



EFFECT OF “GREEN” MESSAGES ON BRANDED CLOTHING OVER PURCHASE BEHAVIOR AND BRAND REJECTION IN INDIAN CONSUMERS

Dr Mallika Srivastava * Prateek Kakkar Sahil Bhavnani ** Vedant Ahir ****

*Assistant Professor, Symbiosis Institute of Business Management, Symbiosis Knowledge Village, Pune.

**MBA I Marketing Student, Symbiosis Institute of Business Management, Symbiosis Knowledge Village, Pune.

Abstract

Purpose – The motive behind this research project is to examine the effects of “green” marketing done by clothing brands on consumer purchase intentions.

Methodology Adopted – The mall intercept technique and e-survey was floated in Pune and Delhi, India who responded to the ‘green’ promotional messages on the tags of respective garment brands.

Findings – The “green” messages helped in building the distinctive image of the brands resulting in favorable purchase decision for the brand.

Practical Implications – Awareness of environmental concerns has increased. ‘Green’ consumerism is on the upsurge.

Originality – Yet not a study has been conducted to concentrate on ‘green’ messages and its effect on branded clothing and its appeal to customers.

Keywords – *Green Marketing, Consumer Behavior.*

INTRODUCTION

“Green” messages or “Green” brands are those products which are known to be softer on environment when used or manufactured. These are products with natural ingredients, organic elements and these do not deplete natural non-renewable resources when manufactured. American Marketing Association (AMA) says, ‘green’ branding or specifically ‘green’ marketing are done to project that their products are environmentally safe.

Thus green marketing includes:

1. Altering the product
2. Process Redesigning
3. Change in Package Material
4. Tweaking Advertising

The visible effects on global climate of exponentially burgeoning industrialization have made companies and consumers sensitive to environmental concerns (Douglas 2006: 458). Now it has become the onus of the businesses to contribute in sustaining the mother earth for the sake of the civilization and yet be profitable. The businesses need to become ‘green’ businesses (Porritt & Winner 1988).

These days’ many consumer goods in the market these days are being marketed with ‘green’ messages. The reason for such a move by FMCG/FMCD companies is the notion that making the consumer perceive that their product is soft on environment will help in gaining acceptance. And ‘green’ products are preferred to normal products (Vandermerwe and Oliff, 1990; Gordon, 2002).

Also to overcome the commoditization of a product in market, the marketers often think of attaching the ‘green’ attribute to their product so as to differentiate from the rest. They think that this new point of difference will help in gaining the essential attention while a purchase decision is being made (Sharp & Newstead, 2010).

Despite the above measures by the present day marketers, we observe that the majorly “green brands” live upon a very small share in the market. The ‘green’ products are perceived to be either of very high cost or as niche products filling the gap of limited customer base (Pickett-Baker and Ozaki, 2008; Vandermerwe and Oliff, 1990; D’Souza, 2004; Charteretal., 2002a, b; Gordon, 2002).

It may be a possibility that attributing the product as “green” may invoke such associations in the mind space of the customer. Therefore, it is essential to study the reason why these “green” brands share a smaller market space. Is it due to low awareness of the “green” brand or is it these limited perceptions influencing the purchase decisions?

EFFECT OF ADOPTING “GREEN” METHODOLOGY BY BUSINESSES ON MARKETING/SALES FUNCTION

- Increasing the awareness of the prospective customer.
- Meet consumer demands satisfactorily but ensuring to be as green as possible to create an impression of business credibility.



- Gain green image for the brand. Improvement in magnitude of potential customers.
- Distinctive and Competitive image is built for the brand.
- Simultaneously take care of revenues, profits and ecology.
- Obtain approval from the masses.
- Be responsible and treat the emissions before releasing to environment by your business.
- Leveraging green issues at concern to market new ideas and trends in lifestyles.
- Create awareness of various green initiatives and capture market share.
- Integrate eco-friendly / 'green' business practices with corporate goals & missions to gain attention of new customers.
- Select eco-friendly packaging.
- Investment for advancement in green technology.
- Buttress eco-friendly image to all stakeholders.

(Sources: *EE Smith & S Perks, Bosch 2006: 687; Cobb 2009: 16; Freemantle & Rockey 2004: 90; Green Consultants 2009; Greenwood 2008: 52; Hellriegel, Jackson & Slocum 1998: 290; Hopfenbeck 1992: 182–187; Info-Corporate 2007;*)

OBJECTIVE

To know the influence of 'green' promotional messages on the brand purchase behavior for a branded clothing product in India.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There have been studies that have quantified the ecological conscious consumer behavior (ECCB) which captures the magnitude of how much individuals opt for products and services which are perceived to be less impactful on environment (Roberts, 1996b). Also some studies suggest that consumers are ready to pay higher prices for "green" brands (Shrum et al., 1995). It is unfortunately observed through the study by Wright and Klyn (1998), that the link between "green" or to say "eco-friendly" attitude of customers and their choice of purchases is weak. Hence, we can't predict that consumers who think about environment while making a purchase will certainly reject a brand if that brand is not "green". Despite the customer intentions, the purchases have been observed to be influenced by more of brand recall, habits and unconscious processing instead of a thorough and consciously evaluated purchase (Roberts and Nedungadi, 1995). If two branded products is substitute for each other but one having additional "green" attribute, logical to believe that this brand would be the ideal choice. In addition the "green" attribute attracts the customer by being the talking point for the brand. Such attention span is critical for a marketer to gain in present times when there is limited space to create a perceptual or functional difference in the mind-space of the customers.

Studies on brand rejection shows that brand belief –positive or negative, previous usage plays an important role during the decision process (Bogomolova and Nenycz-Theil, 2008). Around 80% of consumers who rejected the brand felt that there was no need, no accessibility and no brand knowledge. While rest 20% consciously decided not to go for that brand.

Some reasons of rejection of "green" brands are lack of enough information on the product package (D'Souza et al, 2006), lack of correct interpretation of "green" information (Schmidt, 2009) and concerns on misleading "green" information (Dahl 2010). In literatures still Indian consumers' claimed reasons for rejection are yet to be assessed that why "green" brands in India are rejected in comparison to "non-green" brands.

Concern of "green" issues spans across various categories like food (organic), Deos for being CFC Free, paint for being Lead free, stationery being made of recycled paper etc. All this awareness has caused the impact to be seen in fashion industry also especially clothing. When it comes to clothing, it was found by Meyer (2001) that fashion lovers willfully prefer clothes which are softer to skin. Green Consumerism in the market is burgeoning at a very faster pace and the consumers are now willing to shed off extra premium for such products (Balderjahn, 1988; Laroche et al 2001; Myburgh-Louw and O'Shaughnessy, 1994). These buyers look out for garment tags, swing labels, handtags for more information about the product or its packaging (Suchard and Polonsky, 1991). D'Souza (2006) emphasizes it of being worthwhile and of critical significance to study about the effect on intention to purchase due to 'ecological' labelling.

Over a period of time, importance of brand's reputation in terms of environmental friendliness has grown. As per Goldsmith 2000 & Ginsberg-Bloom 2004, Corporate Planners and marketers have realized the importance of this credibility.

It is important for marketers to understand the responsibility of the claims they are making through their brand as these environmental claims are regulated (Gangadharan 2002). Annonziato (2001) found that claims referring to sustainability, recyclability and naturalness create negative impact. Kim-Damhorst (1999) say that messages which appeal to environmental

advocacy, like asking for support to a cause etc evoke more positive behavior than other brands which claim of environmental correctness like usage of organic cotton to make clothes, or garment tags made from recycled paper. But also Langeland concluded that consumers who look out for organic products could be referred to as “vigilant”. Therefore, positive perception may be seen for organic products. Mathur and Mathur (2000) support the opinion that customers react positively on seeing pro-environment images and feels that these messages in the advertisements are credible. To the contrast, this view is challenged by Laroche (2001). He said that consumers may develop skeptical outlook for a brand, highlighting that consumers may not result in making the purchases. Also as per Ginsberg-Bloom (2004) the consumers may not purchase “green” products because consumers might perceive those to be of inferior or poor quality. They also think that the product may not be able to deliver the environmental claims. McCarty and Shrum (2004) studied that correlation between fun – enjoyment & attitudes towards recycling is positive. And hence positive attitudes are enhanced towards messages that incorporate the above two.

Ginsberg & Bloom (2004) studied that “green” messages may enhance the emotional connect of the brand and the consumer and thereby increasing in customer loyalty. If further develops a very positive and influencing public image which helps in increasing the sales and hence the stock prices (Marshall and Mayer, 1992). Moreover a brand needs to justify their claims and the benefits for consumers. Unless the brand does it, the consumers analyze the messages with a skeptical eye (Branthwaite, 2002). Positive image can be constructed by positive differentiation.

It was suggested by Chan (1999) that favorable attitude is evoked by people on environmental issues which further result into ecologically conscious behavior. Banerjee and McKeage (1994) found that those who are concerned about the continuous present degradation of Earth those are the consumers who are actually ‘green’ consumers. As they are more concerned, they also do not mind in paying premium for purchasing green products. Kim & Damhorst (1999), Kim (1995) have shown in their studies that positive responses are observed towards “green” messages for clothing brands.

Based on our findings in various literatures, the following hypothesis have been framed for further study in this research:

- H1. Consumers’ attitude and credibility are influenced by green messages for clothing brands.
- H2. “Green” Messages help create a positive distinctive brand image.
- H3. Distinctive product image positively influences the purchase decisions.

METHODOLOGY

1.1 Data Collection

In this research study we collected the data from Pune. “Mall interception interviewing” and “Online survey” was done to make the database of responses. The data was collected online in December 2014 & January 2015. In the malls, every 10th person coming out of an apparel store was intercepted for the interview (Zikmund 2000). The demographics of the respondents were in line with the general influencers and buyers who play major role in the purchases. The product chosen were from different categories i.e. leisure clothing and casual clothing. The sample was 150. Responses of 75 were found appropriate for interpretation and analysis.

1.2 Sample Profile

Table 1		
Demographic Factors	Category	Percentage
Age	20-25 years	77%
	26-35 years	235
	36 + years	0
Education	Undergraduate	29%
	Post Graduate	63%
Gender	Male	50%
	Female	50%
Income	< = 4 Lacs	37%
	4 Lacs - 10 Lacs	29%
	>= 10 Lacs	24%

Occupation	Service	46%
	Business	17%
	Free Lance	9%
	Others	29%

Our study sought to find out the impact of green marketing tools especially the green messages on consumer purchasing decisions in Pune. We used analytical model investigation, a questionnaire and regression analysis. This is an applied research. The outcome of the research would help the organizations improve in methodology of providing a product to the customer.

1.3 Knowledge about the Environment

The magnitude of knowledge was captured on a 7 point likert scale (Kim & Damhorst 1999). Most respondents claimed to be knowledgeable about the impact of processing of textile and fabric on environment. It was metered by asking about environmental concerns like water wastage, chemical pollution etc. The respondents were aware of the fact that their choices of clothing do impact the environment. Table 1 shows the results.

1.4 Commitment & Concern to Environment

Robert Organization's (1990) survey questions were used to identify the commitment level of respondents to an ecologically acceptable lifestyle. And Van Liere's & Dunlap's (1981) "new environmental paradigm" were used to measure the concern towards the environment. The results show and prove that they had concern and commitment towards the environment.

Table 2: Knowledge about the environmental impact of clothe manufacturing

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Choose on the scale of 7 - [Textile Processing leads to chemical Pollution]	5.00	1.466
Choose on the scale of 7 - [Air Pollution occurs during dying]	4.36	1.704
Choose on the scale of 7 - [Dying and finishing processes consume huge volume of water]	5.54	1.527
Choose on the scale of 7 - [Phosphates containing detergents can be source of water pollution]	5.54	1.598

Table 3: Environmental Concern & Environment Commitment

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Choose on the scale of 7- [Limited number of people can now sustain on earth due to depleting resources]	5.00	1.540
Choose on the scale of 7- [The balance of nature is delicate]	5.86	1.649
Choose on the scale of 7- [Humans have right to modify nature]	3.00	1.886
Choose on the scale of 7- [Human beings are created to rule over the nature]	2.04	1.453
Choose on the scale of 7- [Humans must live in harmony with the nature]	5.54	1.990
Choose on the scale of 7- [Humans are severely disturbing the eco balance]	5.61	1.873
Choose on the scale of 7- [Recycle Newspapers]	5.96	1.835
Choose on the scale of 7- [Use biodegradable plastic bags]	6.11	1.853
Choose on the scale of 7- [Use low phosphate soaps in detergents]	5.50	1.795
Choose on the scale of 7- [Buy products made from recycled packaging]	5.50	1.836
Choose on the scale of 7- [Buy reusable rather than disposable 2s]	5.71	1.802

1.5 Attitudes To "Green" Messages

Attitude of the samples on the advertisements done through promotional messages on clothe tags was captured on a 7 point Likert Scale (Lacznaik and Muehling, 1990).

Table - 4

Cronbach's Alpha (Attitudes to 'green' messages)	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items (Attitudes to 'green' messages)	Cronbach's Alpha (Message Credibility)	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items (Message Credibility)
.910	.912	.952	.954

1.6 Measure of Message Credibility

The message credibility of the clothing tags was metered on a 7 point Likert scale. Respondents perceived the 'green' messages associated with a brand as highly credible.

Results			
Pearson's correlation study of the 'green' promotional messages associated with the brand Khadi was studied. It shows sufficiently positive but limited relationship between the credibility of the messages and overall attitude towards the brand. This makes the perception of the brand in the consumer's mind and hence influencing the purchase decisions.			
Correlations			
		Overallattitude	Credibility
Overallattitude	Pearson Correlation	1	.682**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	31.830	25.390
	Covariance	1.179	.940
	N	28	28
Credibility	Pearson Correlation	.682**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	25.390	43.520
	Covariance	.940	1.612
	N	28	28
Table 5**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

A hypothetical non- green brand was also created and also introduced to the consumer with the same promotional messages. In this case there was insignificant relation found between the same two variables discussed above. In this case respondents might be influenced by perception of the non-green brand etc.

From the responses, it was observed that customers responded more favorably to "green" messages as compared to "non-green" brands.

Scheffe's method in the post hoc analysis confirmed that there was a significant difference between respondents' perceptions of the credibility of the messages relating to the organically grown cotton for clothes and one from recycled paper tag. There was also significant difference between organic cotton message and the message claiming the "donation" to a social cause. LSD test also confirms that organic message enjoys more credibility than the other messages.

One way ANOVA was performed to rank the three promotional 'green' messages. The result showed that message of organic cotton was having rank 1, donation message as rank 2 and recyclable paper tag as rank 3.

DISCUSSION

H1 & H2, hypothesizing the fact of positive relationship between the perceived distinctive images through "green" messages is consistent with the study by Kim and Damhorst. Results show that the influence of trusted brand in faith of claims made by the brand are in lines with the study of Goldsmith et al. (2000). The greater the trust in the brand, more faith is evoked in its 'green' messages.

H3, concerns with the influence of product distinctiveness on purchase intentions. It helps in building the trust in the brand. Greater trust leads to evoking positive responses towards the "green" messages. The results are in lines with the study by Goldsmith et al. (2000).

Langeland (1999) suggested that a category of shoppers, "vigilant", sometimes might feel that they help to contribute to the welfare of the environment by buying organic or to say eco-friendly substances. This may also be the motto for the upcoming

“green” fashion trends in clothing. Oh (2002) mentions in his study that consumers buy clothes for the following factors: symbolism, enjoyment and interest. Such results are of critical importance to strategic planning in retail sector.

The findings signify that the brand managers should build up brand image of an environmentally conscious organization. This only helps in reinforcing the perception of quality and nature of merchandise. It can also be seen that consumers have become more environmentally conscious and “green” consumption has become a popular phenomenon. Langeland (1999) said that this is better consumption behavior.

Eco-friendly marketing is a prudent way to improve the brand image and enhance the brand equity. It also helps in identifying and exploring new business opportunities. Also global competitiveness increases. Moreover most importantly, it harnesses consumer favorability for “green” marketing. Though the task is daunting as market is dominant by conventional fashion houses.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Identifying consumer attitudes helps marketers to predict the purchase decisions of the consumer. But researchers must come up with newer metrics for ‘green’ activism. Ecological efficiency is a wise way to improve company value, identify new business opportunities, maintain global competitiveness and harness consumer preference for ‘green’ marketing. And to do this in a fashion market is a challenging task. The knowledge on environmental aspects related to clothing industry is still limited. Further in-depth studies are required to help marketers to know more of ‘green consumerism’ especially in branded clothing. More understanding of this set of consumers is required as to who these consumers are, where do they buy from and when do they buy from. The roles of extraneous variable as word of mouth, editorial publicity, media and advertising, store image, merchandising etc (Kinley et al. 2000).

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