



Eco-friendly Marketing: The market potential for sustainably managed Wooden Products - Home & Office Furniture, in Indian Scenario

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to study the possibility of promoting wooden furniture for houses and offices, coming from sustainable managed forests, in order to support Indian enterprises and the Institutions of the Indian wooden furniture for houses and offices involved to apply effective green marketing methods. This research design is based on a prototype structured questionnaire, according to objective of the research, 55 responses were collected from Indian wooden furniture for houses and offices, enterprises in 2012. The questionnaires were analyzed with the statistical program SPSS, using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. The main aim was the investigation of use, knowledge and promotion of wooden furniture for houses and offices that emanates from forests that are under sustainable management, and thus planning the green marketing of these products. The Indian enterprises of the wooden furniture for houses and offices expressed a great concern on the protection of forests. Majority strongly supports the certification of the sustainable management of Indian forests. The enterprises believe movement of green buildings reaches with a slow pace and forecast that eco consumers are prone to offer an additional percentage of around 6% on price, in order to buy wooden furniture for houses and offices. A high percent of most Institutions of Education promote that they use wooden furniture for houses, hostels and offices, and propose their image building through newspapers, magazines, Internet portals, websites, etc of high approach. This research study discusses reflections and forecasts on the growth of this new market of wooden furniture for houses and offices. It offers valuable insights on the market of wooden furniture for houses and offices, and also future developments in the coming years, which can support both enterprises and the institutions involved in strategy forming and decision making, to surmount an important share of the market of eco consumers. The study also proposes an effective method of eco marketing applications. Today the environmental problems concerns citizens, enterprises and institutions all over the world much more than thirty years ago. International researches show that the consumers worry more about the environment and change gradually their buying or purchase behaviour. Hence, new market segments for viable or sustainable products emerge, that are also strengthened by active consumers, because it is one important way to contribute and add value in the process of protection of environment. The organizations gradually recognize the competitive advantage and opportunities that arise from this ecological approach, entering the word "eco" in their activities. It is important to note that in parallel with the Corporate Social

KEYWORDS : Green Marketing, Forest Sustainability, Marketing Planning, Timber Markets, Marketing Research, Ethics, Environment-friendly, Wooden Products, Furniture

Introduction

Responsibility, the concept of "ecological marketing" has also been cultured with effective practices. The term "Ecological marketing" refers to the planning, development and promotion of products or services that satisfy the needs of consumers for quality, output, accessible prices and service, without however a negative effect on the environment, with regard to the use of raw material, the consumption of energy etc (Davis, 1991; Kangis, 1992; Meffet and Kirchgeorg, 1994; Jain and Kaur, 2004; Peattie and Grane, 2005; Grant, 2008; Pride and Ferrell, 2008). According to Kangis (1992), ecological marketing must be more than either a ecological way of marketing, or the marketing of so-called ecological products. According to the literature, the environmental parameter have been included in the strategy of marketing from the beginning of 1990s (Herbig and Butler, 1993; Lampe and Gazda, 1995; Peattie, 1999). Notwithstanding the existing obstacles, "ecological marketing" progressively gains continuously more supporters, specifically in sectors that concern the climatic change and forest protection. In India, even if we are in initial stages of ecological marketing, it is expected to strengthen, and influence the market even more in future. Consumers have to spend an additional 7-20% in order to buy "ecological" furniture products and reject the non-viable conventional alternatives. Today, there is an increase of environment-friendly conscious consumers resulting in increased demand for ecological products. Researchers have shown that consumers that are interested in environmental related issues take buying and purchasing decisions with those criteria that are beyond the usual consumption models. More and more customers are conscious of destructive consequences in the environment because of industrial processes. For them it is also one way to prove that they disapprove non-environment friendly activities of such manufacturers, suppliers, distributors or investors. The problem both for marketers and consumers come from the environmental terms used for promotion of their "ecological" or "environment-friendly" products. Terms like "recyclable" and "friendly" have got hard criticism and are today avoided by the organizations because of the complicatedness of their definitions' documentation (Lampe and Gazda, 1995). The problem faced when promoting "ecological" environment marketing was the increased number of consumers that did not believe in the companies' environmental statements (Schwartz, 1990). In their research Lampe and Gazda (1995) pointed out that "every aspect of the product: design,

production, packaging, use and disposal, provides an opportunity for a company not only to protect the environment but also to benefit from positive consumer attitudes towards the environment".

Grant (2008) points out that "sustainability changes everything", while Johri (1998) shows that the future of ecological marketing strategy passes through the perception that consumers like "ecological" messages and Yudelson (2009) claims that the ecological marketing space is wide enough for large retailers and developers. "Ecological marketing" is considered by many researchers as an important entrepreneurial opportunity to innovate even more and as an outstanding advantage against the competition (Ottman, 1992; Kaufman, 1999; Laroche et al., 2001; Vaccaro 2009). Pride and Ferrell (2008) consider that the objectives of ecological marketing should be: a) to eliminate waste, which should focus on the production of products without waste instead of getting rid of waste, b) to re-invent the concept of product in order to be ecologically consistent with the environmental commitment, c) to price the products portraying the real cost, which means high value for the consumer's money and d) to create profitability via the creation of operational occasions that derive from the environmental conscience in the market. In his study realised, Donaldson (2005) initially concluded that in general the environment-friendly attitude of consumers changed positively. Grunert (1993) finds crucial differences among the individuals of different professional groups with respect to various levels of environmental consciousness. Although the relationship of occupation with the environmental consciousness differs according to the type of product, the results indicate that the professionals segment of consumers, have the strongest environmental consciousness with regard to most of the environmental matters. The "activation" of society for the defence of the environment has set the protection of forests and their sustainable management as priorities of its agenda. Key subjects, related to the forests are reduction of emissions from deforestation and the reforestation. The fundamental objectives of forest certification are: a) the improvement of the management of forests, b) the guarantee of new markets, capable for the absorption of produced products and c) the control of certification of all processes up to the sale of final products, in order to safeguard their sustainable origins (Hansen, 1997; Hubbard, 2005).

The certification of the sustainable origins of forest products can be used by the Indian organizations that are activated in the wooden furniture for houses and offices sector as an effective Marketing strategy tool to position and re-position to enter new markets and to improve their environment-friendly profile (Juslin and Hansen, 2002; Papadopoulos and Karagouni, 2007). According to Dr N. Stamou (2005):

- the products of wooden furniture for houses and offices, sooner or later will prevail and control this market that will emanate from sustainable and environmentally friendly managed forests
- The role of the consumer with environmentally friendly buying or purchase behaviour final purchaser of products of wooden furniture for houses and offices, will become continuously more important. Products of wooden furniture for houses and offices that will not emanate from sustainable managed forests will not be able to easily find a place in the market.
- There will be a gradual development of organizations with products of wooden furniture for houses and offices,
- The existence and viability or the exclusion of organizations of wooden furniture for houses and offices, in the market will be directly influenced by the environmental sensitization of citizens. Consumers were shifting into purchasing green products since the increase in green marketing activities that were taking place in different countries all over the world (Cohen, 1973). Green marketing went in-to a backlash during the 1990's (Wong, Turner and Stoneman, 1996), this backlash is said to be the second stage of green marketing. The backlash took place because consumers' green purchasing behavior was not in-parallel with the concern those consumers have (Schrum, McCarty and Lowery, 1995). The third stage of green marketing started with the beginning of the 21st century. We are living this stage nowadays where green marketing is "making come back" (Ottman, Stafford, and Hartman, 2006, p.26). In this third stage a huge improvement and an escalation in the level of confidence had affected green products (Ottman, 2007; Gurau and Ranchhod, 2005). Sustainable development is the basic argument for this century covering three fundamental functions; environmental sustainability, economic sustainability and socio-political sustainability. According to Lee (2008), the near future of green marketing will include two unavoidable trends. The first trend is doing business under the banner of eco-friendly and going green approaches will be pushed into the main stream (Hanas, 2007). Second trend is the attempt of international green marketers to expand their markets, grow sales and profits by the mean of their positive public image toward their green products and brands in the developed countries (Johri and Sahasakmontri, 1998; Gurau and Ranchhod, 2005). In his recent article, Kotler (2011) reconsidered the four marketing mix, the four P's to fit the new demand of environmentally imperative marketing nowadays. The four P's are restated as follows, and we can refer to them as green four P's: Product (Generally, the products produced must be environmentally friendly and even more it can help settle some environmental damages); Price (different product with different levels of environmental friendliness should be offered); Place (to encourage online selling, e-marketing, decentralized production facilities and others to guarantee distribution channel with minimal environmental affects); and Promotion (Companies must use specific green marketing tools such as eco-label and special sales promotions anxious for their corporate social responsibility). A green consumer is the one who avoids products that are endangered to the health of people, damaging to environment, energy inefficient, causes excessive waste, and endanger environment and species (Strong, 1996). Fitzpatrick and Byers (1990) suggested that "green consumerism" might turn into a potent force in the market. Consumers who share a "life style of health and sustainability" are known as "LAHOS" (Environmental Leader, 2009). Green users are altering in significant ways (Vermillion and Peart, 2010). Green market is growing rapidly worldwide, with environmental concern being the millennium primary top concern for consumers. For this, it is so important for researchers and scholars to keep on their studies about green consumers. The future of environment will depend on the intensity of behaviours translated from green consumers support to environmental (Dunlap and Scarce, 1991). Recently, consumers are sensing the huge impact of their purchasing behavior toward environment (Abdul Wahid, Rahbar and Shyan, 2011). Green or environmental friendly purchasing behavior is defined by the means of consuming products that are environmentally "benevolent/ beneficial", "recyclable/conservable" and "sensitive/responsive" regarding ecological concerns (Mostafa, 2007). A new dimension for consumers to choose between brands is the degree of social responsibility of companies toward environment (Kotler, 2011). Companies should pay more attention to the "green world of mouth" and its effects on the green purchasing behavior of green and non-green consumers. Growing in

importance of green world of mouth, Yuhong and Shaoping (2010) suggested that businesses should launch a special green channel to spread word of mouth. Consumers consciousness for environment is been dramatically translated into green purchasing behavior nowadays.

Research-Methods

Adopting Lee (2008) survey that was used to examine the important factors affecting green purchasing behavior in Hong Kong and their weights, three environmental factors of green purchasing behavior extracted from her review of literatures were chosen. The three factors are: "social/peer influence", "environmental attitude", and "environmental concern". These factors were not examined in the Indian context. Social Influence: Social influence is a very wide field to study. In this study we are interested to examine the effect of friends as a social group on the green behavior of individuals. Social influences can be found within peer pressure, conformity compliance, and many others. Ewing (2001) suggested that norms acquired socially can stimulate ecological consumer behaviour. Hoyer and Mac Innis (2004) argued that general consumption is influenced by inspirational and associative reference groups. With the ease to share information using different channels of social networking as Face-book, twitter, blogs and emails, it is strongly obvious that social influence will be a dominant factor affecting green purchasing behavior. Environmental Attitude: Environmental attitude is a complex mental state involving beliefs and values to behave environmentally. In other words, it taps the consumer's cognitive judgment with respect to the value of environmental protection and green living (Lee, 2009). Contrasting and indecisive results have been found between attitudes and behaviours (Harthman and Apaolaza Ibanez, 2006). Few existing studies found a positive correlation between environmental attitude and green purchasing behavior (Mostafa, 2007), while other concluded a moderate or tenuous correlation (Lee, 2009). Environmental Concern: According to Lee (2008), environmental concern is the consumers' emotional involvement regarding different environmental matters. The data for this primary research was collected using the method of questionnaire formulation, collection and elaboration. The questionnaires were specifically structured for the objective of the present research, according to the basic principles of marketing research. The sample population includes the customers. 101 potential customers from outside or inside the furniture and home furnishings stores in Delhi-NCR were randomly selected. They are all directly related to the Indian wooden furniture for houses and offices, market and they were questioned during their presence also at the Trade Show of Furniture Exhibition, and manufacturers and marketers showrooms of furniture items, marketers of furniture at multi-brand outlets. The questions were structured to be short and comprehensible in order to be easily answered. The pilot application of the questionnaire in five showrooms revealed the weak points of questions which were further elaborated and led to its improved final form. The data were processed and analyzed with the special statistical program SPSS.

HYPOTHESES

Social-Influences

Generally speaking, consumption is strongly influenced by associative and inspirational reference groups (Hoyer and MacInnis, 2004). Lee (2008) found social influence to be the top predictor of green purchasing behavior for adolescents in Hong Kong out of seven factors tested. Ling (1997) found that individuals living in cultures of collectivist orientation are influenced by such orientation, especially on their recycling behavior, therefore we propose the following relation:

H1: Social influence is positively related to green purchasing behavior.

Environmental-Attitude

Lee (2009) stated that the relationship between environmental attitude and environmental behavior is not clear. Hoyer and MacInnis (2004) found that attitudes affect people's purchasing behavior by affecting people's thoughts and feelings. Kotchen and Reiling (2000) found a positive relation between environmental behavior and environmental attitude. Thus we propose:

H2: Environmental attitude is positively related to green purchasing behavior.

Environmental-Concern

Previous studies indicated a relation between the environmental

concern and green behavior (Roberts and Bacon, 1997; Van Liere and Dunlap, 1980); however these studies were conducted in western countries. In a recent study conducted by Datta (2011), Datta concluded that a positive relationship was found between overall environmental concern and consumers' green purchasing behavior in a general buying behavior context. We also propose the following relation:

H3: Environmental concern is positively related to green purchasing behavior.

The questionnaire is composed of five sections. The first three sections measures three different factors: social influence, environmental attitude, and environmental concern. The five-point Likert-type scales were used in all measures. Social influence was measured using six items; environmental attitude was measured using seven items; and environmental concern was measured using four items. Green purchasing behavior was measured using four items. Characteristics of demographics were measured in the fifth section. The questionnaire used in this study was a five-page questionnaire with a brief introduction of instructions and objectives of such research. The introduction also emphasized the confidentiality of the research. The items of the questionnaire were adapted from Kaman Lee (2008). The questionnaire was administered to a sample of individual consumers having an independent purchasing power. Participants responded voluntarily and were not compensated for their participation. Participants were given enough time to respond to the questionnaire electronically.

A total of 101 completed questionnaires were obtained with a response rate of 75%. Our sample consisted of 101 respondents, 58.4% were males and 41.6% were females. The average age of our sample was 24; 56.4% of the sample were single and 62.4% have a Bachelor degree. The major industries represented in our sample were disturbed among the following: 16.8% from the education, 7.9% from the banking and finance, 6.9% from the marketing and advertising and the remaining were distributed among other different industries.

ANALYSIS&FINDINGS

Before examining the proposed hypotheses we tested the reliability of our measures by calculating the Cronbach's alpha ($[\alpha]$). Our results provided empirical support to the previous studies of the following tested scales: social influence ($[\alpha]=.867$), environmental attitude ($[\alpha] = .901$), environmental concern ($[\alpha]=.859$), and green purchasing behavior ($[\alpha] = .862$). To test the proposed hypotheses we used correlation and regression analysis. The correlation results provided support to H1 and H3 in same directions as proposed and a significant relation was identified for H2 but not in the same direction as hypothesized. In accordance with our H1 a significant positive correlation ($r = .44$ at 0.01 sig. level) was found between social influence and green purchasing behavior. The results also provided support for H3 in which a significant positive correlation ($r = .589$ at 0.01 sig. level) between environmental concern and green purchasing behavior. As to H2 a significant negative correlation was found between environmental attitude and green purchasing behavior ($r=-.165$ at 0.05 sig. level) not supporting our hypothesis. In addition to the positive correlation analysis conducted, we conducted regression analysis as well. The results provided support to the correlation results. In H1 we proposed a positive relation between social influence and green purchasing behavior, the results of the regression also indicated the coefficient of determination $[R.sup.2] = .194$, indicating that 19.4% of the variation in the green purchasing behavior is explained by the social influence factor. Thus H1 supported. In H2 we proposed a positive relation between environmental attitude and green purchasing behavior and the regression results indicated a negative relation, with the coefficient of determination $[R.sup.2]=.027$ which indicate that just 2.7% of the variation in the total green purchasing behavior is explained by the environmental attitude factor. As to H3 we proposed that there is a positive relation between environmental concern and green purchasing behavior, the regression results supported our argument with the coefficient of determination $[R.sup.2]=.347$ which indicates that 34.7% of the variation in green purchasing behavior is explained by environmental concern.

DISCUSSION

The positive relation found in our research between social influence and green purchasing behavior is a complement to similar positive relation found by other researches. One of the researches suggested that norms that are acquired socially can stimulate ecological consumer be-

havior. In simple words, social impact of norms is acquired from society as one of the social influences, can lead to green purchasing behavior, which is a pattern or kind of ecological consumer behaviors. In India, norms acquired socially are instituted to a great extent. The positive relation between social influence and green purchasing behavior is also supported by the finding of Lee (2008) which suggested social influence to be a top predictor of green purchasing behavior for adolescents in India. The strong peer influence, a kind of social influence, is suggested to be a reason behind the group effect in environmental behavior (Lee, 2009). From all what proceeds, it is so important to pay attention for what we call a "green word-of-mouth". Green consumers investigate for green products; they search intensively for all information available from any possible source in their society. More emphasis should be given for the "green word-of-mouth" as a communication tool to increase the green purchasing behavior, given that such tool is one of the ways that shape social influences. What is optimistic for green purchasing behavior is the increase in the social influence, which will take place with the ease and advancement of communication taking place in the Middle East, especially in Indian. Clearly, social influence will continue to affect green purchasing behavior positively. Environmental attitude is negatively correlated with green purchasing behavior. In general, attitude is a state of mind or feeling someone has toward a specific subject. The results found in our research suggest that not any person whose environmental attitude is positive will necessarily engage in green purchasing behavior. According to the negative relation found, environmental attitude is actually not a predictor of green purchasing behavior. The positive environmental attitude will not lead to a green purchasing behavior. A possible reason for the negative relation found can be the difference between real attitudes (not expressed attitudes) and behaviors. Inconsistency between people's attitude as verbally expressed and their actual behavior was first suggested by Richard LaPiere (1934). Furthermore, Wicker (1971) found a weak and perhaps nonexistent correlation between actual behavior and measured attitudes. As to the environmental concern factor, the more a consumer is concerned about his environment the more this consumer will purchase green products. The concern is represented in the consumer's emotional involvement with the subject of concern. Our results indicated that the more we are concerned about our environment an increase in green purchasing behavior will be achieved. The positive correlation between environmental concern and green purchasing behavior is an additional support for previous results by Datta (2011); Roberts and Bacon (1997); Vanliere and Dunlap (1981); Arbuthruth and Ling (1975). Schultz (2000) suggested three interrelated issues for environmental concern, these issues are: biosphere, people and self. This wide scope of environmental concern factor can lead us to know that it is significant to have a positive correlation between environmental concern and green purchasing behavior. Logically speaking, any consumer will have at least one concern for one of the three issues. Finally, our results provided additional empirical support to the existing research and provided guidelines to both practitioners and researchers with regard to a non-western sample approach to green purchasing behavior.

LIMITATIONS&FUTURE-RESEARCH

As any research this study has limitations. The first limitation is the small size of the sample. Future research should attempt to collect data from a larger sample. The second limitation is the customer self-reported responses. Future studies should collect data from other stakeholders as well to examine the real impact of these three factors. Furthermore future research should examine additional factors that may impact green purchasing behavior for example, personality type, concern for self-image and perceived environmental responsibility.

Conclusions

The Indian organizations of the wooden furniture for houses and offices, sector show a great interest in the protection of forests in the entire world against illegal loggings and traditional management. This big sensitivity of Indian organizations appears to create favourable conditions for the promotion of wooden furniture for houses and offices that comes from sustainable managed forests. Bigger organizations express relatively a weaker interest in the protection of forests. The entrepreneurs encourage the certification of the sustainable management of Indian forests and believe that the trend towards ecological buildings will emerge also in India but at a slow pace. They forecast that the ecological consumers are prone to offer a premium of a 6% roughly in order to buy wooden furniture for houses and offices, products. The recent economic crisis may cause a minor delay in charging

an "additional price". Nevertheless, it will not take long to be accepted, since the recovery of the building activities is forecast to raise also demand in "ecological" buildings over next two years. Focus should be on an intense informative advertising, with a particular emphasis on "ecological consumers", who comprise the initial target – market. Most Institutions of Higher Education (Universities and Technological Educational Institutes) are trusted to be more capable of promoting the wooden furniture for houses and offices, products. Publicity campaigns are proposed to be better and more effectively contacted by news research studies, magazines and the Internet, by high visiting portals. The promotion campaign has to be carefully planned and fully supported. Furniture producers, wooden furniture for houses and offices, traders and the entire wood industry play a significant role, since they are the direct stakeholders in ecological products promotion. They must be committed to collect and disseminate the relevant information, create attractive advertisements in order to arouse consumers' interest and undertake the risks. Companies express fundamental thoughts and problems in the growth of this new wooden furniture for houses and offices, market, mostly referring to the probabilities of such a development and the role of consumers, market conditions and the competition as well as the price, the guarantees and the economic benefits that will characterize the product. The wooden furniture for houses and offices, market depends directly on the growth of forestry. Synergies are necessary for the sake of the world economy and the protection of environment. It is well established that the certification of forests and wooden furniture for houses and offices, products contributes in the protection of environment. The structured strategy of ecological marketing can be seen as an antidote to the present economic recession as well as to future growth. The wooden furniture for houses and offices, sector should create and follow strategies and policies in order to constantly improve quality, pricing, innovativeness especially on environmental matters and fame. A high level of overall integration will allow the Indian wooden furniture for houses and offices, sector to adequately meet external economic challenges, when the crisis settles. The trend towards "ecological buildings" should be supported all over India. At the same time incentives should be given for Indian forests' certification, which are even today under informal sustainable management. Furthermore, the current development policy in India focuses on "ecological development", which appears the only feasible and viable solution for the country that both serves the human beings and respects the environment. The implementation and promotion of the above mentioned activities are essential for an effective publicity of wooden furniture for houses and offices. It requires however the involvement and combined actions of the relevant institutions such as confederations, Higher Education Institutions, Non Governmental Organisations, editors, volunteers etc. Besides the conventional communication and promotion means, the so - called social media could be

also used to present a fresh direction for wooden furniture for houses and offices, marketing. Companies and Institutions could create Facebook groups and blogs, such as "Ecological Buildings", "Forests under sustainable management", "Use of strictly Wooden furniture for houses and offices, Products" etc.

Consumers should become aware of their power to contribute to environmental protection, even through the purchase of wooden furniture for houses and offices. Besides, they should become aware of the multiple benefits of wooden furniture for houses and offices, coming from sustainable managed forests. Literature review has shown that the majority of successful organizations that trade wooden furniture for houses and offices, products have incorporated environmental policies in their commercial strategies and practices. Government's commitment to the implementation of key policy reforms is substantial. The Indian state is called to apply a sustainable economic development strategy for the forest industry, which will adapt to global developments and ensure the viability of forest exploitations. Policies should also be able to support and strengthen the intentions of organizations to supply sustainable wooden furniture for houses and offices. Ecological consumers seem to become a driving force behind how companies do business, and they are creating a new economy. The supporters of this new to India "ecological consumers movement" are more conscious and with a higher responsibility on natural resources' management and environment protection. Their number is constantly increasing in India, as all over the world and they are the main target groups for the producers of wood products. The proposed ecological marketing can only but assist companies' development and benefit the consumers, the State, the environment and the individuals. The research results will form useful and practical tools for the policy makers who are responsible for the planning and implementation of ecological development and ecological entrepreneurship policies. Further research could be conducted to determine the intention of Indian consumers to use wooden furniture for houses and offices, from sustainable managed forests after the diffusion of the present findings, as well as the intentions and culture of manufacturers and the building industry on the ecological buildings movement and the use of wooden furniture for houses and offices. The last ones exert a great influence on house buyers. The research could also help revealing the intention of the State and its relevant authorities (e.g. Ministries, Chambers, Forests Inspections, Organisations for the conservation of the natural environment etc) about the certification of already sustainable managed forests and the supply of more and stronger incentives to consumers in order to turn to wood products. The suggested research could offer more feedback for alternative policy implications, initiatives and incentives that encourage both organizations and consumers.

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