

## GREEN MARKETING: FORCES, CHALLENGES AND FUTURE SCOPE IN INDIA, AMIDST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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### Abstract

The massive industrialization, despite leading to a rapid economic augmentation all over the globe has resulted in degradation of the environment and has affected almost all spheres of life. Global warming, deforestation, pollution, acid deposition, annihilation of species etc: are the adverse byproducts of this mechanized era. As a result, consumers are becoming anxious about these serious environmental issues. This change has induced many business concerns to adopt green hugging products. Companies are in a pressure to embrace green marketing initiatives to emphasize their focus and goals on sustainability in order to foster their overall performance and sustain in the long run. Green marketing thus entails innovative moderations to the product, process, packaging, advertising etc: which is escalating the quality and jelling with the nature. This paper explains the concept of green marketing, the multitude of threats encountered, the several opportunities underlying it, the various initiatives undertaken by the business concerns in India, the impact it has on

consumer buying behavior, the future scope of green marketing in a developing nation like India and also outlines the future of green marketing in COVID-19 pandemic affected India which is an untouched area by the prevailing literature . The paper culminates on the note that, though consumers are anxious about the environmental issues, they are not prepared to spend on high priced green products.

**Keywords:** *Corporate Social Responsibility, COVID-19 pandemic, Ecological imbalance, Green advertising, Green marketing, Green Washing*

### I. Introduction

In this consumer-oriented era, the consumers are very conscious about the products they use, the services they avail and the environment they live in. This has given rise to many firms that started producing goods and services which are eco-friendly. Consumers are now quality and health conscious; therefore, they are willing

to pay an astounding figure for the goods & services which are eco-friendly. Companies which are assuming the role of responsible citizens, in par with their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives go green for a sustainable world. With the upsurge of globalization leading to a competitive era, CSR is a concept which has gained pertinence. CSR is defined as the duties and responsibilities of the top authorities of a firm to create policies & act with a view to safeguard the entire society by performing ethically and morally (Davis, 1973). In order to assure that the stake holders of a business are safeguarded, business policies and practices are framed in the operation of the firm, which is called Corporate Social Responsibility. Nowadays, the environmental issues are at its peak, as a result of human actions. These include global warming, depletion of ozone layer, acid rain etc. These days natural disasters are not uncommon than earlier days such as floods, landslides etc. the pollution of air, water, soil etc. may lead to many ailments for human beings as well as the flora and fauna. Therefore, producing, selling and marketing of those goods & services, which are good for the people and the environment, is the main thrust of green marketing. It is in marketing which is one of the major business dimensions; those lots of discussions have taken place regarding the environmental issues. So, businesses are trying to incorporate environment friendly activities into their organizational operations at an alarming rate. In this global market, now most of the countries as part of their CSR initiatives are becoming green marketing oriented. Consumers are inclined

to expend more on environmentally safe or green products than on others, is an uncommon presumption. If a firm which professes itself to be eco-friendly goes non eco-friendly in any of their products or operations, it can be menacing to the brand of the firm. All those functions or activities are to meet the human wants for a consideration, in such a way that, these activities result in less pernicious consequences on the eco-system.

## **II. Objective of the paper**

The paper intends to highlight the major reasons why companies in India adopt green marketing initiatives, the opportunities and threats faced by businesses in India to go green, the impact it has created on consumer buying behavior, future scope of green marketing in India and to address the gap in literature regarding how businesses can improve their green initiatives especially in the scenario of COVID-19 pandemic which is a crucial topic to discuss.

## **III. Theoretical background**

It was during the 1980s & 90s that, the concept of green marketing became popular (Sharma, 2015). At first, it was an ice cream company which published the financial report reflecting the effect of industrial activities on eco-system (Jaju, 2016). According to an article by the WC (World Commission) in 1987 on eco system and its growth defines sustainable development as responding to the demands

or wants of the present day without giving up on the necessities of the posterity. There were two books named 'Green marketing' which marked the breakthrough of the concept of green marketing, written by Ken in UK and Ottman in USA in the year 1992 and 1993 respectively. It is suggested that while planning the activities in various dimensions of marketing, the environmental aspects must be considered (Ottman, 2011).

Sustainability of environment shouldn't be considered as a tool of risk aversion or simply legislation. Businesses started realizing the pertinence of producing eco-friendly products and services to gain marketing advantages in this competitive era. There are instances globally, about the increased preference for eco-friendly products/services, which show that people are watchful about the environment. Across the world people are willing to spend over an astounding figure on green products. Green marketing deals with the functions like product designing, price determination, product promotion & distribution in way which will not lead to any environmental consequences (Ferre, 1993). The major dilemma faced by the businessmen in green marketing is with the amount of investment in green marketing. Proper investment in green marketing is a necessity to build the corporate image, to accelerate the co-operation from stakeholders and for the long run sustenance of the concern (Wood, 1991). But there is no point in investing in green marketing over and above a prescribed limit leads to increased cost of production and marketing leading to dwindling of competitive advantage and this is one of the

major issues related to green marketing in the business world (Levin, 1993).

#### IV. Conceptualization

##### *Green Marketing*

The process of searching and finding out, forecasting and satisfying the preferences and wants of people in an economically sound way at the same time eco-friendly (Peattie, 1995) is green marketing. Due to the rising concerns for the environmental issues, these days, the concept of green marketing is gaining much thrust (Chan, 2012). Following are the green marketing initiatives in India:

- ***Eco labeling*** A product or a service adopting a completely eco-friendly product life cycle is recognized as a product or service with eco-label (Menck and Oliveira Filho, 2014). Eco-labeling thus ensures the standard of quality and eco-friendly perspective to the consumers demarcating it from the other ordinary products (Klintman, 2006).
- ***Green Branding*** Green positioning is one among the paramount constituents of green branding (Hartmann and Apaolaza, 2005). The rise in the number of purchases with regard to ecologically-safe commodities is reflected from the positive responses on the brand attitude with regard to green positioning (Hartmann, 2005).
- ***Green advertising*** The revolts by consumer activists, environmentalists and the public against those concerns indulged in

practices which are harmful to the natural environment sparked off the budding of green advertising initiatives by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (Easterling, 1996). The term green advertising encapsulates presentation of environment ads, environment friendly contents, ads focusing on the wants of nature-hugging consumers and various other interested parties (Zinkhan and Carlson, 1995).

### ***Corporate Social Responsibility***

The major obligations to be ensured by the corporate sector are societal well-being, economic growth & conservation of the natural environment, that constitute the crux of sustainable development (Peattie, 1995). There is no commonly accepted definition for CSR till now. CSR as per UNIDO (United Nations Industrial Development Organization) is a term connected to management which involves the incorporation of social and ecological aspects into the activities and behavior of the business. By adopting a planned model for management of the environment, business can take advantage over competitors (Porter and Vanderlinde, 1995). Green marketing is a combined group effort and hence is the obligation carried out by the entire sections of the company (Seth and Khan, 2015). Legal legislations, one of the various reasons for CSR is the most accepted reason for going green (Carroll, 1991). In order to gain advantage over the other competitors, companies use the assistance of green marketing. Besides there are 4 domains of CSR such as ethical, legal, philanthropy and

economic (Seth and Khan, 2015) and for the application of the CSR programmes, different types of procedures and tools are fruitfully implemented (Piercy and Lane, 2009).

### ***CSR and Green Marketing***

Besides, the publishing of financial reports and documents in 1980s, firms also reflected their environmental concerns in various forms, which marked the beginning of CSR (Mosca and Civera, 2017). While some firms considered it as their obligation towards the society, some others considered it as an encumbrance. In this consumer-oriented era consumers are quality and health conscious, and are willing to devote their time, money and efforts on purchasing environmentally friendly products. The increased concerns for environmental issue have actually risen up in the recent years. All these issues have increased the focus on CSR initiatives by businesses.

People round the world are very keen on how the firms are encountering these global challenges, which is reflected in the form of CSR activities of a firm. Designing proper CSR activities are one of the critical tasks for ethically run firms nowadays. Despite the sector differences in which a firm belongs to, it does its operations in a nature-friendly approach, following CSR practices. So, the very necessity for green products and green marketing began to be found out that marked a revolution.

## **V. Reasons for Green marketing**

The figure below represents a conceptual framework to depict the factors influencing green marketing.



Fig 1: Factors influencing Green marketing initiatives by a firm.

### 1. *Competitive strategy*

Since all groups of consumers are worried about the global challenges and environmental issues, all the firms belonging to various sectors have developed their own CSR activities and initiatives. So, the environment friendly firms which satisfy the requirements of customers in an improved manner have more competitive advantage over the non-environment friendly firms. So, firms, are using green marketing as part of CSR, as a powerful tool against their competitions.

### 2. *CSR*

Since, the firms have started realizing that they are also part and parcel of the society, have started performing according to eco-friendly

way. Besides re-cooping profits, firms also started gaining acceptance from the public, by behaving in an ethical manner. In fact, the companies can adopt two angles of perceptions. First, using CSR as a marketing tool and second, genuinely doing it without any publicity.

### 3. *Governmental forces*

In order to safeguard the interests of the consumers in various forms, government sets out rules and regulations regarding green marketing. It includes the reduction or ban in producing malicious goods or products which are against the public interest, changing the consumption/application of such products by factories or the individual consumers and also make the consumers aware about the environmental commitment by the companies through the products and services which they provide, promoting recycling programmes etc. In order to curb the anti-environmental activities, government in some countries imposes higher tax on their activities.

### 4. *Competitional forces*

Firms pursue on tracking the environmental strategies and activities of their competitors, so as to analyze their behavior and adopt competitive strategies against them. In this environmentally conscious, market, it is initial that a firm adopts an eco-friendly marketing strategy to maintain their position and achieve a

prolonged existence. Thus, competition forces have an indispensable part in green marketing.

### 5. *Expense-income aspects*

The disposals of by products which are environmentally hazardous are complicated and very expensive. So, in order to save the expenses on waste disposal and management, a firm tries to reduce the production of harmful wastes by following environmentally friendly methods of production which generates eco-friendly wastes. Environmentally operating firms often keep an eye on their production techniques and adopts efficient techniques of production which cut down waste and use of certain input materials.

## VI. **Challenges encountered in Green marketing**

### 1. *Profitability-Responsibility Imbalance*

Companies which follow green initiatives often find it arduous to make a deal between company's citizen role and profitableness. If the firm compromise on one of these two factors, it might not sustain in the market for long. So, a prudent firm always tries to mark equilibrium between the two.

### 2. *High priced inputs*

A green product basically means a product which is energy efficient, durable and is made up of reusable or recyclable raw materials (Chang and Fong, 2010). So, it usually incurs a lot of expense for adopting technologies to make such products besides the high price of raw materials required to produce it. Though green initiatives hit pay dirt in the distant future, the initial cost of investment is quite high and most of the Indian firms find it troublesome to follow green marketing practices.

### 3. *Cut-throat competitive pressure*

Consumers though value, green products, an average rational consumer always goes for a cheaper one. Usually green products are priced high because of its product quality and benefits. So, firms which follow green marketing often face severe rivalry from other firms which sell their products at a cheaper price.

### 4. *Green washing disguised as Green Marketing*

In pursuit of the growing demand of green products in the Indian market firms these days come up with false green products as it is not possible for every firm to produce green products (Ramus and Montiel, 2005). Thus, they deceive the consumers in order to reap profits by

disguising their products as nature-hugging. This phenomenon is often referred as 'Green Washing'.

### 5. Lack of Awareness

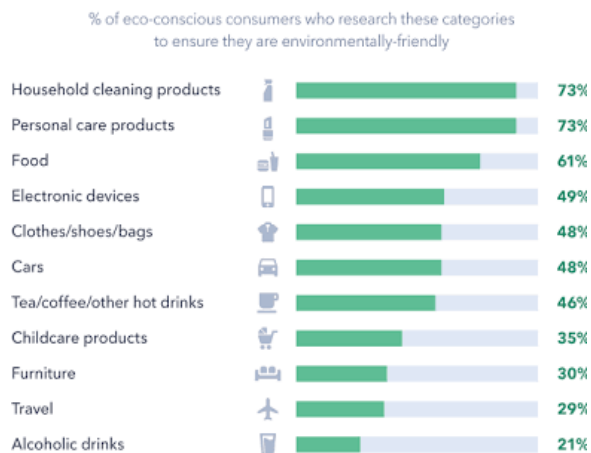
Since the concept of green marketing is still at its budding stage in India, consumers are not much aware about it. Studies show that most of the consumers are not able to demarcate between ecological and non-ecological goods (Maheshwari, 2014). This poses a drawback for the companies to promote green products and green marketing.

### 6. Consumer's attitude towards green products

Most of the consumers have a false perception that green products are not much competent enough as the other products. Also, the high cost of green products often pulls back the average rational customers from purchasing it.

## VII. Impact of green marketing initiatives on the consumer's behavior

Researches have shown that there exists a direct and favorable impact of green packaging and branding, on the consumer's behavior which is eco-friendly. There is a tendency for consumers to buy green branded products & services and they have complete confidence in such reputed Indian brands. Besides, they prefer packaging of products and also support reusable and recyclable products too. So, in order to boost up the eco-friendly behavior of consumers it is prominent to increase the level of green branding and packaging in India. Green branding and eco-friendly behavior among consumers are most commonly seen in urban areas than rural areas. As a result of green brand positioning,



Graph 1: Awareness of ecoconscious\* consumers about eco-friendly products

Source: Global Web Index

\*Eco-conscious consumers are those who agree that, concern for the environment is reflected in their day to day purchasing behavior.

perception among consumers is positive which has led to high demand for green brands. By the year 2020 our nation is likely to occupy a space in the top 3 ranking countries of advancing economies and manufacturing locations. Moreover, there has been a hike in the governmental funding to green manufacturers over the years to support green initiatives. Therefore, a further increase in this state – funds as well as other benefits and concessions to green manufacturers can further boost the economy's growth. Further, green branding must be made in the top of the list of policies of the business firms which could earn them huge profits, in the long run. Investments in green marketing can be done in the rural areas to find out new and potential markets as it is of less growth in these areas.

In addition to this, with regard to green premium pricing, it is found that most of the urban consumers believed that a portion of green premium pricing is used for noble causes in the society and therefore they were willing to pay the high cost while a major portion of the rural consumers were hesitant to spend much. Eco-labeling and green products identification show a positive response to the consumer behavior in case of eco-products. Added to this, green advertisements act as a major stimulator to positive consumer behavior in connection to the sale of green products. But since the green marketers overstate the contents used in the green advertisements there is a

possibility of ambiguity among the consumers.

### **VIII. Future scope of Green Marketing in India**

Ample studies have found out that the Indian consumers are impassioned buyers. When their purchasing behavior was surveyed, it was concluded that their purchases are mostly based on sentiments as emotions. In this 21<sup>st</sup> century, environmental concerns and sustainability are gaining much thrust, which in fact make the Indian consumers greener product oriented. They are prepared to spend for green and high quality less polluting or harmful products which gives Indian market a scope to flourish in green marketing. There have been quite a large number of researches conducted in green consumerism in most advanced nations, India being a developing nation still lags behind in this regard and has a far way to proceed (Moisander, 2007). Compared to the past, now the firms in India have started realizing the need of consumers for ecological products and have taken up initiatives on a rising scale to include ecological marketing, because end-users who are rational now in their decision making, are not only conscious about the safety and security of product consumption to them but also to the environment as well. Nowadays, organizations are realizing the pertinence of green marketing and perceive it as a rivaling advantage.

*The new legislation:*



Post Section 135 of companies Act 2013, Corporate Social Responsibilities became mandatory in India for those companies which cross a prescribed threshold as stated in the legislation (Singh and Verma, 2014). This legislation has increased the role of corporate sector in contributing to the economic development and has made the corporate completely responsible and accountable for their activities which has an impact on the relevant shareholders as well as the community and the environment. Thus, the Act has increased the scope of green marketing in Indian market, which now has to be followed by the companies mandatorily.

### ***Tool of competition***

Another chance of advancement for ecological marketing is in the form of rivalry from the firms which are following green marketing. Those companies which are untrodden in the path of eco-marketing are compelled to adopt green marketing initiatives due to cut throat competition.

### ***Government Legislation***

Due to rising concerns about environmental threats and issues, contemporaneously government plays a sound and major stake in adopting eco-friendly and safe methods of production, distribution and consumption of products/ services by passing adequate and relevant legislations and regulations for the firms.

### ***Cut back of expenditure***

The present scenario has got a broader scope of improvement for ecological marketing due to chopping down the expenses leading to astounding profits. As part of green marketing initiatives firms focus on the golden words – reduce, reuse and recycle. Firms in India have started adopting technologies which reduce the wastage of resources and recycle the left-over. This initial capital expenditure of adopting advanced technology to produce green products can be ploughed back through profits reaped from such products.

## **IX. Future of COVID-19 struck India in green marketing**

Although the novel Corona virus has widely affected the entire globe, causing economic turmoil, financial unrest and panic among the business class, it also poses a wide opportunity to the marketers, especially in the domain of green marketing as mentioned below:

- With the expense of solid waste increasing reasonably high, it's getting progressively costly for organizations to continue devoting time and money to dump the unwanted accumulation into openings in the land. Today businesses face a chain of rigid guidelines especially in certain parts of India with regard to solid waste dumping. Therefore, organizations should be cautious while managing their left over. By using this time-out due to COVID-19 pandemic, organizations get a breathing spell to reframe their recycling procedures

and systems in an advanced and better way. Besides they will be prepared to deal with the waste removal guidelines and restrictions in the days to come. Thus, a reframed system of waste recycling will definitely not only help businesses to diminish the consequences it has on the mother earth, but also makes it cost-effective.

- Due to the adverse climatic changes and ecological imbalances which is the burning topic of the hour, customers are comparatively more aware, conscious and knowledgeable about the consequences which the non-ecofriendly products and practices pose to their existence. There has also been a boom in the number of stakeholders who advocates the environmental impacts caused by businesses and customers have an inclination towards those firms which goes green. Such customers are highly watchful about the firms which put forth a driving change and those that continue to affect the nature. Hence, they question the very existence of the firm itself. It is prominent to redesign company's services and products to meet the expectations and preferences of the customers while going green. For instance, if the company is designing a pantry, it can exhibit the advantages offered by a contemporary bathroom which not only reduce water wastage but also

has advanced lighting that can save electricity as well. This helps the customer to reduce the household expenses in a way. Surveys show that customers prefer products of environmentally responsible firms compared to others. Aside from creating a favorable impact on the bottom line, green marketing also paints a positive and clean picture of the brand or firm which raises its demand. Thus, a firm or brand engaged in green marketing pulls in new customers while maintaining the existing ones.

- A notable technique for encouraging an organization's life span and sustainability is a way to deal with moulding a significant long running business by incorporating the roles of the natural, social and monetary systems. More organizations perceive the expanding need to get proactively engaged in addressing environmental responsibility and accountability, before the concept of sustainability turns out to be highly significant for each and every industrial sector in the nation. While numerous organizations stood caught up with the production and distribution of their products or services, they got little time to look after the sustainability aspects and planned the least on it. But the pandemic has brought about a break to such firms, giving them much more free time and thought-

provoking situation, which underpin them to chase their sustainability goals substantially. As a feature of their initiatives to offer help for fostering sustainability and renewability of resources, there are numerous state-supported incentives accessible to those organizations which carry out practices and arrangements that are nature friendly. The legislature, both at the local and national levels additionally offer a scope of other monetary benefits such as tax reductions, tax holidays, discounts and subsidies to those organizations who do settle on the choice to be fully environmentally friendly. There are likewise a couple of diverse financing initiatives to foster eco-friendly approaches by businesses, for instance, incentives, bonuses, and different kinds of grants. Added to these, there is an array of financing arrangements meant to serve small and medium scale businesses and various other concerns which actively takes part in the headway of green initiatives.

- Even much before the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, nature hugging way of living was a significant concern to a vast majority of individuals and will proceed with all its relevance for quite a while even after the restoration of this catastrophic situation. Therefore, going green would not only build the reputation of the firm or brand but

also attract potential customers, bring down production costs as well as safeguards the nature.

This clearly implies that there is a continual astounding swell in the number of customers who will rush to pass a judgment on organizations based on their degree of social obligation blended with carbon impression. Similarly, there is a steady increase in the workforce who would like to get associated with a green organization. With all these natural changes occurring in the surrounding of a firm, choosing to become environmentally cautious is a stage that most of the organizations should take at the end of the day. As much as any individual who makes out the value of green initiatives, businesses currently comprehend the desirable results which are reflected from these means.

- At first, several businesses thought that undergoing alterations required to turn into a nature-friendly business was a fool's errand, complicated and extortionating task. However, later it was realized turning out to be a green organization whose brand is accepted widely in the global market isn't as troublesome as you might suspect. This economic turmoil due to the corona caused pandemic has forced numerous organizations to alter their way of operations to be economically efficient or else they have no other way than shutting

down their units for an uncertain period. Such a turbulent economy is an unprecedented situation in the Indian history expanding the number of organizations who are sailing in a single boat, with decreased or literarily little turnover, dubious days ahead and financial unrest. Despite the catastrophic situation and the undesirable factors, it causes, organizations who wish to change with an exceptionally novel and innovative way of conducting their business on environmentally friendly grounds has surprisingly got a golden chance to reframe their organizational goals and repaint a green picture in the minds of the public.

## X Conclusion

It can be culminated from the paper that, there is a sound connection between consumer purchasing behavior and green marketing initiatives especially in the scenario of less progressive nations. Even though green marketing is one of the much-discussed topics, it gained attention in India recently. Though it is predicted through many research studies that green marketing has a long successful way to go in India, but the present situation where the nations are facing economic turmoil as a result of the great pandemic, future of green marketing is a question mark. So, the paper highlights the future scope and opportunities in green marketing amidst the pandemic. The paper also outlines the influence of decision making while purchasing, probed by the

green marketing initiatives. Strategies like green branding and green packaging are highly influential to customers in purchasing green products. Now consumers have started realizing the relevance of eco-friendly products, green branding and green premium pricing which has a favorable impact on the buying behavior of consumers. On the whole, end-users are worried and anxious about the environmental issues, but they are hesitant to spend on the highly priced green products.

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