



Environmental Advertising and its Effects on Consumer Purchasing Patterns in West Bengal, India

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the green buying behaviours of Indian customers esp. with reference to West Bengal state and finds the crucial factors which marketers should take into consideration while devising green advertising strategies. On the basis of previous literature a model was developed and tested having a sample size of 400 students studying in different educational institutions of India. Mean score of different items were found followed by two step regression analysis. Research findings divulge that Indian customers have adequate exposure to print and broadcast media but television advertising is preferred. Indians have concern about their environment and are intend to buy green products. In fact studies further suggest that Indians are among the greenest friendly countries. Indian customers are pragmatic and advertisers should include maximum information about the product while devising green advertising strategies. The current study has been conducted with small sample size. Besides that the use of students sample may not be an adequate representative of the general population. The skipping of internet and outdoor advertising further limits the scope of the paper. This paper will provide marketers a new insight to comprehend the market of India. It also endows the researchers with understanding of emerging Indian customers attitudes towards green products.

Keywords: Advertising, purchase intention, perceived effectiveness of environmental behaviour, information in advertising, credibility of claim.

Introduction

Since 1975 green marketing has gone through several phases. The American marketing association held the first workshop on “ecological marketing” in 1975. Ecological responsibility is a critical function of management and emerges as an important tool for the success of any business. In 1980’s a drastic change in consumer behaviour towards eco-products is observed with the emergence of green consumers provoking market mechanisms for environmentally genial organizations¹.

After an antagonistic response in 1990s, green marketing made an upswing in the western markets from 2000 onwards². As a result an increasing number of consumers eagerly seek environmentally friendly commodities. With a higher consumer awareness of environmental issues, firms obviously adopted “green” strategies³ and start making environmental claims in their advertising campaigns with the desire of gaining an edge over their competitors⁴. It further asserts that a well implemented green positioning strategy can deliver that edge by producing a more favourable perception of the brand. Literature shows the existence of green market segments and the high responsiveness of the firms to this green consumer demand. Now it’s the consumer turn to differentiate between different competing products or processes on the basis of their choice.

Numerous aspects can be considered in environmental advertising that are found to influence consumer’s liking in their

adoption of “green” purchasing⁵. The power of “going-green” is currently extending to the South Asian region, where environmental threats are disturbing local governments and citizens⁵. Like many Asian countries, India suffers from hazardous air pollution, poor water quality and high intensity traffic noise. In fact the people are now more eager than previous to react to appeals based on green issues. Recent example of going green in India is the revival of the Ganga action plan through support from the world agencies, a highly polluted river flowing through Indian heartland.

Emerging markets for environmental products, services and technologies in India mean promising opportunities for international green marketers. Having a large population and a large market comprising of the middle class, India is of prime importance for firms to understand their attitudes towards advertising, their likes and dislikes in advertising and the media they preferred to capture this strategic market and expand their business.

However, there are some ignored areas in contemporary environmental research regarding India. Research is needed to add in the existing literature because: i. Asia-based green marketing studies are comparatively small when weigh against the Western works⁶. ii. Among those scant Asian-based green marketing studies, a negligible research has been done to find out important factor of green advertising that can affect

purchase intention of the consumer. iii. No study has been done so far to evaluate the factors of green advertising which are central to purchase intention of the consumers of India.

Previous Research: Credibility of the claim: This paper is a useful source of information for international green marketers about what 'works' and what 'does not work' in appealing to Indian customers. This paper therefore attempts to fill the gap by investigating the green buying behaviour of consumers of India and finding the important factors which marketers should keep in mind while doing green advertising in this country. This paper will provide marketers a new insight to understand the market of India. Previous research support the view that consumers are inclined more favourably towards environmental friendly products and it is originated that environmental messages in advertisements are credible⁷. It is also examined that consumers respond actively to product-related messages than cause-related messages. A brand with a green image may augment the emotional bond with the audience and thereby boost customer allegiance³. Researches have established the view that environmental claims are more credible if ascribed to green brands as compared to neutral brand⁸.

However, some researches defy this view. Crane⁹ established that consumers formed sceptical attitudes towards green advertising, indicating the threat of consumers evading purchase. To avoid this danger positive differentiation from rival brands should be accomplished by constructive positioning. This will result in competitive advantage against the rivals¹⁰.

Persistent worry for the environment and particular concerns over the environmental impact of certain products, have showed the way for more environmentally focused advertising and an increase in environmentally beneficial claims. Goldsmith et al.¹¹ proposed that the perceived skill and reliability of the brand owner will influence consumer's attitudes. The higher levels of perceived trickery were linked with lower levels of perceived credibility, and with negative attitudes toward the advertisement and the advertised brand. On the basis of the findings of the studies so far reviewed, I propose that:

Hypothesis 1: Consumers will respond positively to environmental claims made for green brands: Early research on attitude towards advertising has shown it to be a multidimensional component¹². As consumers continue to uncover to growing volley of varied advertising message through a variety of media, it is of little surprise that advertisers are having a tricky time getting advertisements to be heard. Advertising and its allied ingenuity heavily rely upon the audience for success.

However, it is vital to remember that advertising is more often termed as unwelcome intrusion and regarded by many consumer as a constant source of annoyance¹³. It is thus central for advertisers to pay extra consideration to the kind of claims made

in their advertising, or to risk scepticism. Previous literature shows that result suggest that various sort of green advertising evoke varied responses among customers, positive reactions being potentially self promotional for the advertiser⁸.

This provides the basis of my second hypothesis that:

Hypothesis 2: Consumers with positive attitude towards advertising will respond positively to advertising of green products: Media: People embrace different expectations about different media. For example it has been found that people are likely to seek information from print and entertainment from broadcast¹⁴. Television and print media are also very dissimilar with respect to the way they are used by their audience. Television is a display medium with external pacing (which means that the medium decides the moment and speed of information transfer), while print media are search media with internal pacing by the reader¹⁵. Media selection has a major influence on advertising success and selection criteria changes with countries and cultures. In China the degree of likeness of print advertising is more than broadcast ones¹⁶. Whereas for the traditionalist Indians "entertaining and culture bound" television commercials are preferred¹⁷. Based on these finding I propose my third hypothesis.

Hypothesis3: Consumers will like broadcast media as compared to print media: Information: Environmental information may be in two forms, one being that consumers have to be educated to aware him or her of the wide-ranging impact of the product on the environment and the other is customer understanding in the product itself being produced in an environmentally friendly way. Now it is the responsibility of the marketers to publicize that information¹⁸. It has been proved that customers seek solid and correct product information from advertisement to guide their shopping¹⁶. This leads to my fourth hypothesis that:

Hypothesis 4: Consumers who seek more information in environmental advertisements are intended to purchase green products: Relevance: The ad should be relevant, meaningful, fitted and important to the audience. Relevance is related to the brand/informational properties of the advertisement. Yang states two types of relevance Ad-consumer relevance and Brand-consumer relevance. Here we are taking relevance of environmental advertisements with respondents daily life and develop my fifth hypothesis that

Hypothesis 5: Consumer will respond more positively to environmental advertising having relevance with their daily lives: Perceived Effectiveness of Environmental Behaviour: Perceived effectiveness of environmental behaviour means the thinking of the respondents that how much they can contribute to the environment through their actions. Literature showed it to be positively related to purchase intention of the respondents⁶. It is also expected that perceived effectiveness of environmental behaviour will moderate the relationship of attitude towards

advertising, information in advertisement, credibility of claim, relevance and media with purchase intention of the customers. This leads to my sixth and seventh hypothesis:

Hypothesis 6: Perceived effectiveness of environmental behaviour will increase the intention to purchase green products.

Hypothesis 7: Perceived effectiveness of environmental behaviour will moderate the relationship of attitude towards advertising, information in advertisement, credibility of claim, relevance and media on purchase intention.

Research Methodology

Sample: The fieldwork for the study was conducted in different cities and towns of West Bengal including Kolkata, Burdwan, Asansol, Durgapur and Kulti. Based on survey of 400 respondents, questionnaires were distributed among students of different educational institutions in the above said cities.

Instruments and Measures: 22 Items were selected to test the dependency of purchase intention on attitude towards advertisement, credibility of claim in environmental advertising, relevance of advertising with respondent's daily life, Information contained in the advertising and media to be selected for advertising. Perceived effectiveness of environmental behaviour is taken as moderator in the relationship. Attitude towards advertising is further divided into attitude towards television advertising and attitude towards print advertising. The scale used in the study was adopted from previous work^{16,19,20}.

Procedure: Questionnaires were distributed among the students after explaining that what green advertising is.

Two examples of green advertisements from different companies "Green Ideas" and "Go Green by adopting CFL lamps for greener environment" were quoted to help them understand the concept of green advertising. 261 males and 139 females completed the questionnaires. Age of the respondent ranged from 18 to 32 with an average age of 24 years. Most of the respondents were unmarried (95.5%).

Following were qualifying conditions for our study: i. Respondents should have exposure to advertising of green products on at least one media i.e. print or broadcast. It was perceived all had television at home and was exposed to green advertisements. ii. The respondents should have at least 14 years of education. Only Final year students were taken. iii. They had environment in their syllabus.

Those who reported previous exposure to green advertising on at least one media were asked to express their views on environmental advertising¹⁵. Five point likert scale was used for

measurement of items. Respondents were asked to show their agreement or disagreement for the statement where as, 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= interpreted as a neutral response, 4= agree and 5= strongly agree.

As the definitive purpose of the environmental advertising is to incite purchase, it is vital to examine the key factors that effect consumer's intention to buy the advertised green products. This goal was accomplished by using regression analysis. To find the effect of moderator, first purchase intention was designated as the dependent variable with attitude towards advertising, media, credibility of claim, relevance, information and perceived effectiveness of environmental behaviour as independent variables. In second step the product of moderator and each independent variable was regressed with purchase intention. The results are shown in table 1 and 2.

Results and Discussion

Result shows that majority of the population sample (82%) have exposure to at least one medium of advertising i.e. print or television advertising. They are more exposed to television advertising as compared to print advertising (71% vs 65%). Findings further suggest that Indian customers have positive attitude towards advertising (table-1).

Majority of the respondents like both TV and print advertising and considered them as essential. Television advertisements are most desired by respondents as compared with print ads. These findings are supported by prior research in India¹⁶. Respondents seems to be mystified as they were unable to agree or disagree with the statements related to attractiveness of advertisements, relevancy of advertisements with their daily life, exaggeration in advertisements, credibility of claim, image of the country and image of the product used in advertisements. High importance is given to the use of information regarding the advertised product. (mean =3.933). Most of the respondents want to purchase green products which show their concern about the environment. Table 2 illustrates that Attitude towards advertising, Information in advertising and perceived effectiveness of environmental behaviour has positive impact on purchase intention (p value < .05) so we accept our hypothesis H2, H4 and H6. Relevance has significant impact on purchase intention but the relationship is negative so we reject hypothesis H5.

Table-2 also demonstrates that credibility of claim and media has no statistically significant impact on purchase intention (p value > .05) so we reject our hypotheses H1 and H3.

Results to test our hypothesis H7 are shown in table 3. After comparing p-values of table 2 and table 3 we reject our seventh hypothesis and concludes that perceived effectiveness of environmental behaviour do not moderate any of the variables.

Table-1
Mean responses of the students to different statements

	Mean
perception of respondents considering TV advertising as a bad thing	2.125
degree of likeness of TV advertising	3.751
thinking of respondents that TV advertising is essential	3.754
thinking of respondents that print advertising is essential	3.897
perception of respondents considering print advertising as a bad thing	2.128
degree of likeness of print advertising	3.678
perception that contents of eco advertisement are of little relevance	3.122
perception that eco advertisement are poorly produced	2.863
perception of respondents that eco-advertisement are exaggerated	3.216
thinking of respondents that environmental claims are vague	3.027
perception that source country of advertised does not bear a eco friendly image	2.979
perception that manufacturer of the advertised product does not bear a eco friendly image	2.985
Perception that the alleged eco friendliness of the advertised product does not match with the respondent's previous consumption experience	3.231
Degree to which respondents definitely intend to buy eco-friendly products	3.964
Degree to which respondents would absolutely consider buying eco-friendly products	3.979
Degree to which respondents definitely expect to buy eco-friendly products	3.912
Likeness of those advertisements that contain information regarding eco-friendly products	3.933
Degree to which respondents think that their pro environmental behavior would contribute to their environment.	3.748
Degree to which respondents think that environmental quality of the country will stay same if they engage in pro environment behaviours.	2.918
Degree to which respondents think that even if they recycle reuse things, the environmental quality of their country will remain the same as it currently is.	2.708

Table-2
Regression Coefficients, Standard error in parenthesis, t-values in brackets and p values in Italic

Constant	Attitude towards Advertising	Media	Credibility of Claim	Relevance	Information	Perceived effectiveness of environmental behaviour	R-Square	F
0.983	0.154	-0.159	0.019	-0.08	0.309	0.383	0.402	36.07
	-0.103	(-0.044)	-0.024	(-0.112)	-0.377	-0.322		
[3.068]	[2.328]	[-.999]	[.545]	[-2.506]	[7.693]	[6.771]		
0.002	0.021	0.319	0.586	0.013	0	0		

Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention dents to different statements

Table-3
Regression Coefficients, Standard error in parenthesis, t-values in brackets and p values in Italic

Constant	Attitude towards Advertising	Media	Credibility of Claim	Relevance	Information	Perceived effectiveness of environmental behaviour	R-Square	F
-1.74	0.587	-0.52	0.04	-0.012	0.499	1.211	0.41	20.022
	-0.395	(-0.144)	-0.048	(-0.016)	-0.607	-1.016		
[-1.200]	[1.755]	[-.665]	[.233]	[-.076]	[2.630]	[2.799]		
0.231	0.08	0.507	0.816	0.939	0.009	0.005		

Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention dents to different statements

Conclusion

Research findings reveal that Indian customers have adequate exposure to print and broadcast media but television advertising is preferred. Indian population have concern about their environment and are intend to buy green products. Indian customers are pragmatic and advertisers should include maximum information about the product while devising green advertising strategies.

The main limitation of the study comes from the small sample size. Besides that the use of student sample may not be adequate representative of the general population. Indeed, several researchers have questioned the validity of research with samples of students who are anyway more aware of the environmental realities. The skipping of internet and outdoor advertising may limit the scope of the paper. Besides print and electronic media, outdoor advertising is also an important part of advertising green products in India. Research on the impact of outdoor advertising is needed, also a large sample with representation from every segment of society will further increase the generalization of the results.

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