



A Study of the Factors Affecting Attitude Of Consumers Towards Eco- Labeled Products

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ABSTRACT

Eco-labelling is a way to provide consumers with credible and easily accessible information on the environmental attributes of a product. The consumers around the world are found to have positive attitude towards eco-labelled products. This study is conducted to determine the factors affecting the attitude of consumers towards eco-labelled products in India. The data was collected from 375 students of Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh with the help of structured close ended questionnaire. The data collected was analysed using correlation. Social Influence and Perceived seriousness of environmental problems correlate positively with the attitude of consumers towards eco-labelled products. It is recommended to the marketers of eco labelled product to approach the consumers through their social groups.

KEYWORDS : - Eco-label products ,perceived seriousness of environmental responsibility, perceived environmental responsibility, green purchasing behaviour

Introduction

Over the past decade consumers have become increasingly interested in learning more about the way in which their purchasing decisions may affect the environment. One of the responses to this 'green consumerism' has been the establishment of private voluntary eco-labels. The appeal of this market oriented mechanism for sustainable development is clear: it simultaneously informs consumers about the environmental impact of their consumption while providing producers with a way to extract a price premium by accurately translating the mood of consumers into environmentally friendly product development. The idea of eco-marketing or green marketing stresses that the production should take care of the ecosystem and welfare of the society, fulfil the goals of the company and satisfy the customer. The term eco-labelling is derived from the science of ecology which deals with interrelationship between organisms and environment. An eco-label is a label which identifies the environmental preference of a product. It is awarded to a manufacture by an appropriate authority. ISO 14020 is a guide to the award of eco-labels. The Government of India launched an Eco mark scheme in 1991 to increase consumer awareness with respect to environment friendly products. Objective of the study is to determine the factors affecting attitude of consumers towards eco labelled products and to study their relationship with the attitude of consumers towards eco labelled products.

What is ecolabelling?

"Eco-labelling" is a voluntary method of environmental performance certification and labelling that is practised around the world. An "eco-label" is a label which identifies overall environmental preference of a product or service within a specific product/service category based on life cycle considerations. Similar to Energy Rating and certain Organic Food Certifications, an eco-labelled is awarded by an impartial third party. However, while Energy Star Rating and Organic Food Certifications are based on a very narrow set of criteria (energy efficiency in case of the Energy Star Rating and adherence to certain ways of cultivation in the case of organic food certifications), a comprehensive sustainability of both products and service categories from a "Lifecycle" i.e., cradle-to-grave perspective. The availability of such a label in India is expected to benefit both the conscious buyer (consumer) and progressive seller (product manufacture/service provider). An eco-label identifies environmentally preferable products based on an environmental impact assessment of the product compared to other products in the same category. The environmental impact assessment includes the production process, use, and disposal of the product (van Ravenswaay and Blend). While eco-labels require compliance with standards, they are still considered market-oriented because they do not involve direct government regulation. Eco labelling signals that a product has been eco-certified. While there is increasing use of eco labelling practices, there is still little understanding of the conditions

under which eco labels can command price premiums (Delmas and Grant, 2008).

Global Ecolabelling Network:

Global Ecolabelling Network (GEN) is a non-profit association of third party i.e. environmental performance labelling organisations which was set up in 1994 which was set up in 1994 to improve, promote and develop the ecolabelling of products. GEN includes 26 national and multinational member organisations around the world. They include US, Germany, Japan, France, India etc. (Panda and Goswami, 2009)

Indian Eco-mark and its Logo:

The Government of India launched an Eco-mark scheme in 1991 to increase consumer awareness on eco-friendly products. An earthen pot has been chosen as Logo for the Eco-mark scheme of India as it uses a renewable resource like earth, does not produce hazardous waste and consumer little energy in making. The logo signifies that the product carrying it does the least damage to environment. The scheme identifies 16 categories of consumer products for the purpose of development of eco-criteria and labelling but so far only 14 have been notified. Manufacturers of these categories can apply to BIS for award of logo if their product meets the notified standards. Awareness campaign has also been launched but could not become popular due to lack of response from the manufacturers (Panda and Goswami, 2009)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rashid (2009) says that consumers react positively towards eco labels and purchase of green products. Kuhn (1999) feels that eco labelling will help company's market share. Conflicting view is expressed by Leire and Thidell (2005) who think that eco labelling does not necessarily result in purchase of eco friendly products. D'Souza (2004) finds there is not enough evidence to show that there is a link between eco labelling and purchase of eco friendly products. Lyer (1999) thinks this is due to lack of trust among consumers on eco labels.

Although Thorgersen (2002) and Rashid (2009) state that eco labels influence consumers purchasing patterns, yet it is felt that green terminologies like "recyclable" "biodegradable" etc. confuse consumers (Robertson and Marshall, 1987; Muller 1985, West 1995, Casewell and Modjuszka 1996, Wessels et al, 1999). Still D'Souza et al (2006) affirms that environmental labelling is an effective way of communicating the benefits and claims of safety of the products. But the ability of recycling packaging elements is a major concern to both retailers and consumers. For example in USA 3 million wine bottles are sold and none is reused with 75% going in landfills. Laroche et al (2001) feels that ecologically conscious consumers will try to protect the environment in different ways like checking whether a package is made of recycled material.

Consumers have indicated a lack of trust and growing confusion over the plethora of government, corporate and third-party eco-symbols on a wide variety of products (Bhaskaran et al, 2006; Terrachoice Environmental Marketing, 2009). Adding to the confusion are the increasing numbers of companies developing their own proprietary labels in order to differentiate themselves in the marketplace. There is a growing call for clearer communication about the consumer benefit of green products (Pickett-Baker and Ozaki, 2008). The recent State of Green Business Forum (2010) reported that green information needed to be accessible in an easily understandable manner right at the point of purchase (Mazur, 2010). The project adds to the growing body of literature on environmental labelling, and investigates the efforts of different levels of environmental information on key consumer metrics. Previous studies suggest that consumers would purchase and are willing to pay more for green labelled products (see Bigsby and Ozanne, 2002; Vlosky et al, 1999; Ottman, 1992).

Factors affecting attitude of consumers towards eco-labelled products

According to Hallin (1995) and McCarty and Shrum (2001), people engage in environmental behaviour as a result of their desire to solve environmental problem, to become role models and a belief that they can help to preserve the environment. However, the consumers' indications of positive attitude towards environmental issues do not necessarily lead to actual environmentally friendly purchasing behaviour (Laroche et al, 2002). Majority of consumers do not purchase products based on the environmental concern alone and they will not trade-off other product attributes for a better environment (Yam-Tang and Chan, 1998).

Previous studies also suggest that consumers who are willing to purchase green products are, in general, conscious about the environmental problem, concerned about the environment and believe that it is important to be environmentally friendly (Laroche et al, 2001; Schwepker and Cornwell, 1991).

Johri and Sahasakmontri (1998) showed that consumers do not base their purchasing decision on environmental concern alone. Product attributes such as convenience, availability, price and quality play a more important role in the consumers' purchasing decision process. Anderson and Hansen (2004) also found that the price was the most important attribute in American consumers purchase decisions for wood furniture. Their study also found that typical respondent is willing to sacrifice environmental certification for the sake of a lower price.

Although consumers are in general concerned about the environment, the previous literature found that consumers are extremely price sensitive towards green products (Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, 2002) and are unwilling to pay higher prices for green products (Ottoman, 2000). D'Souza et al (2006) further suggest that purchase probability of green product decreases as the price premium increases. Miller (1990) discovered that consumers are willing to pay up to 5% extra for a product under the environmentally friendly category (see Blamey, Bennet and Louivere, 1999). Thomas (1989) showed half of those interviewed would be willing to pay at least 10% more for ozone-friendly aerosols and recyclable products. Ozanne and Vlosky (1997) found that consumers' willingness to incur a price premium for ecolabelled forest products varied depending on the value of the item considered, with a range from 4.4 to 18.7 percent.

Another variable that influence people to purchase green products is their concern about the environmental and social responsibility to save the nature, environment and society from the dangerous effect arisen by using non-green products. Here the Perceived Environmental Responsibility (PER) refers to the degree of emotional involvement in environmental issues. It has been found that from the last decade, people have additional PER, Knowledge and awareness of environmental problems (Lai, 2000) but still their sense of individual responsibility in environmental safety is normally weak. PER simply means a behaviour and attitude of a person that he/she is responsible for his/her consuming and its effects on the environment and nature. It is defined by a famous researcher that green consumers are those who avoid those products that are likely to damage health of user, because significant damage to the environment during manufactur-

ing (Strong, 1996). A researcher has confirmed with his research that compare to males, females had higher levels of PER towards environmental protection (Zelezny et al. 2000). On one hand they expect, the government can eliminate the environmental problem. On the other hand, they are hesitant to make one-side sacrifices with the government's policy (Lai, 2000). PER is a main variable that guides a person's attraction and intention towards green purchasing (Kaman Lee, 2012). It is verified that Asian citizen's societies are becoming conscious of alarming environmental problems (Johri and Sahasakmontri, 1998). **Hypotheses:**

H₁: There is no significant relationship between the social influence and attitude of consumers towards eco labelled products.

H₂: There is no significant relationship between the Perceived seriousness of environmental problems among respondents and attitude of consumers towards eco labelled products.

H₃: There is no significant relationship between the Perceived environmental responsibility and attitude of consumers towards eco labelled products.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design is descriptive in nature. Data Type used for the study are primary and secondary. The study covered students enrolled for various courses of graduation and master level at Aligarh Muslim University. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed out of which some were returned, partially filled or some were not returned at all. Only 375 questionnaires were considered fit for analysis. So, further analysis was carried out on these 375 questionnaires. Sampling Technique used is Convenience Sampling. Data was collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to the students after explaining the purpose of the study. Students were assured that the information they provided would remain confidential. Moreover, the respondents were not required to reveal their identity while filling up the questionnaire. This too encouraged them to provide truthful responses. For Research Instrument, Structured and undisguised questionnaire was used. Questions asked were closed ended. A structured self-administered questionnaire in English language was used to collect the information. The questionnaire was pre-tested with the experts to check its appropriateness and to avoid ambiguity. Based on inputs during the pre-test, some modifications were done in the ordering of the questions as well as the language to make it respondent friendly. Questions were asked in a simple language and the use of jargons/technical terms was avoided to minimize errors. Section I Q1 to Q4 They were intended to measure awareness about eco labelled products. The questions are based on nominal scale. Section II Q5 to Q8 They were intended to measure Social Influence, Perceived seriousness of environmental problems, perceived environmental responsibility and green purchasing behaviour. They are based on 5 point Bi-polar likert scale. The options in question 7(a,b,c) were reverse coded, because these were negative worded statements. Section III Q9 to Q12 Demographic Variables-General demographic information like gender, age, family income were collected.

Correlation is a statistical technique that can show whether and how strongly pairs of variables are related. Correlation is computed into what is known as the correlation coefficient, which ranges between -1 and +1. Perfect positive correlation (a correlation coefficient of +1) implies that as one variable moves either up or down, the other variable will move in the same direction. Alternatively, perfect negative correlation means that if one variable moves in either direction the security that is perfectly negatively correlated will move in the opposite direction. If the correlation is 0, the movements of the variables are said to have no correlation; they are completely random.

Data Analysis

Sample mainly consists of respondents belonging to middle income group [20,000-50,000] which accounts to 53.8%. Mostly respondents belongs to age group between 20-25 years which accounts to 68%. Sample consists of 50% male and 50% female respondents. Most of the respondents are postgraduates which accounts for 56%. Most of the respondents are interested in buying eco labelled products. Infact 83.5% of the respondents have already bought eco labelled product at least once in their life time. About 42% of the respondent buy eco labelled product at least once in a month. They also mentioned that

they consider that the eco labelled products are different from conventional products.

CORRELATIONS-VARIABLES= Socialinfluence,Perceived Seriousness of Environmental Problems, Perceived Environmental Responsibility & Attitude of consumers towards eco labelled product

As it can be seen in the Table 1 the social influence has significant and positive relationship with the attitude of consumers towards eco labelled products($r=.199;sig=.000$)The relationship however is not strong as suggested by low value of coefficient of correlation.In the same way the Perceived Seriousness of Environmental Problems is also having significant and positive correlation with Attitude of consumers towards eco labelled products ($r=.141;sig=.006$)The relationship however is not strong as suggested by low value of coefficient of correlation.Perceived environmental responsibility being the exception is not having significant relationship with the Attitude of consumers towards eco labelled products ($sig=.918$)The Hypothesis H_1 that there is no significant relationship between the Social influence and attitude of consumers towards eco labelled products is **rejected**. The Hypothesis H_2 that there is no significant relationship between the Perceived seriousness of environmental problems of respondents and attitude of consumers towards eco labelled products is **rejected**.The Hypothesis H_3 that there is no significant relationship between the Perceived environmental responsibility of respondents and attitude of consumers towards eco labelled products is **accepted**.

	Social Influence	Perceived Environmental Responsibility	Perceived Seriousness of Environmental Problems
Pearson Correlation			
Attitude of consumers towards eco labelled products	.199**	-.005	.141**
Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	.918	.006

Table -1

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is mainly to understand the most important factors that can influence the purchase behaviour of eco labelled products.For this purpose, we select several elements to understand the actual role of these factors regarding purchase behaviour of eco labelled products.Social influence,perceived seriousness of environmental problems, perceived environmental responsibility and green purchasing behaviour was taken into consideration.We correlate Social influence,perceived seriousness of environmental problems, perceived environmental responsibility with green purchasing behaviour to understand that whether they have direct relationship with it or not.Following concluding remarks have been given.The young consumers are influenced by members of their social group.Friends,siblings and parents have an important role in their purchasing decisions of eco labelled products.The young consumers are concerned about the environment and they are serious about prevailing environmental problems.They want to mitigate these problems and save the earth from evil effects of environmental degradation for themselves and their future generation.They see eco-labelled products as an option to deal with these problems.The seriousness about the environmental problems

increases with age and education levels.The consumers become mature with the increasing age and education levels and their understanding about the environmental problems and their effects on present and future generations become more clear.They are more inclined to act green if properly directed to do so.Understanding the in-

fluence/importance of these factors(regarding the purchase decision of eco labelled products) can help marketers in making effective marketing plans.The environment label would be an important element in future environmental policy.It can assist consumers to become environmentally responsible in their daily lives by providing information to take account of environmental factors in their purchase decisions. It encourages citizens to purchase products, which have less harmful environmental impacts.Ultimately it improves the quality of the environment and encourages the sustainable management of resources. It is responsibility of government, manufactures, employers and institutes to make consumers, employees and students aware for the green products and service to save future of the earth. If the level of education will increases in India awareness for the green products and service will increase. It is also the responsibility of individual to **"Think Green and Act Green"**.As a suggestion for government, government can raise campaigns to promote public awareness of eco-labels as it is proven in this study that trustfulness of eco-labels can exert a significant influence in green purchase behaviour of consumers. With the increase awareness on eco labels, it would help in promoting green consumption among consumers. However, government should be monitoring the credibility and trustworthiness of messages carried in eco-labels.As also suggested by (Rios et al., 2006) government should endeavour to inform citizens about the meaning and availability of the new eco-labels and eco-brands and the benefits of using eco-labelled and eco-branded products to environment.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Since, the attitude of consumers towards eco labelled product is correlated with social influence and perceived seriousness of environmental problems as shown in the findings of the research.It is recommended to the marketers of eco labelled product to approach the consumers through their social groups.The medium such as internet and television can be used as an effective tool to promote eco labelled product.Further the consumers has high perceived seriousness of environmental problems, so marketers can use fear appeals to target the consumers.The consumers who are more in age can be used as an opinion leader for the consumers who are younger than them. They can influence young consumers through word of mouth for purchasing eco labelled product.The emotional appeals like "Together we can save the earth",Environmental protection starts from me" for promoting the eco labelled product.Green marketing should use more buzz marketing to encourage young consumers to talk about environmental messages to their peers and recommend good environmental products to their friends by word of mouth in the form of face to face or new media communications.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The structured self-administered questionnaire was used, so there was a possibility of reporting false information. However, every effort was made to motivate respondents to provide true information.The study is limited to the Aligarh Muslim University campus so we need to generalize the findings with caution.Sampling technique used is Convenient Sampling; therefore there is a possibility that the results may be biased. Probability Sampling gives more accurate results.The sample size includes mostly youngsters; therefore results are not applicable to all age groups.There is a possibility that respondents may have given socially desirable responses and thus the results & conclusions made may be inaccurate.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is conducted on general eco-brands.As such future studies could focus on a specific eco-brand such as Body Shop or Himalaya for a better understanding by respondents.Additionally,choosing a specific eco-brand can provide respondents with the opportunity to compare eco-branded and the non eco-branded products thus generating a more reliable response.This research only undertake the younger generation for survey.People from other age groups such as middle age,senior citizens can also be included as they might be interested to purchase eco-labelled products.Future studies must contemplate other variables and broader demographic area as a base element to measure the impact upon consumers green purchase intentions.Research is mainly conducted in university area and it includes university students. Future researches can include respondents from other parts of the city as well.Sample size can be increased so as to increase the reliability of the date and to minimize the errors.Open-Ended questions can be asked to get quality responses from the respond-

ents. The family backgrounds of the students are not being taken into consideration while measuring their consumption pattern. So backgrounds, location of residence should also be taken into account. Sampling technique used for the study is Convenient Sampling. Future researchers should use Probability Sampling so that the accuracy of the analysis can be increased.

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