

Consumer Behavior towards Purchase of Green Products vis-a-vis Ayurvedic Products

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Abstract: *The objective of this paper is to understand the reasons that motivate people to buy ayurvedic products. The paper also tries to understand if the reasons for purchasing green products and ayurvedic products are same, since there are similarities between these two categories of products.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades many researchers have studied consumer behavior towards green products (GP) in the developed markets. However, research regarding the same is limited for various emerging markets, like India. This paper attempts to answer questions related to awareness and purchase intention of these products in the Indian market. India has a heritage of preferring and using products which are close to nature for eg. Ayurvedic products (AP). This paper also tries to find out if Indian consumers perceive green products in the same way as they perceive Ayurvedic products, since both are perceived to be close to nature. This paper will provide some insights to the marketers as how to market green products in India.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW & HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

According to United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA, 2015), a product may be considered as green when it scientifically demonstrates that it has significantly less impact on the human body and environment in comparison to other products that serve the same purpose.

According to the Green Retail Market (2015), products which have qualities to protect the environment or which use natural ingredients in place of artificial ingredients, may be called as green products. It may contain ingredients derived from natural sources to lower the risk of health problems that can be caused by exposing the skin to artificial dyes or fragrances.

The organization also says that there are no legal guidelines or strict definitions for use of the term, so it is subject to interpretation.

Durif *et al.* (2010, p. 31) have studied many definitions for green products available in the literature and they came up with the definition that "A green product is a product whose design and/or attributes (and/or production and/or strategy) uses recycling (renewable/toxic-free/biodegradable) resources and which improves environmental impact or reduces environmental toxic damage throughout its entire life cycle".

According to Gurau and Ranchhod (2005), green marketing has reached a global dimension. They have stated that there is a rapid growth in the use of ecological products which represents a shift in consumption behavior and also leads to increased demand for green products for which consumers were ready to pay additional cost. There has been a significant growth in the past decade regarding green consumerism. There are reflections of green products as meaningful consumption objects and the greening of consumer practices (Zaharia and Zaharia, 2014).

Researchers have found that green purchase behavior (GPB) increases with education (Brécard *et al.*, 2009; Paço and Raposo, 2010; Straughan and Roberts, 1999; Thompson *et al.*, 2010), decreases with age (Brécard *et al.*, 2009; Gerpott and Mahmudova, 2010; Thompson *et al.*, 2010) and may vary with race or political affiliation (Ellen *et al.*, 1991).

Environmental concerns (Ellen *et al.*, 1991; Kim and Choi, 2005; Mostafa 2006; Straughan and Roberts 1999) and environmental knowledge (Brécard *et al.*, 2009; D'Astous and Legendre, 2009; Pieniak *et al.*, 2010) significantly impact the GPB. If an individual has higher environmental knowledge, he or she will engage in green purchase behavior (Tan, 2011).

These assertions have been made for the consumers in the developed market. However, the current literature does not show if the same hold true for Indian scenario also. However, we believe given the effects of globalization and acculturation the

same would be true here as well. Hence we propose:

H1a: *Environmental concern significantly impacts the decision to purchase GP.*

H1b: *Environmental knowledge significantly impacts the decision to purchase GP.*

Tan's investigation among consumers in Malaysia observes that when an individual believes that his or her actions can make a difference in solving the environmental problems, he or she will engage in green purchase behavior (Tan, 2011). Do Indian consumers also hold the same belief? This has not been probed so far. To test this hypothesis we propose:

H2: *If an individual believes his/her action can make and impact to the environment, s/he will be interested in buying GP.*

Peer influence constitutes the most powerful predictor for adolescents' green purchase behavior in Hong Kong. Green purchase behaviors embody other social meanings, values and rewards for adolescents (Lee, 2011). Since Indian society is perceived to be collective in nature, we also believe peer influence can affect green purchase behavior in India. Thus we propose:

H3: *Peer influence effects GPB in India*

As per the IIED and ETS study (2002), Ayurveda is an ancient health system of India, which is thought to have originated during the Vedic times around 5000 years ago. As per its description, more than 8,000 plants have already been found to be of medicinal value. Combinations of a selection of these plants are used in ayurvedic formulations.

Ayurveda uses plants, minerals or metals to produce various medicines (NCCIH, 2015). The aim of Ayurveda (the science of life) is to prevent illness, heal the sick and preserve life. It has its origins from the India and extended its wings in various parts of the world. (CCIM, 2014).

Ayurveda has a 70 per cent share in the formal medicine market in the country. There is a large presence of a small, unorganized micro-manufacturing units and pharmacies which makes it very difficult to estimate the overall turnover of the industry. Roughly it was estimated at around INR 88 billion for the year 2010 (Krishnakumar, 2010).

The demand for ayurvedic formulations is increasing both in the domestic market as well as internationally, putting the total exports at INR 10

billion for 2010 (Krishnakumar, 2010). According to some estimates, the domestic sales are growing at an annual rate of 20 per cent while the international market for medicinal plant-based products is estimated to be growing at 7 per cent per annum (IIED and ETS, 2002)

The business prospects for global herbal plants amounts to a \$62 billion ready market, which is poised to grow to a \$5 trillion, market worldwide by 2050 (DSIR Report). The total size of the Indian Ayurvedic market is INR 50 billion and it is growing substantially at a rate between 10-15 percent, with the same growth rate targeted for the next 10 years (Financial Express, 2015).

As per a report from WHO (2005), more than 80% of the population in India is aware of Ayurveda and other traditional medicines.

Many of the large Ayurvedic companies in India manufacture pharmaceutical products, nutraceuticals products and also FMCG like soaps, shampoos, toothpaste, toothpowder using traditional herbal ingredients (Vaijyanthi *et al.*, 2012).

With widespread interest in Ayurveda, the Indian consumer is using large quantities of these products. More than 80% of the prescriptions issued by practitioners of modern medicine include one or more preparations containing herbal drugs. There are over 20 well recognized manufacturers and 1200 small manufacturers and thousands of licensed vaidya, prescribing and dispensing ayurvedic medicines on their own. The organized sector of the manufacturers with their aggressive salesmanship and promotion of drugs through mass media, has been successful in popularizing these drugs among general public (Dahanukar and Thatte, 2000).

Saini *et al.*, (2011) in their study stated that the Indian herbal market is growing at a CAGR of 20% which is one of the fastest growing markets. Formation of herbal farm clusters by the government is also helping in this growth. The recent surge in use of herbal medicines has led to a huge requirement of raw materials by the industry. The turnover for the Ayurvedic industry is estimated to be more than Rs 8800 crore and this is expanding day by day. Also there is a growing demand for natural products including items of medicinal value, food supplements and cosmetics.

IIED and ETS study (2002) found that the Ayurveda industry has seen a steady growth in the last two decades. The share of Ayurveda in the formal medicine market is 70% in the country. The

reason for this growth is continuous expansion of the domestic market and the resurgence of faith in the natural and traditional medicine. There are around 6000 licensed units manufacturing Ayurvedic medicines along with an equal number of unlicensed units. The authors also stated that there is no concrete data available to measure the real trade. The medicinal plant trade in India is highly complex, highly underestimated, not regulated and not organized well and hence macro level data is not available. Thus there are chances that the market may be more than what is estimated. The World Health Organization estimates that around the world more than 80% people rely on natural plant based medicine (Bannerman *et. al.*, 1983).

Can Ayurvedic Products be considered as Green Products?

Previous research have stated few qualities of green products like products containing natural or herbal ingredients, which are grown organically, contain little or no phosphate, are not tested on animals and which possess no harm to wildlife and natural environment (Kaur 2014; Schorsch 1990). Also these products are manufactured using green technology with recycled materials, non-toxic chemicals as well as natural and biological ingredients. (Alam *et. al.* 2012).

Interestingly, Ayurvedic products share some striking similarities with those characteristics stated above. The works of Patil (2014) also support the contention that Ayurvedic Products are indeed a type of Green Products.

However, the pertinent question is do people perceive ayurvedic products similar to that of green products. Given the characteristics of the green products in the literature we strongly speculate that ayurvedic products can be considered a type of green product as they seem to share many of the characteristics mentioned. It would be interesting to test what educated urban Indian consumers think about this. Thus we propose:

H4: *People perceive ayurvedic products to have the same characteristics to that of green products.*

Though from the extant literature we see that there are similarities between ayurvedic products and green products, however, the bone of contention is does an average Indian consumer perceive it in this way or not? Although Indian consumer have shown huge demand for Ayurvedic products and favorable disposition towards green products (Gupta and Abbas, 2013; Mishra and Sharma, 2010) the popularity and sale of Ayurvedic products

surpasses green products by multiple times. This paper attempts to identify if the factors which the literature contents impacts the purchase of GP do also lead to purchase of AP. Hence we propose:

H5a: *Environmental concern significantly impact the decision to purchase AP*

H5b: *Environmental knowledge significantly impact the decision to purchase AP*

H6: *If an individual believes his/her actions can make and impact to the environment, s/he will be interested in buying APs.*

H7: *Peer influence affects the purchase behavior of APs.*

Previous research on Indian consumers (Bhattacharya, 2011) has shown that consumers have a lack of trust on the green products' claim making people highly suspicious about them. The given study was done 5 years ago. During this time a lot more information has been provided to the consumers about green products. Hence it is imperative to test if the Indian consumers still have lack of trust towards GPs. In addition to this, for the sake of comparison between the perception of GPs and APs, we would also test the trust dimension for ayurvedic products also.

H8a: *There is a significant lack of trust among consumers regarding green products*

H8b: *There is not a significant lack of trust among consumers regarding ayurvedic products*

3. DISCUSSION

Kollmus__and Agyeman (2002) stated that institutional (recycling, public transportation) and economic factors have a strong influence on people to behave pro-environmentally.

There is a strong positive relationship between green advertisement and green brand awareness. If the companies adopt green advertising strategies with true environmental and green claims to create positive green brand awareness, it will result in prompting buying behavior and green satisfaction. Also in that scenario, environmentally conscious customers would pay more to purchase green products in order to satisfy their needs (Zubair, 2014).

Again as stated by Hillenbrand *et al.* (2013), consumer's choices are influenced by brand names.

Brand names which provide a hint about the expected product benefit can trigger psychological processes thereby influencing consumers' perception about the product. Similarly Huang *et al.*, (2014) studied the effects of green brand on green purchase intention and supported that green brand positioning & knowledge influences the attitude which in turn influences the green purchase intention. And as stated by Ramayah *et al.*, (2010) purchase intention serves as a proxy to actual purchase. Improper green branding can cause products to fail in the marketplace (Huang *et al.*, 2014).

Peattie and Crane (2005, p. 366) indicate that more efforts are needed in terms of green marketing. Though some green brands are sustainable than others, their degree of sustained efforts were doubtful and this had acted as a pressure valve among the environmentally-concerned consumers where the consumers are adopting the green products as though they were "doing their bit".

Kumar *et al.*, (2012) found the Indian consumer strongly wishes to behave pro-environmentally and a sizable number of them are ready to pay premium too for this (Gurau and Ranchod, 2005; Maheswari and Malhotra 2011; Kumar *et al.*, 2012; Gandhi and Solanki, 2012). However, they lack the awareness as to how they can contribute. Also though people are aware of green products, they are not sure of what these products contain in reality and how the usage of these products can benefit the environment.

Bhattacharya (2011) shows that majority of Indian consumers are highly suspicious of the green claims of the products and they are not sure as how these products are actually helping the environment. The consumers look for more information to authenticate the claims. This may hinder the growth of green marketing in India.

Consumers, who are willing to purchase green products, find it difficult to identify them. There might be some distrust from the consumer's end if the products are really green as being claimed (Trivedi *et al.*, 2015).

Chaubey *et al.* (2011) had suggested that the lack of information regarding green products should be addressed and their pricing should be made economical or at par with the non-green ones to encourage their adoption.

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