A Study Analyzing the Green Retail Patronage Behaviour of Shoppers

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1. Green Practices
2. Customer Preferences
3. Store Patronage
4. Perception

Abstract

With growing awareness regarding the threat of global warming, environmental consciousness is at an all-time high. This green concern is also being manifested in the retail sector. As retailing is an energy intensive activity ranging from storage, distribution, packaging to store operations, it has its contribution to global warming, waste, carbon emissions, landfill and pollution. A greener approach to retailing or adopting green retailing practices of less polluting and more resource-efficient can help in promoting sustainability in retailing. A number of stores have decorated their outlets with eco-friendly displays and fittings, while others have displayed about the lowest possible carbon footprint for the products and processes of their firm. Some fashion retailers lay emphasis on their 100% organic or recycled materials or how to use them in an eco-friendly manner. Others are contributing by conducting recycling programs to encourage consumers to return items of clothing that they no longer use. All these green initiatives taken up by retailers have an impact on customer's perception and their inclination for certain stores over others. This paper is an attempt to explore whether these customers consider the green initiatives of retailers as more socially responsible than the ones who do not undertake such activities and claims. Do customers have trust in claims of the retailers who promote their environmental sustainability? At the same time, the undertaken study aims at examining the influence of greeninitiatives of retailers on customer preferences.This empirical study is based on quantitative approach for the target population of shoppers visiting various stores at the malls in the city of Mumbai. This study takes a sample of 506 respondents for generalizing about the population. To conclude the results of the study, various statistical tools are used for the analysis of the data collected. A demographic variable like gender was used to analyze the perception of customers about the green retailer and their store patronage. This would help in assessing the strategic positioning of various stores and analyzing whether this preferences translates into repeat visits and higher patronage of the stores.

INTRODUCTION

With growing awareness regarding the threat of global warming, environmental consciousness is at an all-time high. Businesses across the world are developing strategies to sustain themselves in the wake of climate change. They are working towards developing a low carbon landscape and undertaking efforts to optimize the carbon efficiency of existing products and infrastructure. Global warming, reduction of green cover due to adverse manufacturing processes and taking care of the natural environment is becoming an important issue for all nations. This green concern is also being manifested in the retail sector. As retailing is an energy intensive activity ranging from storage, distribution, packaging to store operations, it has its contribution to global warming, waste, carbon emissions, landfill and pollution. A greener approach to retailing or adopting green retailing practices of less polluting and more resource-efficient can help in promoting sustainability in retailing.

The consequence of the externalities generated by retailer's activities is impacting society, environment and consumers' lifestyle (McGoldrick, 2002). These retailers are sometimes criticized for their socially irresponsible business practices by various stakeholders, especially the mass media and consumer advocacy groups (Wagner, Bicen and. Hall, 2008). In response to this, Deloitte's report, Feeling the squeeze- Global Powers of Retailing (Deloitte, 2009) suggests that out of the 250 most powerful global retailers, two-thirds of them have adopted one of the several principles of CSR so as to build positive image in the minds of various stakeholders. Today retailers face challenges of

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keeping the cost level low, increasing the efficiencies of supply chain, building their brand, reputation and image; responding rapidly to changing consumer tastes; expanding their reach to newer markets and greening their operations.

As people are becoming more conscious for their planet Earth, this eco-sensitivity is also felt in the retail environment. Various environmental stakeholders like consumers, government and legislation is putting lot of pressure on retailers to switch for sustainable produced products. Sustainability is becoming a part of a new value chain that respond to green enterprises offering a range of opportunities and challenges. Slowly, this trend is getting acceptability in the retail world. Many established retailers are developing green initiatives that range from green buildings, green operations including green supply chains and offering green products. The logic behind the green movement is to focus on three R's i.e. reduce, reuse, recycle and a desire to preserve the environment.A number of stores have decorated their outlets with eco-friendly displays and fittings, while others have displayed about the lowest possible carbon footprint for the products and processes of their firm. Some fashion retailers lay emphasis on their 100% organic or recycled materials or how to use them in an eco-friendly manner. Others are contributing by conducting recycling programs to encourage consumers to return items of clothing that they no longer use. All these green initiatives taken up by retailers have an impact on customer's perception and their inclination for certain stores over others. This preference can lead to the consumer's choice for a particular retail store resulting in store patronage.

Retailers have realized that building a green image would differentiate their offerings from those of competitors in the crowded market. Store image depends on the store location, merchandise, store atmosphere, customer service, price, advertising, personal selling and sales incentive programs and other affective inferences that arise from the store's attributes. Store image has an important role in store choice (Ou, Abratt, Dion, 2006), patronage intention (Chang &Tu, 2005; Grace &O'Cass, 2005), profitability, success (Amirani& Gates, 1993; Mitchell, 1993) as well as loyalty (Osman and Jabri, 1996). This leads to a positive correlation between green image and shopping value in consumer behavior (e.g. Baker,Parasuraman, Grewal, & Voss, 2002; Sarkar, 2011). Previous studies reveal that store loyalty is influenced by factors like satisfaction (Liang & Wang, 2007; Faullant et al., 2008) image (Martenson, 2007; Abdullah et al., 2000) and green image of retailers (Yusof, Musa, &Rahman,

2011).According to Chen (2008), companies which invest in efforts on environmental issue, are able to improve their corporate images and to develop new markets as well as to increase theircompetitive advantages. In addition, companies that embrace the concept of green environment with environmental-friendly products and packaging can charge relatively high price for their products and hence increase their differentiation advantages of their products (Shrivastava, 1995; Chen, 2008; Porter & van der Linde, 1995). The study of Rahbar and Abdul Wahid (2011) supports the above fact by suggesting that customers trust in eco-label and eco-brand and result in showing positive and significant relationship with actual purchase behavior.

Retailers are looking for various ways to create a positive image on consumer's mind. Environmentally sustainable products help organisations to differentiate their offerings from that of competitors (McEachern and McClean, 2002; Dosi and Moretto, 2001). Environmental responsibility can promote a positive corporate image and provide points of differentiation to the organisation (Carlson et al., 1996; Morris et al., 1995). Retailers need to influence the purchase interest and actions of customers towards green products. Hence they require green in-store communication that should be informative and persuasive enough in deriving the desirable targeted business outcomes. The advertising claims such as "eco-friendly" and "biodegradable" are the common terms available in the market but its effectiveness in convincing green purchase action is still insignificant (Peattie, 2001).

Store choice and store patronage are few of the contemporary issues that have been widely studied by many scholars in different parts of the world (Sinha,Banerjee and Uniyal, 2002:13). Today's retail environment is characterized by evolving shopper expectations and a realignment of the choiceamong a set of stores (Sinha& Banerjee, 2004:482). The changing dynamics of socio-demographic in current consumer markets, growth of dual-income and single parent households and the presence of computer literate consumer and penetration of internet in daily routine activities have significantly altered the demands during their shopping experiences(Kim, 2002:595). As a result, consumers of today usually make careful decisions regarding the choice of their stores(Oh, Fiorito, Cho &Hofacker, 2008:247). These decisions are influenced by store characteristics and consumer characteristics. The store characteristics consist of ambient variables or aesthetics (light, music, scent, color, design layout, crowd, and cleanliness), convenience and accessibility, location, assortment, entertainment and service quality. The

consumer characteristics consist of consumer demographics, buying impulsiveness, materialistic attitude, advertising attitude, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

Store Patronage

Store patronage is combination of attitude, normative beliefs and motivations that influence purchasing behavior of customer (Burnkrant& Page, 1982; Fishbein&Ajzen, 1975). Kotler (1973-1974) stated that store atmosphere affects store image and its patronage. According to Baker et al. (2002); Macintosh and Lockshin (1997), willingness of customers to shop longer in store, deliver good word-of-mouth of the store, buy more in the future and repurchase made up patronage intention in retailing industry.Donovan and Rossiter (1982) believed that the retailers should have deep understanding of patronage intention of their target customers so that they could predict the customer behavior in the future. Grewal, Rajdeep, Thomas, and Anthony (2003b) found that retailers could influence consumer patronage decisions by factors like desirable assortment of products, preferable price level, time and place utility and perceived value factors.Broekemier, Marquardt and Gentry (2008:60) felt that store patronage or retail patronage intention had been highly correlated with consumers' beliefs about the image of a retail service environment.

Store Image

The image of a retail outlet in the mind of shoppers is very important as it plays a significant role in patronage intention of behavior. The elements of retail image constitutes many attributes like brand or quality of merchandise, specific services such ascredit or delivery, an attractive outlet, courteous employees, store appearance and promotionalmaterials. Martineau (1958:54) defined store image as "a store's personality and the way in which the store is defined in the consumer's mind". Kardes, Cline and Cronely (2011:71) and Lusch, Dunne and Carver, (2011:101) defined store image as a set of attributes that are considered as important by shoppers. Saraswat, Mammen, Aaja and Tewari (2010:168) also redefined store image as the symbolic, experiential expression of the store that resises in the minds of consumers. With all these definition, it can be suggested that store image is nothing but the perceptions of consumers about a particular store.Prasad and Aryasri (2011:80) emphasise that store image is an important factor for consumer decisions in which they decided where and when to shop. It is also important for the retailer decisions who decides about the when,where and how to operate their stores. Therefore it is important for retailers to establish, communicate and maintain the firm's image in order to position it in thecustomers' minds (Berman & Evans, 2013:668).

Hsu, Huang and Swanson (2010:126) and Chang and Luan (2010:523) found that convenience factors, merchandise, store ambience, services personnel and marketing attractiveness are key dimensions used by a consumer when evaluating store image. However, Van Waterschoot, Sinha, Van Kenhove and De Wulf (2008:196) found price, reputation and quality to be the key dimensions associated with the consumer's perception of fashion store image. From the foregoing discussion, it seems that various store image variables perform an important role in store selection.

Store Choice

Carpenter and Brosdahl (2011) felt that it was very important for the retailers to become responsive to consumers' need for information during their search and evaluation efforts. Such kind of information might help retailers to know about the elements that contribute towards the customer satisfaction and in turn their loyalty. Store selection criteria depend upon competing choices between the different store types or format and the different categories present in the store.

Previous research had suggested that image attributes affect store choice behaviour. Visser, du Preez and Van Noordwyk (2006:60) found that merchandise and clientele are the important image dimensions that affect respondents. Koksal (2007:79) linked product, pricing, methods of payment, personnel and store convenience as important attributes when choosing a grocery store. Venter and Dhurup (2005:432) found that customers assign great importance to the atmospheric variable (physical aspects), the consistency and the policies of the retailer. Pan and Zinkhan (2006:239) highlighted the following retail environment factors: physical location, parking facilities, check-out speed, and store atmosphere as crucial factors for shoppers searching for a traditional retail store.

Store Atmosphere

A well-defined store atmosphere helps in attracting and retaining new customers and creating positive impact on the customer patronage intention by minimizing cost, time, and effort (Ishwar, Ruchi, &Zillur, 2010).Hence, it is very important for the retailers to have an understanding of the factors that are responsible for the store patronage. The customer willingness to revisit the storeand spread positive word-of-mouth to fellow customers and friends is the reflection of the store patronage.

Retail environment or store atmospherics consisting of

physical designs, social ambience (Grewal and Baker, 1994), emotional cues, olfactory and tactile characteristics (Spangenberg, Gorhmann, and Sprott, 2005) that influences the consumers' subjective interaction with the environmental stimuli. These environmental stimuli can affect consumers' cognitive process responsible for developing value perception and retail patronage. er (1973-4), in one of the earliest

Donovan and Rossiter's (1982) felt that store atmosphere influences emotional states such as pleasure, arousal, dominance, and submissiveness and blocks or elevate the consumers' mood and shopping motive. Gardner and Siomkos (1990) found that store atmospherics such as lighting, layout, displays, fixtures, colors, textures, sounds, and fragrance affect consumer product perception. The environmental cues not only builds store image but also reflect about the identity of the store's clientele.(Sirgy, Grewal,andManglebury, 2000).

Green Atmospheric

Atmospheric planning can make the difference between success and failure for the given store (Bitner, 1990). Store atmospherics relates to the display of tangible elements with intangible dispositions interwoven into a web of meanings (Markin, Lillis, and Narayanan, 1976) that impacts the footfall of the store and influence on consumer buying decision. It refers to aesthetics and ambience of the store like color, décor, music, light, fragrance , displays and store front that reflect the store atmosphere and play an important role in shoppers' perception and evaluation of the store (Dabija, Băbuţ, 2012: 168). In other words, it is a combination of all physical designs, social ambience (Grewal and Baker, 1994), emotional cues, olfactory and tactile characteristics (Spangenberg,Gorhmann, and Sprott, 2005) that influences the consumers' subjective interaction with the environmental stimuli. Other environmental elements like interesting and eye-catching window dressing and layouts, soothing and trendy color combinations at store, magnificent architectural design, freshness and fragrance, proper temperature to make it feel comfortable, attractive and a unique logo, and gentle crowding are ideal conditions that can affect the current and future behavior of consumers (Smith and Burns, 1996). Kotler (1973-1974) has introduced the term atmospherics and was the first to define as the conscious designing of space to create pleasant effects on buyers. More specifically, atmospherics is done to bring about specific emotional effects in the buyer that increases his purchase probability. He also highlighted the correlation of combinations of retail environmental characteristics (store atmospherics) in stimulating a consumer's desire to

purchase. According to Cox and Brittain (2000) store atmosphere is the major component of store image and can be defined as dominant sensory effect created by the store's design, physical characteristics, and merchandise activities like display techniques, on-the-spot demonstration, free sampling, special offers, and other point-of-sale methods (p. 203).

Gardner and Siomkos (1990) suggested that store atmospherics like lighting, layout, displaydesign and fixtures, wall coverings,colors, textures, flooring, smell, sound level, store lighting and temperature and fragrance affect consumer product perception. The environmental cues not only helps in crafting positive store image but also speak about the identity of the store's clientele and act as signals of quality and value to other customers (Sirgy, Grewal, and Manglebury, 2000). Ambient scent and product class have significant impact on store image (Mitcheil et al. 2000). The tactile factors can potentially alter emotional experiences that may be stimulus seeking such as anxiety, lack of interest, foul mood and uneasiness in a public place (Grossbart et al., 1990).

Green retailers can make use of green cues of their respective environments to influence consumer behavior, as are their non-green counterparts. Many manufacturers have realized the fact that customers place greater value on the manufacturer's green claims and patronage those retailers who support these green initiatives into their business strategies. Customers often complain about the lack of knowledge about the green products, the authenticity of green products and their availability at retail stores. Retailers should allocate their funds into areas where they believe their customers will appreciate green attributes and also in green communication. Also the retailer should invest in green interior environment that helps the customers to answer their queries like whether the given product is certified through a third-party, is it sustainable, can it be recycled, what percentage of recycled content does it contain and more information about its biodegradability.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

There is ample of research on store atmospheric stimuli and customer patronage intention but this aspect is not been explored with respect to green atmospheric and retail patronage. The objective for this paper is to identify the relationships between green store atmospheric stimuli and store choice. Store preference of shopper helps in predicting the magnitude of store patronage. The focal point in this research was to explore the relationship between green retail atmospherics and retail patronage.

Therefore, in this study a field survey was conducted in different store types such as multi-brand stores, single brand stores, and discount stores. The research questions that formed the basis of this study are following:

To identify whether customers shop at retailers that showcase their green concern in their marketing communication.

To understand the perception of customers who associate going green with making conscious decision to protect the environment in store preference.

To examine the influence of green store atmospheric communication of retailers on customer preferences.

These research sub objectives lead to the following hypothesis:

H01: There is no significant difference between perception of male and female regarding their preference for the retailers who showcase their concern for the environment.

H11: There is significant difference between perception of male and female regarding their preference for the retailers who showcase their concern for the environment.

H02: There is no significant difference between store preference of male and female regarding their preference for the retailers making conscious decision to protect the environment.

H12: There is significant difference between store preference of male and female regarding their preference for the retailers making conscious decision to protect the environment.

H03: There is no significant influence of green store atmospheric communication of retailers on customer preferences.

H13: There is significant influence of green store atmospheric communication of retailers on customer preferences.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study is to present an overview of and describe the relationship between the green retail atmospherics of the store and retail patronage showcased by shoppers visiting these stores. Hence the research followed a quantitative approach to observe the difference in the perception of male and female shoppers with respect to their preference for the retailers who showcase their concern for the environment. In addition to this, whether shoppers prefer those retailers who making conscious decision to protect the environment by choosing their store for their routine shopping. For the better understanding of above objectives, a non-experimental and quantitative

research has been employed in this study. The study has used a descriptive survey design. The descriptive surveys are aimed at collecting factual information that describes the existing phenomenon (Ezeani, 1998). The data for the study has been collected using the mall intercept method. This method is mostly used by retail settings where researcher interacts with respondents after getting their consent to participate in a research study. This type of survey was chosen due its low cost, the ability to yield accurate responses and the fact that data is easily obtainable (Wild&Diggins, 2009:114).

The target population for the study is all the shoppers who patronized organized retail outlets at Mumbai for their high involvement products. The sample consisted of shoppers with more than 15 years that come to stores for their non-food purchases. The respondents were selected using the non-probability, convenience sampling technique and they belong to the medium-high socio-economic status. The initial sample size was pegged at 500 respondents. The subjects' participation was based upon their willingness to take part in this research. The data was collected using a self-administered structured questionnaire. Administration of questionnaires was conducted on-site between July and August, 2014. Out of the 800 questionnaires that were initially distributed, 506 questionnaires were successfully completed and eventually used in the actual data analysis.Validity of the instrument refers to its ability of measuring what it is intended to measure. This validity relates to content, construct and criterion. To ascertain the content and face validity of the instrument, the initial questionnaire was reviewed by three academics whose field of expertise is marketing. Furthermore, the questionnaire was pilot tested using a group of 40 conveniently selected respondents. Using the feedback from the three reviewers as well as the pilot study, minor changes were made to the questionnaire. This ensured the suitability of questionnaire for data collection purposes.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data were analyzed by using descriptive analysis of the sample composition. These analyses were conducted using the Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS – version 16.0).The demographic characteristics of respondents are illustrated in Table 1. As illustrated in Table 1, 50.5% of respondents (n=256) were male whereas 49.5% (n=251) were female. The majority of the respondents (24%; n=121) were aged between 18 and 24 years. Additionally, the largest group of respondents (47.7%; n=242) earned between Rs 25,000 to Rs 50,000 per month. Most of the respondents like to go for monthly shopping (26.6%; n=135). Good store layout is one of the

important factor that helped the customers in meeting their objective of buying things (29.6%; n=150). The study suggests that around 24% of the respondents (n=124) agree that they would make conscious decision to protect the environment whereas 26% of the respondents (n=132) do not agree with the same. There is huge proportion of respondent (50%, n=251) who are somewhat agree with this. This suggests that there is huge gap between what people say and what they do. From the table 2 we find that p value is less than 0.05 for the statement like shopping at retailers that showcase their concern for environment and advertisements play an important role in selecting green retailers. Also, p value is more than 0.05 for the statement like definition of going green is making conscious decisions to protect the environment. This shows that there is significant difference in the perception of male and female with respect to the preference for the retailers that showcase their concern for environment and advertisements play an important role in selecting green retailers. But at the same time, there is no significant difference in male and female respondent's behavior in making conscious decisions to protect the environment.

Limitations and Scope for Further Research

The current study has some limitations in terms nature of sampling, sample size, hence the generalizability of the findings must be treated withcaution. Non-probability convenience sampling of the study can be responsible for causing systemic bias in the study. Also the data on environmental conscious retailers is not very clear and even shoppers do not have clear cut idea of green practices of the retailers.This study had used questionnaires that were originally designed and intended for purposes andcontexts that differ from those of this study. The study was done in Mumbai but similar studies couldbe conducted at other places of country including other subcultures, social classes and lifestyles.Since the quantitative mode was adopted for this study, future studies could use the mixed method approach in whichboth qualitative and quantitative approaches are integrated. This could provide an in depth understanding of storeselection criteria among consumers. In order to examine improvements to the instrument, longitudinal research could be conducted byreplicating the study in similar settings over different time phases. This could provide updated insights on the changingshifts in store selection criteria among.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to identify whether customers shop at retailers that showcase their green concern in their marketing communication. The study suggested that only a small proportion (25%) of population patronize those retailers who showcase their commitment towards the environment. There seems to lack of awareness among the shoppers about the green practices undertaken by the retailers. The study showed that there is significant difference in the behavior of male and female customers while shopping at retailers that showcase their concern for the environment. The study suggests that female respondents are more positive towards retailers who showcase their concern for environment as compare to the male. The study also suggests that is no significant difference between store preference of male and female regarding their preference for the retailers making conscious decision to protect the environment. But advertisement helpsthe customers in selecting green retailers. There is need of aggressive and regular communication from the retailers in building awareness, educating shoppers, making green products easier to find and recognize. The green practices undertaken by retailers like enhancingthe in-store communications and inspiring shoppers at the store shelf would help the retailers to reinforce their commitment towards the green movement. Shoppers definitely acknowledge and trust the green initiatives of retailers and consider them as more socially and environmental responsible than the ones who do not undertake such activities.

Several managerial implications might be derived from the findings of this study. Since advertisement play an important role in creating awareness and information about the green practices. Hence, advertising can serve an important variableand the advertising message should be trustworthy and believable for their green claims. The non-biased communication from the retailers can build trust in their shoppers. Many times, shoppers are skeptical about the productperformance and raise doubts for the product quality. In such conditions, communicating brand and product attributes via in store signage and product packaging can motivate the shoppers to the green products purchase. This can help the retailers to develop strong relationship with their green shoppers and build a green image for themselves. This green image can play an important role in choosing a green store. A repeated visit by the shopper to store would be the indicator for its green store patronage.

Retailers should include their green commitment into their vision statement and strike an emotional link between a company and its customers. Projecting a personal commitment to the environment by the CEOs of the chain can win the trust of the customers. Employee working at the stores should be enlighten and empowered with respect

to the climate change, clean technology and green consumer behavior. They should be involved in identifying and discovering opportunities for cost-effective eco-solutions. The employees should aspire for becoming carbon neutral chain of stores. When visiting a store, customers will not only look at the display product or layout but also for the in-store communication that influence customer buying emotion and satisfaction.Marketing communication and in-store advertising helps in creating strategic positioning of stores in the minds of shoppers. If the shoppers are satisfied with the store services, they develop preference for the store and intend to buy the next time at the same store. This preference can be further translated into repeat visits and higher patronage of the stores.

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Annexure

Table 1 : Group Statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Shop at retailers that showcase their concern for environment	Male	256	2.82	1.128	0.070
	Female	251	2.43	1.169	0.074

Table 2 : ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
Shop at retailers that showcase their concern for environment	Between Groups	19.288	1	19.288	14.630	.000	H01 is rejected
	Within Groups	665.758	505	1.318			
	Total	685.045	506				
Ads help in selecting green retailers	Between Groups	3.862	1	3.862	4.050	.045	H02 is rejected
	Within Groups	481.605	505	0.954			
	Total	485.467	506				
Definition of going green is making conscious decisions to protect the environment	Between Groups	0.272	1	0.272	0.401	0.527	H03 is accepted
	Within Groups	342.915	505	0.679			
	Total	343.187	506				

Definition of going green is making conscious decisions to protect the environment

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	124	24.5	24.5	24.5
	no	132	26.0	26.0	50.5
	Somewhat	251	49.5	49.5	100.0
	Total	507	100.0	100.0	