

Environmentally Responsive Consumption: A Study Of Young Consumers In India

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Abstract

The present study explores the phenomenon of green consumption among young consumers in India. The paper analyses the factors affecting consumers' green consumption behaviour. This paper further delves into eco-labels effects, their marketing strategies, and how they relate to consumer segmentation regarding green purchasing behaviour. This paper also suggests areas for future research, and recommendations to promote sustainable consumption. Inspired by contemporary thinking, this paper locates where conceptual gaps exist to highlight the exchange in addressing environmentally beneficial consumption practices, while offering insights into creating strategies that create a culture of sustainability for future generations.

Keywords: *Environmentally Responsive Consumption, Young Consumers, India, Green Products*

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I. Introduction

Over the past two decades, environmental sustainability has become a central theme in global conversations on climate change, resource depletion and ecological degradation. Hence, eco-friendly behaviour has now become a rising focus in many sectors, such as shopping trends. Given India's recent economic boom and the demographic composition of its population increasingly skewed to the younger people, it is imperative to investigate how environmentally responsive consumption plays out amongst Indian youth.

The nation is facing several environmental challenges, including poverty, deforestation, soil erosion, solid waste management, air and water pollution, and wildlife preservation. These issues have a wide range of effects on socio economic development, ecological integrity, and public health. Sustainable consumption habits are therefore becoming more widely acknowledged as a means of reducing environmental stresses and fostering the development of an eco-resilient society.

The demographic makeup of India offers a special context for researching consumption that is ecologically conscious. Young people are an important consumer segment that has a big influence on market trends and preferences (UNICEF, 2020). Approximately 356 million youths between the ages of 10 and 24 make up this group, which accounts for over 27% of India's total population. Additionally, this group is exposed to more and more global consumer culture, technology developments, and environmental awareness, all of which have an impact on their consumption and behaviour.

Environmental Awareness and Attitudes

Understanding the attitudes and level of environmental knowledge of young customers is essential to understanding their environmentally conscious purchase.

Regarding the growth in India's youth population, formal education on the environment, media exposure, and campaigns have been cited as some of the causes for this (Hameed et al., 2019). However, this elevation towards green behaviour often varies between situations. While there is an overall positive inclination towards ecological conservation among Indian youngsters, according to various researchers, it highly depends on sociocultural, economic, and psychological factors whether this behaviour translates into actual choices of their incorporation. In general, consumer behaviours regarding eco-conscious purchasing are shaped by elements including subjective perceptions of convenience or ease of use, perceived affordability or value for money paid by the product or service under consideration, prevailing social norms that govern how people act within a given society and personal values held by each individual (Gupta & Ogden, 2009).

Influence of Social Norms and Peer Networks

Significantly, the impact of social norms and peer networks appears to be a determinant of environmentally responsive consumption behaviour of young customers in India. Information flows, marketing decisions, and consumer choices are influenced by the interaction between peers, popularity associated with media, and group relationships (Bhattacharyya & Chatterjee, 2020). Regarding environmental sustainability, eco-

friendly behaviours can be either promoted or curtailed depending on the forces of cultural traditions, peers, and society.

Additionally, social identity through belongingness can shape individuals' motivations towards responsible environmental consumption within groups of friends. According to studies that have been conducted on young Indians who associate themselves with youth-led movements advocating for conservation or any other positive action, they are more inclined to take part in sustainable consumption practices to support their affiliations and express their values (Krishnan & Khanna, 2017).

Economic Considerations and Market Dynamics

Young Indian consumers' purchase decisions are influenced by economic considerations as well. Although there is a rising market for environmentally friendly products and services, customers are sometimes prevented from adopting them due to several hurdles such as cost, restricted product availability, and lack of understanding (Sarkar & Roy, 2020).

Furthermore, the belief that environmentally friendly substitutes are likely inferior in quality or performance might discourage purchasers from making sustainable decisions, particularly in markets with price sensitivity.

Additionally, marketing strategies, branding and product labelling play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and preferences (Afifah, 2024). Big organisations and companies are more likely to draw in ecologically-sensitive customers by overemphasising the advantages their products will have on the environment and add "sustainability" into their brand (Sharma & Mahajan, 2019). Moreover, another tactic used by organisations is called "greenwashing" which is the act of misleading customers into thinking that certain items are more environmentally conscious or friendly than others. This tactic also undermines a consumer's ability to make informed judgments and increases their distrust in environmentally conscious companies.

II. Review Of Literature

Since environmental issues are becoming integrated into mainstream marketing, it is important for marketers to comprehend how customers choose green products. Earlier, customers used to have to comprehend certain claims made regarding environmental safety, now a quick search on the Internet helps them understand the ecological impacts. (Chase & Smith, 1992). Furthermore, several items that were implied to be ecologically friendly turned out to be deceptive. (West, 1995). It has been discovered that the context in which assertions about environmental safety are made might affect how such claims are interpreted (Hastak et al., 1994).

Environmental labels are widely used by businesses to identify their products and provide an eco-friendly message, as well as to assist consumers in choosing environmentally friendly items (D'Souza, 2000). Marketers convey the advantages of their goods' environmental impact using a variety of tactics/ terms such as "eco-friendly", "environmentally safe", "recyclable", "biodegradable" and "ozone-friendly" (Morris et al., 1995). There are two main ways through which knowledge about the environment is developed: first, consumers should be informed to understand what they need to know about the general environmental impacts of products, and second, they should also be aware of whether products were made in a manner that does not destroy the environment. It is also important to note that pollution and overconsumption cannot be completely eliminated, just minimised. Customer motivation is a determining factor in encouraging green buying intentions which may be further categorised into three types of consumers - non-green consumers, emerging green consumers and ultra green consumers. Brands may become more familiar as individuals learn more about environmental issues while at the same time developing positive feelings toward green brands, usually assisted by environmental labelling that helps recognise characteristics of a green product. Non-green consumers are conventional and ignore issues surrounding green products and their associated environmental risks. In addition, there is a habit of ignoring the potential benefits (D'Souza, 2004). Emerging green consumers understand the advantages of eco-friendly goods but may need to find a reason to buy them. To these people, just any brand will do; they usually look for something other than environmental information when making purchases, thus making green product labelling relatively unimportant (D'Souza, 2000). These customers typically focus on product attributes like quality, warranty and performance during their evaluation and selection process.

Environmentally conscious customers, however, are highly concerned about the environment and always choose environmentally friendly products when possible. They conduct an exhaustive investigation of label information to find environmental justification for their purchases (D'Souza, 2004). These individuals have been described as "ultra-green" with the environment on top, among other factors such as quality and price (Volsky et al., 1999). Although environmental attitudes do not always govern product choices, they are now rising in prominence as selection criteria (Irland, 1993). Furthermore, the more people involve themselves in environmental issues, the more likely they are to buy green products (Jones-Doyle & Katsanis, 2012). Therefore, even if these consumers are willing to compromise quality, they will still prefer green products whose labels contain some form of environmental justification, such as biodegradability or recyclability.

Environmental alertness affects consumer behaviour, particularly about green purchase intentions. Research has found that highly environmentally aware people engage in eco-friendly practices (Sheltzer et al., 1991). Though, other studies have countered this idea; in spite of concerns for the environment, consumers might not display environmentally conscious buying habits. (Kalafatis et al., 1999; Gardyn, 2003).

A recent assessment released the findings of Greendex's third edition by National Geographic and GlobeScan, which assessed the sustainability of global consumerism (National Geographic and GlobalScan., 2010). This survey had a sample size of 17 countries with an aggregate respondent number of over a thousand. It was concluded from this research that many people are worried about their environment when it comes to making choices as consumers daily (Winston et al., 2007). According to Roberts (1996), an ecologically conscious consumer prefers consuming products that do not harm the environment or have minimal impact on it. As per Hailes (2007), the green consumer relates product purchasing or consumption with environmental conservation, thus avoiding goods believed to destroy nature. These include but are not limited to any products with health risks, those that consume significant amounts of energy, those with unnecessary packaging materials, and those made using components sourced from endangered species' habitats.

Interestingly, research indicates gender differences in environmental consciousness; women display higher levels of environmental awareness than men. (Banerjee and McKeage, 1994). Men are more willing to pay more to become more "environmentally conscious". (Balderjahn, 1998).

III. Discussion

The review further explains environmentally responsible consumption as it brings to understanding several factors influencing consumers' buying behaviour towards green products. It reiterates the need to assess how customers can make informed decisions regarding green products because of so many environment-friendly claims that may be untrue or taken out of context. Another aspect this study deals with is the function played by these labels serving consumers' guidance and the analysis of specific groups of consumers, depending on their environmental beliefs and actions.

Misleading Environmental Claims

Garraio (2005) believes that, although using environmental legitimacy claims on products can make for a good marketing strategy, they may contribute to consumer 'green fatigue' (Chase & Smith, 1992; and West, 1995). Multiple papers highlight instances where environmentally safe claims were found to be misleading or false, resulting in consumer suspicion and disillusionment. It emphasises the need for more transparency and accountability in green marketing to help consumers make informed decisions on environmentally friendly products.

Role of Environmental Labels

Consumers may discover and purchase ecologically friendly items with the use of environmental labels. D'Souza (2000) claims that organizations utilise environmental labels to express their sustainable features and set their products apart from the competition. Depending on the kind of ecological claim they make, they are differentiated, with general phrases like "natural" or "green". These labels function as environmental responsibility signals and make it easier for consumers to navigate the often confusing world of green products.

Consumer Segmentation

Consumer segments are categorised according to their attitudes and behaviours towards green products. Traditional consumers describe themselves as non-green and have apathy towards environmental issues (D'Souza, 2004). In contrast, environmentally green consumers are very concerned about the environment and show proactive attitudes towards looking for such kinds of products, however, with trade-offs in terms of lower quality or higher price (D'Souza, 2004). These consumers are environmentally driven and give others precedence to act socially responsible.

Gender Differences

The literature also indicates gender differences in environmental consciousness. While Banerjee and McKeage (1994) believe that women care more about the environment than men, Balderjahn (1998) has no clear answer: Whether males are prepared to pay a higher price for environmental protection initiatives still needs to be analysed, their results provided valuable insights into the design of marketing strategies for green products that are sensitive to variations across genders in consumer tendencies and attitudes.

Impact of Environmental Awareness on Consumer Behavior

Based on the literature, environmental awareness can affect consumer behaviour, including green purchase intention. Sheltzer et al. (1991) state that consumers with a high level of environmental awareness are

more likely to display “green behaviour” However, Kalafatis et al. (1999) and Gardyn (2003) also note that while consumers claim to be environmentally sensitive, their purchasing behaviour may not necessarily support these claims. This suggests that environmental concern is a factor in shaping attitudes toward green products. Still, consumers also consider other related factors such as price, convenience, and product efficacy.

Challenges and Opportunities

Although there is a rising understanding of sustainable consumerism, many obstacles prevent ecologically conscious actions. The obstacles are: limited availability of these products, differences in cost between conventional and their sustainable counterparts, and navigating societal norms that could deter environmentally conscientious actions. (Ramaswami et al., 2018). Nonetheless, there exist prospects for inventiveness and cooperation to cultivate a more ecologically aware populace. The discussion expands beyond India to reveal trends in environmentally aware consumption. A significant portion of customers worldwide demonstrate their concerns by the products they purchase, according to Nielsen's research from 1992.

This literature review and subsequent discussion provide insights into several facets of conscious consuming. This covers things like the importance of environmentally friendly labelling, customer classification, gender differences, and the ways in which consumer decisions are influenced by environmental consciousness. Understanding these dynamics can help marketers develop tactics to encourage consumers to adopt a sustainable mentality and purchase eco-friendly products. However, given that a variety of societal, psychological, and cultural influences determine people's views and behaviours, it is essential to recognise the nuances and complexities of eco-consumerism.

IV. Future Directions

- 1. Examining Growing Trends:* Future research may delve into the latest trends in sustainable consumer behaviours, including the increasing acceptance of circular economy methodologies, the usage of sustainable packaging options, and the integration of technological advancements like blockchain and IoT to facilitate transparent supply chains and environmental impact assessments.
- 2. Cross-Cultural Assessments:* International comparative studies may provide important new perspectives on the cultural elements affecting green consumer behaviour. Gaining insight into how cultural norms, beliefs, and traditions influence perspectives on sustainability can help one comprehend eco-consumption.
- 3. Longitudinal Research:* Longitudinal studies can help understand how the landscape of eco-consumption as well as sustainable practices is changing. By simply monitoring changes in consumer attitudes and actions over a long period of time we can understand the trends.
- 4. Behavioural Strategies:* Behavioural interventions such as social marketing, gamification and nudging can be investigated as possible methods to encourage environmentally conscious behaviour and decision-making.
- 5. Policy Evaluation:* The areas that require policy changes or interventions and how government decisions and laws affect Indian consumers' and their sustainable consumption choices need to be further examined.

V. Recommendations

1. Providing customers with information about how their decisions affect the environment is essential to promoting sustainable behaviour. Public campaigns, school programs on sustainable education and providing information and resources can empower consumers to make conscious decisions.
2. Building trust and confidence in eco-products requires green marketing practices and clear labelling. Environmental labels that are standardised and thorough certification processes can help consumers in identifying products.
3. Collaboration amongst stakeholders, including governmental agencies, businesses, nonprofit organisations, and academic institutions, is crucial to advancing sustainability projects. In order to achieve sustainable development goals, stakeholder partnerships may be helpful for information exchange, resource pooling, and action taking.
4. Investments in research and innovation must be maintained in order to develop products, services, and business strategies that promote environmental objectives. By sponsoring research initiatives and startup incubation programs, it is feasible to promote innovation and hasten the shift to a circular economy that is centred on regeneration.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has shed light on how young Indian customers behave regarding environmental sustainability. Furthermore, this paper has identified several issues in the current literature that are relevant to understanding consumers' purchasing behaviour towards green products. These issues include the significance of environmental labels, the importance of misleading environmental claims, and consumer segmentation based on environmental attitudes. The primary findings of the paper are that consumers need to be better informed about sustainable consumption, marketing communications promoting ecological claims and appeals need to be more

authentic, and future consumer-business and government collaborations in sustainable consumption need to be established.

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