Green Marketing – A Research Agenda

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Abstract: In an era of rapid globalization and growing concern for environmental protection, green marketing is a global issue affecting every individual and industry in all the nations. It is an initiative aimed at contributing towards sustainable development by striking a balance between economical, environmental and societal concerns of the industry. In a fiercely competitive market, business organizations have realized that they can grow only by fulfilling their responsibility towards society and planet in true sense. Scholarly researches in the area of green marketing are in the nascent stage. In the recent past there has been a growth in interest and research across the globe, but still this area is largely unexplored. Conceptualizations, theoretical developments, policies, strategies, applications and measurements in the area of green marketing are yet to be developed. In the light of earlier work done in this area, the present paper raises some critical issues for scholarly and applied research for facilitating theory building, policy making and strategy formulating for sustainable development.

Key Words: Green Marketing, Environmental Marketing, Sustainable Marketing, Nature

Introduction
Green has gone mainstream because more people are worried about sustainability - related issues than ever before (Ottman, 2011) [1]. Green marketing is believed to be essential for sustainable development by striking a balance between ecology, industrialization and human life. Industrialization and modern lifestyle is often accused for climatic changes, depletion of natural resources, health hazards, natural calamities and many other environmental problems. United Nations, along with a large number of NGOs, is advocating promoting healthy industrial practices for sustainable growth so that we are able to provide a better future for coming generations. Green marketing, also known as ecological marketing or environmental marketing or sustainable marketing commonly refers to a broad range of activities, including production processes, technology employed, product modification, packaging changes, as well as advertising for consumer awareness. Nadaf and Nadaf (2014)[2] described that “Green marketing is the process of developing products and services and promoting them to satisfy the customers who prefer products of good quality, performance and convenience at affordable cost, which at the same time do not have a detrimental impact on the environment. It includes a broad range of activities like product modification, changing the production process, modified advertising, change in packaging etc., aimed at reducing the detrimental impact of products and their consumption and disposal on the environment”. Growing popularity of fuel efficient automobiles, energy efficient electronic products, eco-friendly packaging, use of recyclable material and growing consumer awareness and willingness to buy environmental friendly products is a result of continued efforts of green marketing advocates. It is still in a nascent stage, there is a need to go a long way in its development for a better and safer future.

A large number of companies, both public and private, have made serious attempts to promote green marketing efforts to prevent nature such as – aviation and railways are promoting use of e-ticket; telecom operators promoting text messages; IT companies promoting use of e-mails and electronic documentation, banking and insurance companies promoting electronic transactions; automobile companies producing hybrid/electrical and low emission fuel efficient vehicles, energy companies using alternate source of energy, publication houses promoting e-newspapers, books and magazines, cosmetic companies promoting no animal testing, and widespread production and consumption of organic foods. These are some of the examples reflecting growing popularity and wider acceptance of green marketing initiatives taken by a large number of organization. There is a global concern towards sustainability in a changing world. Kilbourne (2010) [3] emphasised about the integration of environmental issues into marketing approaches and actions for sustainability. In the light of growing importance of green marketing as an important global issue for sustainable development, the present study aims at proposing critical issues for scholarly and applied research for facilitating theory building, policy making and strategy formulating for maintaining a judicious interface between industry and nature for sustainable development.
Evolutionary Phases of Green Marketing

The evolution of Green Marketing can be traced in the last few decades. American Marketing Association organized the first ever workshop on Ecological marketing in 1975 which resulted in the first book on the subject entitled —Ecological Marketing by Henion and Kinnear in 1976 [4]. The AMA workshop brought together academics, practitioners, and public policy makers to examine marketing’s impact on the natural environment. At this workshop ecological marketing was defined by Henion and Kinnear (1976) as: “the study of the positive and negative aspects of marketing activities on pollution, energy depletion and non energy resource depletion”. In 1994, Polonsky [5] defined green marketing as, “All activities designed to generate and facilitate any exchanges intended to generate and facilitate any exchanges intended to satisfy human needs or wants, such that the satisfaction of these needs and wants occurs, with minimal detrimental impact on the natural environment”. Marketers concern towards nature friendly products and practices has gradually evolved in sequential stages. Peattie (2001) [6] described the evolution in terms of “three stages with different implications for marketing: (1) Ecological marketing, a narrowly focussed initiative which concentrated on reducing our dependence on particularly damaging products; (2) Environmental marketing, a more broadly based initiative which aimed to reduce environmental damage by tapping into green consumer demand and opportunities for competitive advantage; and (3) Sustainable marketing, a more radical approach to markets and marketing which seeks to meet the full environmental costs of production and consumption to create a sustainable economy. In a similar manner, Murphy (2005) [7] has also traced the development of environment friendly marketing practices. He described that different terms were used to described such efforts - “in the 1970s, the focus was on "ecological or environmental" marketing which gradually shifted during the 1990s towards "green marketing" and recently, the emphasis has shifted to “sustainable marketing”. Polonsky (2011) [8] believes that green marketing has the potential for improving the quality of life along with improving the natural ecosystem. It is related to the interface between natural environment and consumer behaviour, marketing strategy, public policy initiatives and macromarketing issues. The major impediments in transformative green marketing are attributed to failure in adopting systems thinking by three key players – consumers, firms and governments. Ottman (2011) [9] is of the firm opinion that “the green market is not just here to stay, it will also grow and mature, evolving the rules of engagement even further. Knowing how best to cater today’s green consumers will bring significant opportunities to grow your top-line sales and revenue growth and increase your market share among the fast-growing numbers of green consumers, as well as to save money, enhance employee morale, and recruit and retain the brightest minds.”

Emergence of Green Consumer

Growing concern towards health, society and nature, and awareness about burning environmental issues – hazards of industrialization, has made the consumers realize that they need to raise their voice against the anti-environment practices adopted by business organizations across the globe while favouring those products which strike a balance between human life and nature. Rezai et al. (2013) [10] observed that growing awareness about health, environment and animal welfare issues has motivated consumers to be conscious of their consumption behaviour. They have started looking for green products were produced under environmentally friendly conditions. A wide range of consumer segments exist which vary with regard to their sensitivity towards nature and green marketing efforts of the organizations. Brown and Wahlers (1998) [11] explained about different segments of environmentally concerned consumers based on their motivations. They described three distinct groups of such consumers as Product Seekers, Recyclers and Political Watchdogs. They further found that different set of consumers have their own reasons for not making environmental efforts. Such barriers are classified as – non believers, excuse makers and buck passers. Boztepe (2012) [12] describes emergence of Green Consumer who is generally defined as one who adopts environmentally friendly behaviours and/or who purchases green products over the standard alternatives. Green consumers are more internally-controlled as they believe that an individual consumer can be effective in environmental protection.

Green Marketing and Sustainable Development

Origin of Green marketing concept can be traced in social responsibility dimension of business organizations. It is an attempt to characterize a product as being environmental friendly (eco friendly). In an intensive review of literature done by Polonsky (1994) [13] it was reported that there are “five possible reasons for development of green marketing practices: 1. Organizations perceive environmental marketing to be an opportunity that can be used to achieve its objectives; 2.
Organizations believe they have a moral obligation to be more socially responsible; 3. Governmental bodies are forcing firms to become more responsible; 4. Competitors' environmental activities pressure firms to change their environmental marketing activities; and 5. Cost factors associated with waste disposal, or reductions in material usage forces firms to modify their behaviour. Menon and Menon, (1997) [14] held the view that marketing which is a part of business not only has to satisfy customers in particular, but also has to take into account the interests of society in general. That is, all those who are affected by the activities of a business should be kept in mind when setting the objectives and the policies of an organization. They further opined that 21st century will place greater demands on success of the organizations will depend upon green marketing policies and practise adopted by them. Saxena and Khandelwal (2010) [15] argued that field of sustainable development can be conceptually broken into three constituent parts: environmental sustainability, economic sustainability and socio-political sustainability. Due to challenges of global warming, nations and people these days have all time high concern for environmental protection and a new format of business has emerged as Green Business. The industries who claim that they are environment friendly and have concern for society are known as green industries, their marketing philosophy is termed as green marketing and their environment friendly products are called as green products. On the basis of their study they concluded that Industries these days have high concern for environmental protection and have strong belief that green marketing can definitely be used as a tool for gaining competitive and sustainable growth. Polonsky (2011) [16] proposed that transformative green marketing can be implemented by (a) creating alternative ways of presenting value and costs (considering environmental value), (b) changing the communications approach with a focus on education about human-environment interface and importance of action and inaction; and (c) reframing consumption as want satisfaction rather acquisition of goods. In a study on green marketing practices in India, Shrikanth and Raju (2012) [17] found that a large number of Indian companies are reported to be among pioneers in adopting green marketing initiatives. The authors further asserted that organizations are now aware with the fact that without adopting green in the core of their strategy they cannot survive in the present competitive era. Indian companies are also adopting green to retain their image in the market, cost cutting, employee satisfaction, waste minimization, and society welfare. Boztepe (2012) [18] in a study on effect of green marketing on consumer behaviour reported that as result of the study, as environment consciousness, green product features, green promotion and green price increase, green purchasing behaviour increases as well. The result of the study further show that people are now willing to pay more for environment-friendly product against environmental pollution that threatens our world together with developing technology and industrialization. These studies reflect upon the growing concern of both industry and government towards their responsibility in contributing for sustainable development.

Research Issues in Green Marketing

The scholarly work done in the area of green marketing related issues and emerging business practices have established the emergence of green marketing movement across the world as well as in India. It has made considerable impact on organizational practices in terms of production processes, product and packaging design, promotional activities and social awareness. Green marketing has emerged as a potential area of research both for academic, social, political and sustainable development. Following issues are proposed for further research in this area:

Knowledge Development Issues: Conceptual researches relating to existing understanding of green marketing, its evolution, conceptualization, definition, characterization, its relationships with other variables and development of theoretical framework. Such researches may also propose conceptual models for effective management of green marketing in organizational contexts incorporating input, process and output related dimensions.

Consumer Behaviour Issues: Scholarly and applied researches may explore about changing consumer behaviour towards environment friendly – green products. They may identify major determinants governing consumer behaviour – awareness, perception, attitude, motivations for purchase or non purchase of green products. The researches should also extend their scope to incorporate influence of demographic, social and psychological factors on consumer responses.

Industry Implications Issues: Applied researches aimed at providing strategic and operational implication to business organizations for developing green marketing strategies aimed at sustainable development. The research issues would explore into alternative raw materials; sources and utilization of energy; technological intervention; manufacturing process; supply chain
management; environmental costing; customer value; marketing mix elements involving product design, pricing, distribution and marketing communication; and other related dimensions. The researches may also explore major challenges and opportunities in adopting green marketing practices.

**Policy Development Issues:** An analysis of present regulatory frameworks and current business practices may help in identifying certain shortcomings or discover newer dimensions for improvements or changes in the existing policy framework towards green marketing practice. Researches may aim at studying various regulatory or legal framework adopted by national or international bodies in different countries to gain an insight into role of government in compliance of green or sustainable business practices.

**Sustainable Development Issues:** Rapid industrialization and growing consumerism has created serious concern about environment for future generations. Scholarly researches may explore into social, moral and ethical dimensions of business practices. At one hand, the research may assess the hazards of industrialization, while on the other hand they may explore environmental friendly – green marketing practices for sustainable development.

**Conclusion**

Green marketing has emerged as a global issue for sustainable development. The human-nature interface is being researched, debated and discussed across social, political and industrial circles. Recent past has witnessed a rapid growth in the interest, research and practice of green marketing among scholars, policy makers and practitioners. This area is still in its infancy and requires a lot to be done at all the levels. Scholarly researches in this direction will definitely bring important contributions about knowledge, application, and policy making. The present paper makes significant contributions by bringing out important research issues related to knowledge, consumer, industry, policy and sustainable development. It will help in providing guidelines and directions for future researches in the field of green marketing.

**References**


