

Eco-Friendly Packaging and Consumer Behaviour

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ABSTRACT

In present marketing scenario, the study of consumer behavior has become essential. Consumers are the kings of markets. Without consumers no business organization can run. All the activities of the business concerns end with consumers and consumer satisfaction. Customer behavior study is based on consumer buying behavior, with the customer playing the three distinct roles of user, payer and buyer. Consumer buying behaviour has become an integral part of strategic market planning. In order to develop a framework for the study consumer behaviour it is helpful to begin by considering the evolution of the field of consumer research and the different paradigms of thought that have influenced the discipline. The increasing internationalization and globalization of business has forced many firms to reconsider what contributes to their competitive advantage. With pollution levels increasing every year and consumers willing to make more sense in their daily consumption, packaging sustainability represents an important issue for industrials and retailers. The understanding of environmentally concerned consumer behavior is of importance to consumers, business, market place, educationists, public policy makers, thinkers and academicians.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the influence of eco-friendly packaging on consumers' responses. It defines the concept of eco-friendly packaging, and proposes a consumer-led taxonomy of its cues. In this paper, consumer environmental choice is studied by analyzing the relative importance of green packaging when compared with other relevant product attributes.

Key-Words: Consumer Behavior, Eco-friendly packaging.

INTRODUCTION

Study of consumer's behaviour is a key to the success of business organizations. Marketing personnel are constantly analyzing the buying behaviour and purchase decisions of consumer, to predict the future trends. Consumer behaviour can be explained as the study of how, when, what and why people buy some product. Consumer behaviour can be understood as: "The decision process and physical activity of individuals engaged in when evaluating, acquiring, using, or disposing of goods and services", (Loudon and Della Bitta, 1980). Nowadays, it can also be illustrated in the following way: "activities people undertake when obtaining, consuming, and disposing of products and services", (Blakwell, Minard and Engel, 2001). A study done by Voss and Parasuraman (2003) suggests that the purchase preference is primarily determined by price, than quality during pre-purchase evaluation. Given explicit quality information and price of product had no effect on pre-purchase or post-consumption quality perceptions. Instead, post consumption and quality evaluations had a favourable impact on price evaluations. Another study done by Chernev (1997) described the effect of common features on brand choice and the moderating role of attribute importance. It is argued that when attributes of brand differ in importance, with the best value on the most important attribute, polarizing brands choice shares. In contrast, when all attributes are similar in their importance, common features are likely to have an opposite effect, equalizing brands share.

Russo and France (1994), studied the nature of the choice process for common nondurables purchase by tracking eye fixations in a laboratory simulation of supermarket shelves. The findings of the study are fully compatible with the general view that the choice process is constructed to adapt to the immediate purchase environment. To describe about shopping orientation, Sinha (2003) reports that Indian Shoppers seek emotional value more than the functional value of shopping. His orientation is based more on the entertainment value than on the functional value, in the study. The orientation is found to be affected primarily by the type of the store, the frequency of buying or purchasing and to some extent by the socio-economic classification.

Vigneron and Johnson (1999) studied that people's need for appearances and materialism were increasing. Now human beings wanted to satisfy the need to look and feel good. This created a boom in the cosmetic and toiletries sector across all over the world. The pattern and preference of use of these items vary according to different needs or segments of gender, age and socio economic class of consumers. When we review the literature on the cosmetic and toiletry industry, not so much studies are available especially about Indian consumer market.

Manufacturers and marketers need to gain a deeper understanding of consumer and shopper behaviours and then work out the appropriate value proposition and delivery channels for their basket of goods and services. It is well known fact that the success of any business organization depends on company's ability to understand and influence consumer behaviour. Failure to understand the dynamic consumer behaviour and improper allocation and coordination of resources will lead the organization to a great loss. The better marketers are those who understand the consumer behaviour, the more successful they will be at influencing consumers purchase behaviour (Kurti Shah 2009). There are three sections of consumer behaviour that need to be studied carefully: psychological influences, socio-cultural influences and situational influence. There is a risk of dissatisfaction among the consumers as far as its benefits are concerned.

“Packaging includes the activities of designing and producing a container for a product” (Kotler 2000). According to Kuvykaite (2009), package attracts consumer’s attention to particular brand, enhances its image, and influences consumer’s perceptions about product. Package imparts unique value to products (Underwood et al. 2001; Silayoi and Speece 2004), works as a tool for differentiation, that is, helps consumers to choose the product from wide range of similar products, stimulates consumers buying behaviour (Wells et al. 2007). Thus packaging performs an important role in marketing communications and could be treated as one of the most important factors influencing consumer’s buying decisions. Packaging protects the commodity from losses, damages and deterioration in quality due to exposure and it keeps the content pure and clean, as, the goods may be packed mechanically and untouched by unclean hands. Packaging also reduces the chances of breakage and pilferage in transit and adulteration. Pre-packed goods ensure correct weight, quality and price as these are indicated on the package. Packaging helps in widening of the market due to necessary protection, ease in handling and convenience to all. It also helps in branding, advertising and point of purchase display (Sherlekar 2006).

Packaging eco-friendliness

Packaging eco-friendliness has never been subject to a clear conceptualization in consumer behavior literature. Instead, researchers have used different terms when studying eco-friendly packaging: green packaging design, sustainable design, ecodesign, design for the environment and environmentally conscious design (Boks and Stevels, 2007). The Sustainable Packaging

Coalition® (2011) has defined sustainable packaging according to eight criteria beneficial, safe and healthy for individuals and communities throughout its life cycle; meets market criteria for performance and costs; is sourced, manufactured, transported and recycled using renewable energy; optimizes the use of recycled source material; is manufactured using clean production technologies and best practices; is made from materials healthy throughout the life cycle; is physically designed to optimize materials and energy; and is effectively recovered and utilized in biological and/or industrial closed loop cycles. The above criteria outline a framework for specific actions that are to be taken by companies to manufacture more environmentally friendly packaging, but provide no information about how consumers perceive and value this packaging. Considering that consumers' selection of these eco-friendly packaging truly ensures that global packaging pollution decreases, it seems rather important to conceptualize eco-designed packaging in the eye of the consumer. Boks and Stevels (2007) have actually stated that there are several kinds of eco-friendliness falling into three different categories: governmental, scientific and consumer. Packaging eco-friendliness can therefore be analyzed within that framework. Governmental eco-friendliness is related to legal requirements such as how to recycle or discard hazardous materials. Scientific green usually takes a life-cycle assessment point of view and determines the environmental impact of products throughout the whole product life cycle. This category is usually considered as the most accurate and objective to measure the real environmental impact of a product.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to develop a framework for the study consumer behaviour it is helpful to begin by considering the evolution of the field of consumer research and the different paradigms of thought that have influenced the discipline. As described in this article, a set of dimensions can be identified in the literature, which can be used to characterize and differentiate the various perspectives on consumer research. It is argued that consumer behaviour itself emerged as a distinct field of study during the 1960s; and is characterized by two broad paradigms, the positivist and the non-positivist. The positivist paradigm encompasses the economic, behavioural, cognitive, motivational/trait/attitudinal, and situational perspectives; these perspectives are referred to as the traditional perspectives as they pre-date the development of the non-positivist paradigm. The positivist paradigm, which is still the dominant paradigm, emphasizes the supremacy of human reason and that there is a single, objective truth that can be discovered by science. This paradigm regards the world as a rational and ordered place with a clearly defined past, present, and future. The assumption of rationalism is therefore fundamental to the traditional perspective. The opposing, non-positivist paradigm, envelops the interpretive and postmodern perspectives, which have emerged more recently during the period post-1980 to date. The proponents of this emerging perspective argue that positivism overemphasizes the rational view and the ideology of a homogenous social culture and thereby denies the complex social and cultural world in which consumers live. This paradigm instead stresses, the importance of symbolic and subjective experience and the idea that consumers construct meanings based on unique and shared cultural experiences, and thus there can be no single unified world view. Unsurprisingly, the two paradigms differ in their views on the benefits derived from consumption and the objectives that underscore consumer research. The traditional, positivist perspective takes a very utilitarian approach to the benefits from consumption. While the non-positivist perspectives place much greater emphasis on the symbolic dimensions of choice. The objective of non-positivist research endeavour is to achieve a better understanding of consumer behaviour with no specific intent to influence consumer processes. Conversely,

outcomes of positivist research are directed toward advancing the goals of marketing practice. By identifying the paradigmatic shifts within the field, this article aims to identify different streams of thought that could guide future consumer research.

Consumer behaviour is the study “of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use, or dispose of products, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy needs and desires” (Solomon 1995, 7). In the marketing context, the term consumer refers not only to the act of purchase itself, but also to patterns of aggregate buying which include pre-purchase and post-purchase activities. Pre-purchase activity might consist of the growing awareness of a need or want, and a search for and evaluation of information about the products and brands that might satisfy it. Post-purchase activities include the evaluation of the purchased item in use and the reduction of any anxiety which accompanies the purchase of expensive and infrequently-bought items. Each of these has implications for purchase and repurchase and they are amenable in differing degrees to marketer influence (Foxall 1987). Engel, et al. (1986, 5) define consumer behavior as “those acts of individuals directly involved in obtaining, using, and disposing of economic goods and services, including the decision processes that precede and determine these acts”. Simple observation provides limited insight into the complex nature of consumer choice and researchers have increasingly sought the more sophisticated concepts and methods of investigation provided by behavioural sciences in order to understand, predict, and possibly control consumer behaviour more effectively. Psychology, social psychology, and sociology are the disciplines most widely employed in this endeavor which has become a substantial academic industry in its own right. In order to develop a framework for the study of consumer behavior it is helpful to begin by considering the evolution of the field of consumer research and the different paradigms of thought that have influenced the discipline (Marsden and Littler, 1998). Paradigms in consumer research can be broadly classified as a set of fundamental assumptions that researchers make about what they are studying and how they study it (Kuhn, 1962). Consumer behaviour itself emerged as a distinct field of study in the 1960s. A major catalytic influence in its emergence was the formation of the Association for Consumer Research in 1969. Membership now exceeds 1700 (www.acrweb.org), and the growing maturity of the field is reflected in its annual conference proceedings, entitled *Advances in Consumer Research*. The literature has grown sharply, with the *Journal of Consumer Research* (first published in 1974) standing as a premier source. The *Journal of Consumer Psychology* was launched in 1992. Literature on packaging is usually divided into two main streams; the first approach called holistic or gestaltist considers the influence of packaging as a whole, whereas the second approach, called analytical, examines specifically the influence of verbal, graphical or structural elements on consumer responses. The subsequent paragraphs highlight the main features of both approaches and position this research within that corpus of literature.

The holistic approach considers packaging in its totality and does not consider its characteristics independently. In this area of research, some studies have used qualitative approaches to tackle consumers’ perceptions of packaging (Underwood and Ozanne, 1998; Nancarrow et al., 1998; Kniazeva and Belk, 2007; Wells et al., 2007; Rundh, 2005, 2009). Most studies in this field are following a semiotics approach, and researchers examine the meaning assigned by consumers when confronted to package design. Dano (1998) argues that packaging is a meaningful object and that its success depends on the adaptation of its discourse to consumers’ expectations and personal values. In a similar approach, Orth and Malkewitz (2008) have created a guide aiming to help marketers to develop packaging that would directly tie together packaging design and

brand personality. Hence, robust brands should have a massive and contrasted packaging design, whereas competent brands should exhibit a delicate design.

Wang (2013) states that attitudes toward visual packaging directly influence perceived quality of food products and brand inferences. In short, this first approach considers the gestalt of several elements to study the packaging as a global entity. On the other hand, the analytical approach regards packaging characteristics independently, and the elements usually studied in the literature are either structural or graphical/iconic or verbal/informational. Thus, it appears that color influences perceptions and judgments of taste (Dichter, 1964), product evaluation and purchase intention (Gordon et al., 1994), or beliefs and consumers' attitudes (Rouillet and Droulers, 2005). Likewise, packaging shape has an effect on product preferences (Raghubir and Greenleaf, 2006), volume perceptions and product use (Folkes and Matta, 2004) as well as on brand personality (Pantin-Sohier, 2009). Size influences product purchase and the quantity used during product consumption (Wansink, 1996). The presence of imagery also triggers purchase. Only a few studies tackle the influence of environmental cues (Bech-Larsen, 1996; Polonsky et al., 1998; Rokka and Uusitalo, 2008). Among them Rokka and Uusitalo (2008) have tested if green packaging would have an influence on product choice.

ABOUT CONSUMER'S FACTOR

Consumer Personality Factors

There are two factors mainly influencing the consumers for decision making: Risk aversion and innovativeness. Risk aversion is a measure of how much consumers need to be certain and sure of what they are purchasing (Donthu and Gilliland, 1996). Highly risk adverse consumers need to be very certain about what they are buying. Whereas less risk adverse consumers can tolerate some risk and uncertainty in their purchases. The second variable, innovativeness, is a global measure which captures the degree to which consumers are willing to take chances and experiment with new ways of doing things (Donthu and Gilliland, 1996). The shopping motivation literature is abound with various measures of individual characteristics (e.g., innovative, venturesome, cosmopolitan, variety seeking), therefore, innovativeness and risk aversion were included in this study to capture several of these traits. Measures by Donthu and Gilliland (1996) were used to measure innovativeness and risk aversion.

Consumer Perception Factors

Perception is a mental process, whereby an individual selects data or information from the environment, organizes it and then draws significance or meaning from it.

Perceived Fit: Perceived fit is an attitudinal measure of how appropriate a certain channel of distribution is for a specific product. Morrison and Roberts (1998) found that consumer's perception of the fit between a service/product and a channel is very influential in determining whether they will consider using that channel for a specific service. In fact, perceived fit was found to be more important than consumer's preferences for the distribution method or service.

Packaging: Packaging establishes a direct link with the consumers at the point of purchase as it can very well change the perceptions they have for a particular brand. A product has to draw the attention of the consumers through an outstanding packaging design. Earlier packaging was considered only a container to put a product in, but today, research in to the right packaging is beginning at the product development stage itself. Packaging innovation has been at the heart of Dabur's attempt to rap with the urban consumers. It spends large sums annually on packaging research. -"We have been laying emphasis on aesthetics, shelf appeal and convenience for consumer"" says Deepak Manchandra, manager packaging development.

Consumer behavior trends toward eco-friendly attitudes have been increasing. According to a survey made by the Co-operative Bank in the UK, in 1999, 17% of respondents “felt guilty about unethical purchase” and in 2005 there were 44% (Grant, 2007, p. 35). Consumers who have positive attitude towards the environment are more willing to purchase green products (Balderjahn, 1988, p.53). As previously said, however it is also true that even if consumers are concerned about environmental issues; they will not necessarily purchase green products. During the consumer decision making the five stages are sometimes not followed (“problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, product choice and outcome”) for example when the consumer buys a product on impulse, his decision is focused on “environmental cues” and it is called the “behavioural influence perspective” in this case the information on packaging has an important role to play because it is the first thing that the consumer sees (Solomon et al., 314-317).

Many retailers such as L’Oréal, Procter and Gamble are investing more and more money in the production of eco-friendly products. For example Procter and Gamble reduced the size of its packaging or some detergents are now more concentrated to save money on the packaging or for example instead of selling toothpaste in a cardboard box marketers sell it just with the tube. (Solomon et al., 2010, p. 211).

Packaging materials can be broadly classified as food and non-food packaging materials. Food packaging materials comprises of glass, ceramic, earthenware, plastics, metalized plastics, laminated paper, multilayer packaging and metals like some alloys, stainless steel and aluminum cans, foils. These packaging materials have high volume but may have low weights making up only 15-20 % of all packaging. On the other hand non-food packaging materials are mostly cardboards, blister plastic, thermocol, paper, wood, cellophane and other clear transparent and opaque plastics, multilayer containers and strappings. The non-food packaging make up almost 80-90% of all packaging by weight (Ministry of Environment and Forests 2010). Packaging waste can have number of impacts on the environment. Most of the packaging waste is dumped in landfills or burnt which results in pollution in number of ways (Ministry of Environment and forests 2010). Packaging materials like fused aluminium and plastics are completely non-biodegradable and emit toxic fumes on burning. It also causes infertility of soil. According to Indian Institute of Packaging (2009), total packaging waste constitutes 32 million metric tones every year of which paper and board waste constitute 120000 metric tones. On the other hand, glass, metal and other waste constitute 4000 metric tones each while plastic waste is 5000 metric tones and film laminates constitutes 3000 metric tones. If there were few people in the world, the earth’s environment would be very forgiving and capable of absorbing most that human throws at it, cleansing itself automatically. The days of low population on the earth have passed, the total number of people on the planet and particularly the density of people in some parts of the planet magnify the size of environmental insult, overloading the capacity of the earth for self-cleansing.

The family is generally viewed as a semiopen system. Inputs from the environment enter into the family and help to shape its decision outcomes. In turn, families help shape environments by the decisions they make (Paolucci et al. 1977; Martlow and Silver 1991; Kinnear and Taylor 1973). Family decisions do affect environments, and the environment can influence the quality of resources coming in the family.

Families which accept a responsible consumer role make the decisions about products very carefully. They are aware of the interdependence of family and environment. For instance, they would consider what kinds of wastes will the family release into the environment? Can these

wastes be recycled? The choices which consumers make are never ending series of votes 'for' or 'against' the environment (Kinnear et al. 1974; Makower 1993). These reflect their environmental concern.

Concern about environment is worldwide phenomenon. The result of a poll conducted by Dunlap (1993) has shown that most people in both industrialized and developing nations have at least some concern about environmental problems. According to Kolstad (2000), "concern with the environment is not a passing fad but a deep-seated concern, brought on in large part by the coincidence of high incomes and high population density. A survey to assess environmental behavior, attitudes, and knowledge and the personality dimensions was conducted by Arbuthnot (1977) on two diverse samples, 85 users of a recycling centre and 60 conservative church members. The two samples differed systematically as predicted on behavior, attitude, knowledge and personality characteristics. The education, knowledge and environmentally related attitudes best predicted recycling behavior, while exposure to information through books, personality and attitudes best predicted environmental knowledge.

Another study conducted in Germany by Holzer and Schahn (1990) revealed that the knowledge and gender moderate the relationship between attitude and behavior. Women were more environmentally concerned in those areas of household behavior, whereas men knew more about environmental problems. Shamdasani et al. (1993) in their study observed that the green movement had started to make its impact on the consumption decisions and behaviors of Singaporean consumers. Their exploratory study had examined the differences among ecologically concerned and non ecologically concerned consumers with respect to their personal and social characteristics and their perception of marketing of eco-friendly products. Significant differences in terms of attitude and personality traits among the green and non green consumers were reported. A state-wide survey of Pennsylvanians conducted in 1990 provided data on residents' opinion about ideas contained in the new environmental paradigm (NEP) and behaviors engaged in that are environmentally protective. Although Pennsylvanians expressed support for the NEP, they were not likely to engage in activities that contributed to environmental protection (Scott and Willits 1994). Minton and Rose (1997) investigated the main effect of environmentally concerned attitude and norms on product choice, search for information, recycling and the various behavioral intentions. His research supports the work of Schwartz (1977) and Hopper and Nielsen (1991) by showing that the personal norm has the primary influence on environment friendly behavior. He stated that the attitude toward the environment had strongest effect of the three predictors on the behavioral intentions is very important contribution to the literature. However, the personal norm had the strongest effect of the three predictors on the product choice, information search and recycling. Thus, while attitude is a good predictor of intentions to act in environmentally concerned ways, sense of personal moral obligation is more likely to lead to action in the form of environmentally friendly product choices search and recycling.

A study conducted on "values and relationship to environmental concern and pro-environment behavior-A gender analysis" highlighted that male and female were reported to be connected with nature at moderate level and males reconnected with nature at high level as compared to female. The male gave more importance to egoistic concern while females gave more importance to biosphere concern in relation to environmental problems. It also revealed that there existed a relationship between pro-environment behavior of male respondents with their biospheric concern and pro-environment behavior of the female respondents with their egoistic and altruistic concern (Jaiswal and Patel 2009).

As the general concern about environmental quality has been increasing, a totally new problem area in consumption and welfare research has emerged: the impact of private consumption on the quality of physical environment. The behavior of consumers, both with respect to the environmental compatibility of consumption processes and to consumers' interesting environmental quality has yet to gain due attention in the researches.

It is highly important that present day consumer is aware of various issues related with the impact of packaging on the environment. Knowledge can be enhanced if needed. This is all the more essential in India because up till now Indian consumers have not found any product bearing "Eco- mark" (an earthen pot). In other countries several products are available which have been given eco- mark to ensure that the product is least harmful to the environment. Such a mark is given after doing 'cradle-to-grave' analysis of the product. But the Indian consumers have to select and make a "good green choice" among various alternatives available in the market. By selecting the alternative which is the least harmful to the environment, they exhibit their eco-friendly behavior. However, manufacturers are responding to pressures to reduce packaging or make a product more "environmentally-friendly," Moreover, buying behavior in relation to consumer goods has been studied but environmental concern in buying goods is relatively uninvestigated in India.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it was discovered that the problem of making packages sustainable is not black and white, but entirely a gray area. Consumers do need to become more informed, but in the interim manufacturers are becoming more and more responsible and acting in accordance with sustainability and attempting to make products that mesh with experts opinions. – Structural changes are reinforcing a need for competitiveness where packaging can make the difference for many consumer products. The findings from the literature review underscore the importance of packaging and packaging design for fulfilling multi-functions in relation to customer satisfaction and buying behavior. New demands due to changes in consumption patterns and habits are requiring innovative packaging solutions in retail outlets.

Practical implications

The main implication for management is to understand and take advantage of packaging as a strategic weapon and marketing tool for the entire business. The government should take important decision to ban the sale of packaging that is harmful for environment. The consumers should be made aware and encouraged for purchasing good in eco-friendly packaging. This can be done with the help of educational programme. The field of Family and Community Resource management can play a significant role in preparing and promoting such educational programmes. The findings of the study is of great importance for homemakers as it will make them aware and awaken about their purchase of good in eco-friendly packaging and thus reflecting their environmental concerns.

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