

2

Green Consumers – An Empirical Study in Bangalore City

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ABSTRACT

Green consumerism has emerged as an important aspect in the 21st century. Companies and business enterprises are giving more importance to environment. Green consumer behaviour is being closely observed in most of the western markets and they are giving more importance to the consumer consumption patterns. 'Green Consumerism' is not a new phenomenon. But until 90's, it did not reach its zenith. Consumers are responsible for the ecological problems, instead of producers, as the consumers decide, what is sold in the market. On the other hand consumers also contribute to its solution by buying Green (Smith, 2000).

Businesses are trying to reach Indian consumers with new responsibility of consuming Green and are coming up with environmental friendly products. Corporate sectors as part of corporate responsibility are incorporating good number of Green activities.

There are numerous research studies conducted on Green consumerism in developed nations, whereas in India very few studies are there on Green consumer. This study highlights on Green consumerism and consumption behaviour by finding out whether (or not) Indian urban consumers have completely become 'Green Consumers'. The study also understands the awareness level of consumers towards Green, their attitude and perception towards the concept 'Green' and 'Green Consumption.'

Key Words: Consumers, Green Consumers, Green Consumption, Green Consumerism

1. INTRODUCTION

Green consumers are very earnest in their intention and always have a commitment to Green lifestyle. They try to judge their practice of environmental purchase as insufficient. Green consumers mostly look for companies taking steps in Green product creations and their effort to maintain sustainability towards generating Green products. A Green Consumer can be defined as 'An individual who is very concerned about the environment and, therefore, only purchases products that are environmental-friendly or eco-friendly'. Products with little or no packaging, products made from natural ingredients and products that are made without causing pollution are all examples of eco-friendly products.' A Green Consumer will always be attentive towards environmental related issues and will be supportive towards environmental causes. "Buying Green products presents people with a social dilemma: they have to be willing to pay premium prices – not for their own direct benefit, but for the greater good," says Professor Shruti Gupta of Penn State University, a world expert in ethical behaviour. "Consumers will buy pricier Green products," Gupta says, "but only if they are convinced that the sacrifice of higher prices signals some measurable value."

Adams provides a useful definition of Green Consumerism as: "The exercise of consumer choice which expresses a preference for less

environmentally harmful goods and services” (Adams *et al* 1991). This emphasis the importance of ‘choice’ in the decision to purchase goods, owing to the individualistic character of the Green consumer act. It is performed alone, not collectively, with decentralised decision-making on the basis of identified self-interest (Smith 1990). Green consumerism is hence a type of “public environmentalism” (Buttel and Larson 1980) in that individuals are sympathetic to environmental causes and espouse some environmental behaviours, but not in any collective form.

Green consumption mainly happens by two different types of consumption

- Individual objectives of the consumer.
- Collective long term environmental protection objectives of society.

Consumers are slowly moving towards the concept ‘Green’ in India. Mainly in major cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Chennai and Bengaluru people are becoming aware towards eco-friendly products. Products are certified as Green only if they satisfy the norms of Government Environmentally Preferable Products (EPP) program, Fair Trade, Energy Star and so on. A product is considered earth-friendly if it is biodegradable, meaning that it will pose no threat to the earth and environment, when it is released to the air, water or earth while in use or when disposed of. The term ‘Green’ has nothing to do with colour, but the choice of name is appropriate because Green is a colour that is often associated with nature. The term is widely used and it doesn’t take much for a product to be called Green, so it can cover a wide range of consumer goods. Green Products are those which are non toxic, energy and water-efficient, as well as harmless to the environment.

1.2. SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

Marketers are trying their best by incorporating Green products or eco friendly products in the markets. Almost all consumers are aware about eco-friendly products but take little initiative to buy Green products. It’s a real challenge to

understand the Indian Consumers attitude and perception towards Green product purchase and their consumption pattern. One of the major problems faced by environmentalists today is to know the consumption pattern of a consumer towards durable products. The scope of this research paper is to know whether (or not) Indian consumers have become ‘Green’ and has their consumption pattern changed towards the environment.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As majority of Indian consumers are comparatively poor, their choice of products is natural and notably influenced by price. Other issues, such as environmental impact, play little role in their choice of products. As environment friendly products usually cost more, only consumers with higher purchasing power are willing to pay the premium price because of their concern for environment (Swapnali Borah; 2012). Every time someone makes a decision about whether (or not) to purchase a product or service there is the potential for that decision to contribute more or less sustainable pattern of consumption. Each purchase has ethical, resource, waste and community impact implications. When individuals consider the adoption of sustainable lifestyles, they engage with an increasingly complex decision-making process. These every day decisions on practical environmental or ethical solutions often ending up at trade-offs between conflicting issues and result in a “motivational and practical complexity of Green consumption” (Moisander, 2007).

Researchers in the past have also highlighted importance of Green promotion tools such as Green advertising and eco labelling towards influencing consumers to buy Green product and to indulge in more sustainable life styles (M.R. Cohen, 1973; S. K. Jain 2006). Jackson (2005) provides a comprehensive review of the literature on consumer behaviour and behavioural change. He concludes on the evidence base for different models of change and recommendations to policy-makers encouraging more sustainable lifestyles.

Faiers et al (2007) have also produced a useful categorisation and review of consumer behaviour theories that relate to the critical internal and external factors influencing consumer choice in respect of energy use. The categories are Consumer choice, Needs, Values and Attitudes, Learning, Social learning, Buying process, Categorisation of consumers and Product attributes (Biel & Dahlstrand 2005; Sener & Hazer 2007; Wheale & Hinton 2007). This could be brand strength, culture, demographic characteristics, finance, habit, lack of information, lifestyles, personalities and trading off between different ethical factors. This perspective has served to highlight the nature of compromises reached in real decision processes. In this way individuals or families build up portfolios of purchase (or non-purchase) decisions, which may or may not be linked or underpinned by a belief set (Peattie, 1999). Consumer demand for Green products and services in China, India and Singapore is outstripping supply. That's according to a recent regional study (2011) by product certification and testing company Tuv Sud. The study found that business are missing out on opportunities and need to change their attitudes to tap a growing market.

When it comes to Green products, businesses seem to be underestimating demand. Tuv Sud's Green Gauge, which surveyed 2600 consumers and more than 460 businesses in China, India and Singapore, has shown disconnection between how consumers and business view Green products. The research demonstrated that on an average 84 per cent of consumers are prepared to pay a 27 per cent premium for products which are clearly certified as Green. Peattie (1999) suggested that the clearest way to understand Green consumerism is by viewing each individual's consumption behaviour as a series of purchase decisions. These decisions may be inter-related and underpinned by common values or they may be unconnected and situational. Looking at sustainable consumption in this way leads to a micro focus on individual purchases, an approach that is followed in this paper.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Basically this study is about exploring the Green consumers and behavioural patterns. The sub-objectives revolve around portraying the extent of Green theme consideration by an individual while purchasing consumer durables. As housewives occupy key place in purchase decision, influencing and deciding about vast array of goods, their attitudes towards Green products has also been given a window sight.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study is a descriptive approach to achieve stated objectives. Both primary and secondary data was used to collect data. Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered to understand the Indian consumers' opinion towards Green Consumerism and to know whether (or not) in reality they follow the pattern of Green Consumption. The questionnaire was made keeping in mind ease of understanding. While framing the questionnaire 5 point Likert scale was used to collect the responses. The questionnaire was divided into two parts: one to know respondent's attitude and perception towards Green products and second part helped to know the consumption pattern towards Green products and sustainability maintenance.

The study adopted non probability method sampling as there was no sample frame available. 150 respondents were chosen from Bengaluru city, Karnataka, India. All the respondents chosen were in the category of housewives- as they are called as 'Queens' in consumerism. This is because most of the household purchase decisions are mainly influenced by them. The respondents were selected on a convenient sampling method and an in-depth interview was conducted. All respondents were in the age group of 35-45 years. The average monthly income was in between 20,000-30000 INR.

White Goods (Household Consumer Durable Appliances) were taken into consideration in understanding the housewives behaviour towards

Green consumption pattern. The products focused were Refrigerators and Washing Machines. Refrigerator is one of the fastest growing segments of the consumer durable industry witnessing significant growth on account of rising per capita income and improved social indicators. Washing machine, no longer a luxury appliance, is gaining ground as a utilitarian product for the rapidly growing middle class and increasing younger population, who routinely holiday overseas, spends on aspirational goods, and experiments with western food habits. With such evolving lifestyles, consumers are warming up to the idea of purchasing home appliances with advanced features (ADI 2012). The data collected was analyzed using simple statistical tool like percentage for descriptive analysis.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

The environmental movement is an international movement, represented by a range of organizations, from the large to grassroots and varies from country to country. Due to its large membership, strong beliefs, and occasionally speculative nature, the environmental movement is not always united in its goals. At its broadest, the movement includes private citizens, professionals, government and religious bodies, politicians, scientists etc. Environmentalists advocate the sustainable management of resources discusses about ecosystem, nature etc.

Take Part in Environmental Movements

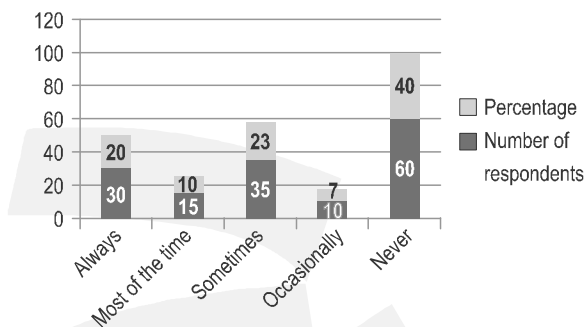


Fig No 5.1
Source: Primary Data

Most of the respondents (60%) mentioned that they never involve themselves in environmental movements whereas; only 20% mentioned that they always take part in such movements and are more concerned about the environment. 23% of the respondents mentioned that they look for the movement on basis of its theme and then try to attend the environmental campaigns.

ROOM FOR GREEN PRODUCT IN THE LIFESTYLE

The definition of “Green” is a grey area and certainly varies among different people, and especially among consumers within different cultures. While Western consumers define the term more in the concept of “back to nature” and Asian consumers define it more in terms of a form of ‘lifestyle’.

Purchasing Green Products is part of Lifestyle

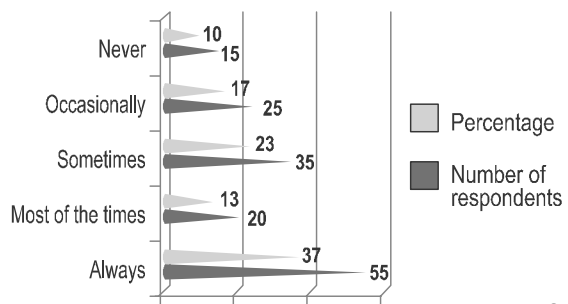


Fig No. 5.2
Source: Primary Data

In the research study it was observed that, majority of respondents (37%) mentioned above always they buy Green products because it is the part of their lifestyle. Over 10% of the respondents have mentioned that they never purchase Green products based on their lifestyle and image.

PERCEIVED ROLE PLAYING IN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Every human must know the importance of environment and nature sustainability. They need to protect environment and realize the role that can be executed. In the research study it was observed that 27% of the respondents feel that they play a pivotal role in changing the scenario of protecting environment through Green purchases occasionally.

Table 5.1 :To Believe you have a Role to Play Towards Environment

	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Occasionally	Never	Total
Number of respondents	32	30	33	40	15	150
Percentage	21	20	22	27	10	100

Most of the respondents (37%) believe they have a role to play in preserving environment. Only 10% of the respondents believe that they don't have to play role towards environmental safe product purchases.

GREEN VALUES

Values are part of human behaviour. Values can be observed from the point of ethical or moral perspective.

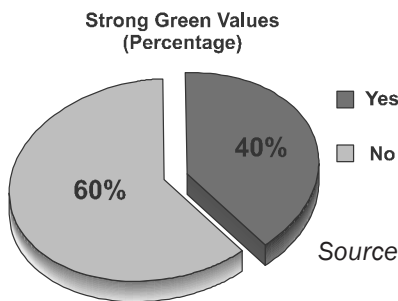


Fig No 5.3
Source: Primary Data

The research study shows that, 60% of the respondents mentioned that Green values are not very strong and only 40% of them mentioned they have strong Green values.

PURCHASE INTENSITY OF GREEN PRODUCTS

An individual usage or consumption towards products need not be Green. Purchasing Green products can always motivate a person based on his/her behaviour towards pro-environmental thoughts and feelings.

Table 5.2 Ask for Green Products

	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Occasionally	Never	Total
Number of respondents	15	25	39	50	21	150
Percentage	10	17	26	33	14	100

Source: Primary Data

In this research study respondents have mentioned that they use to ask for Green products occasionally (33%) for certain specific products than always. Over 14% of the respondents mentioned that they never ask for Green Products inspite of knowing Green environment importance.

AWARENESS OF ECO-LABELS IN INDIA

As the world's environmental consciousness is progressing, the need towards environmental products are increasing too. Green Label therefore gradually plays an important role in international trade.

Awareness of Green Labels used in India (Percentage of Respondents)

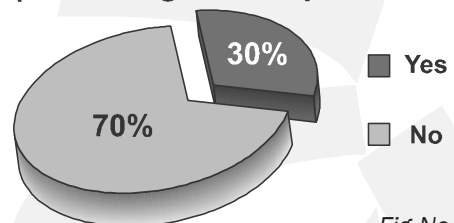


Fig No 5.4
Source: Primary Data

Today, there are about 50 different types of Green labels around the world. In Asia, countries such as China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand have already launched their Green label schemes. Some of the product labels are 'Environmental Friendly', 'Green', 'Ozone Friendly' etc. In the research study it was observed that many of the respondents' i.e., over 70% are not

aware of eco-labels used in India, whereas 30% of the respondents mentioned that they are aware of eco-labels used for Green Products in India.

PERCEIVED PRICING OF GREEN PRODUCTS

Most of the respondents (50%) believe that Green Products can bring in price hike for the product marketed, whereas only 17% of the respondents were against this statement.

Table 5.3 Green Products Are Always Expensive

	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Occasionally	Never	Total
Number of respondents	75	30	15	5	25	150
Percentage	50	20	10	3	17	100

Source: Primary Data

Even though Green Products matters to them still they prefer to purchase products without the tag/label 'Green' because they always looked for value of the product. They believe that because of technology usage these products become more expensive than other products.

GREEN CONSUMPTION PATTERN

In this research study, two products (Refrigerator and Washing Machine) Green Consumption pattern was studied. To know the consumption pattern 7 questions were asked to the respondents under each product category and were analysed on a scale of 3 point Likert Scale.

5.4: TABLE SHOWING RESPONDENTS CONSUMPTION PATTERN TOWARDS GREEN PRODUCT

REFRIGERATOR

Items	Always	Sometimes	Never
Do you follow the Green Tips or Green Instructions	53(35)*	40(27)	57(38)
Do you check the temperature (set temp. at 4 ^o C and freezer at 16 ^o C)	55(37)	35(23)	60(40)
Do you clean the coil (back of the refrigerator) twice a year	20(13)	30(20)	100(67)
Do you keep the refrigerator where there is proper ventilation	40(27)	35(23)	75(50)
Do you keep the refrigerator away from heat generating home appliances'	46(31)	20(13)	84(56)
Do you multi-task yourself by getting/keeping two or more things at one go from the refrigerator	35(23)	40(27)	105(70)
Do you follow the disposal of refrigerator as per the local regulations	11(7)	10(7)	129(86)

*Note: The figures in brackets are percentages

Source: Primary Data

In the present day business scenario, marketers are mainly concerned about providing Green Products to the consumers. For this reason, they spend a lot on technology and thereby create Green Products or Eco-Friendly Products. They try to educate consumers too with regard to Green Consumptions. This research study tries to understand whether (or not) the respondents follow the concept of Green Consumption after the product purchase. While observing the table (5.4) it's observed that only 35% of the respondents follow Green instructions provided by the marketers whereas many of the respondents are not following the Green Consumption pattern of behaviour. Majority of the respondents mentioned that while using refrigerator they never follow the instructions of 'Green' given by the marketers or environmentalists. With regard to disposal of refrigerator majority of the respondents (86%) were of the opinion that they never dispose the product based on the instructions and always sell it as second sales and are not aware of the procedure of product disposal.

5.5 TABLE SHOWING RESPONDENTS CONSUMPTION PATTERN TOWARDS GREEN PRODUCT WASHING MACHINE

Items	Always	Sometimes	Never
Do you follow the Green Tips or Green Instructions	47(31)*	40(27)	63(42)
Do you follow Water Saving Practices regularly	69(46)	15(10)	66(44)
Do you pre-soak dirty garments	26(17)	28(19)	96(64)
Do you use required water always	39(26)	28(19)	83(55)
Do you always wash full load	55(37)	40(27)	55(37)
Do you use natural laundry detergent	41(27)	32(21)	78(52)
Do you follow the disposal of washing machine as per the local regulations	09(6)	11(7)	130 (87)

**Note: The figures in brackets are percentages
Source: Primary Data*

The concept of 'Save Energy, Save Water' should be the mantra while using washing machine. Consumers following this on a regular basis are observed in this research study. It is observed that only 31% of the respondents always follow the Green instructions provided by the marketer or the environmentalists. While considering water saving practices, majority of the respondents (46%) mentioned that they follow the practice regularly. Most of the respondents (64%) do not have a practice of pre-soaking the dirty garments. 87% of the respondents are unaware about the product disposal procedures.

individuals purchase Green Product they should follow a Green Consumption pattern to save environment and energy. Green Consumption is motivated by following Four Goals or Formula i.e. Think Environment, Society, Family and Self (ESFS Formula).

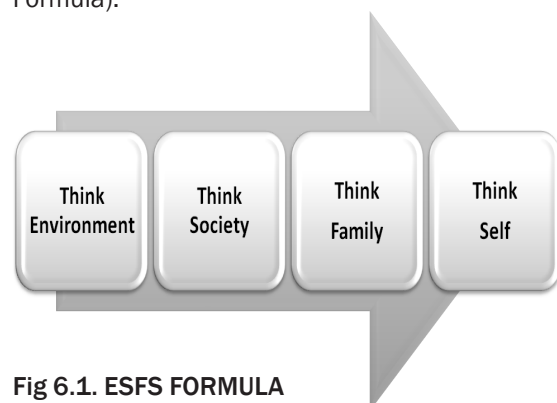


Fig 6.1. ESFS FORMULA

6. FINDINGS & CONCLUSION

Green consumer behaviour is always observed based on their actual purchase of Green products, the willingness of purchasing Green and also the intention of purchasing Green. Even though

There are a lot of products incorporated in the market with the tag 'Green'. Green advices to consumers about purchase and usage, can always motivate consumers to 'Go-Green' and thereby result a healthy change in environment.

The attitude and perception of housewives are slightly changing but not totally like in western countries. This might be due to lack of consumer education and enlightenment, towards environment. Authorities and marketers should go to grass root level and make the consumer aware about the Green Product Purchases (Green Consumerism) and Green Consumption patterns. Absence of reliable factors in literature on Green consumerism restricted this study to make use of advance analysis. Future studies can concentrate on more sophisticated analysis and specifically concentrate on Green consumersim.

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