candid about the information relation to green products and thus have ranked it sixth (5.68). This feeling could be the outcome of two things. First one could be the over enthusiasm of the companies in convincing the consumers that their products are really eco-friendly. The other reason could be that products may have failed to deliver the eco-friendly performance associated with them. Brands cannot ignore this particular problem, for it has a lasting implications on brand credibility and brand loyalty.

The seventh ranking difficulty is the unwillingness of companies to go green (5.81). It seems that some of the companies haven’t recognized the marketing potential of green products. Indeed it would take time to establish the green credibility but once established the companies can make benefits in the long run.

Respondents of this survey have ranked the inability of companies in producing green products, resulting in the scarcity of such products as the eighth rank (6.32). This is
very much in line with the preceding difficulty where respondents felt that many companies are hesitating to go green. Again companies should look at this scenario as a business opportunity in which they can make a mark of their own.

Lack of no standardization to certify that a product is organic or eco-friendly ranks ninth (6.58). This is widespread and common lacuna in the Indian FMCG sector. This problem could dent the faith of consumers and thus affecting the business prosperity. Government should take note of the condition and bring about appropriate and efficient law to govern market.

Respondents felt that governments are not taking proper measures to compel companies to take up the production of green products and have ranked this difficulty tenth one. Even though it has been ranked tenth yet not an unimportant and dispensable element. Respondents expect an active role of government for making available the green products and thus bring about a healthy society. People believe that the accessibility of healthy and safe consumer goods is their fundamental right thus government should step into and take efficient measures.

**Implication of the study**

The findings of the study hold significant relevance for the stakeholders involved in green marketing. The companies and marketing managers can make use of the findings and fine tune marketing strategies. The government too can consider some of the legal issues involved in green marketing and constitute better legislations to make sure there aren’t blatant violations of the trust of consumers.

**Conclusion**

No business venture can exist for a long time by breaching the trust of consumers. Indeed the green marketing has opened new possibilities for business concerns. But at the same it cannot be considered as a walk in the park, as the demands and expectations are very high by consumer as was evident from the study. If their concerns, problems and apprehensions about green products and green marketing are not addressed adequately and comprehensively, then it is feared that green marketing would become a mere marketing cliché and eventually fizzle out from the favour of consumers.

**REFERENCE**
- Chan Yew Ling and Chang, Consumers’ purchase intention of green products: an investigation of the drivers and moderating variable, accessed at www.elixirpublishers.com, on April 13, 2018