

Growing Consumer Awareness and CSR, in context of Green Marketing as a way forward for India.

Preena Pradeep

Ph.D. Research Scholar

Mother Teresa Women's University

Kodaikanal

Article History: Received: 10 January 2021; Revised: 12 February 2021; Accepted: 27 March 2021; Published online: 28 April 2021

Abstract: The concept of Green marketing has subconsciously become entwined into various aspects of the society. Presently there are a significant number of businesses which have grown to become extremely conscious about using/selling products that are said to be non-eco-friendly and environmentally unsafe. Customers are willing to spend extra for products that observe eco-friendly standards. CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) index has become the new normal with businesses adopting models which echo greening, by producing/buying Green products for the welfare of the environment and society. This paper mainly merges with how the execution of Green marketing can be a road to promote CSR.

Keywords: Green marketing, CSR, Business environment, sustainability

Introduction:

Indian economy and way of life per-se, has been predominantly centered around agriculture. The earliest excerpts from ancient texts of Indian origin have pointed towards a harmonious synergy between man animal and the environment. Basis of many beliefs and custom owe their advent to this synergy, for example the festivals of Makkar Sankranti, Pongal, Lohri have more in common with harvest and end of winters than with any religious customs. This way of life is still witnessed with regard to a lot of our customs which are followed even today.

The major changes came to the world somewhere around the 16th Century and the industrial revolution which brought about drastic changes in the subcontinent much akin to the ones being seen the world over. Mechanization and Industrialization brought about concepts alien which were unheard of before like mass production, assembly line, changed the whole ambit of how things worked. Spurred on by greater profit margins, larger factories came up, which meant greater workforce who worked for scraps and lived in squalor, over a period of time, work environment changed and became better.

Unlike European who went about the whole affair in stages, India witnessed a quick fire introduction to the industrial revolution on Indian soil. This lead to a mad race to raise industries in the sub-continent, with companies breaking almost all rules to maximize profits.

Industrialization and manufacturing in India had come to become synonymous with wastage, profit making and monopoly which had made many big brands complacent to harm they were doing.

Gone are those days where customers were carefree about the products they bought and consumed. Customers these days are becoming increasingly conscious about keeping the environment clean and the aware of the harm that is associated to production, and consumption patterns have changed drastically,

As stated before, buying patterns of customers, have shifted to organic, eco-friendly products. Industries too have taken a big leap forward by being eco-conscious with respect to the manufacture of goods and services and subsequent disposal or recycle of waste.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To find out the connection between Green Marketing and Corporate Social Responsibility
2. To observe various Green Marketing practices as a social initiative in India.
3. To understand how companies nurture Green Marketing by creating an Eco-Conscious workforce
4. To cognize how CSR is driving industries to adapt green practices.
5. To understand the impact of Green Marketing to gain competitive advantage.

Research Methodology:

Secondary Research: Content was collected from existing data such as: a wide range of articles, social media posts, research journals, newspaper clippings, web content, written texts, books, journals and so on.

Some of the challenges encountered while undertaking the research were as follows:

Since green marketing is still in its infancy, data was not freely available. Intense research had to be undertaken in order to collect and collate the required data. However, the choice of methodology adapted did prove to be effective as the required results were gathered and the research proved to be successful.

Green Marketing – The need of the hour

The world has been witnessed a massive growth in the industrial sector especially since the 20th century. This drastic growth has resulted in high levels of wastage and pollution of the environment we live in. A significant number of businesses have grown to become extremely conscious about using/selling products that are said to be non-eco-friendly and environmentally unsafe. Customers are willing to spend extra for products that observe eco-friendly standards. CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) index has become the new normal with businesses adopting models which echo greening, by producing / buying Green products for themselves, the welfare of the environment and society as a whole. Hence industries and customers have a strong feeling towards the growing importance of sustainable marketing. Implementing Green practices is the crying need of the hour.

Relationship between Green Marketing and CSR:

Green marketing and Corporate Social Responsibility are in-fact symbiotic and complement each other, thereby impacting the purchase decisions of the customers. Green Marketing and CSR work together well co-ordinated they unquestionably generate a pleasant growth and development of the environment we live in.

The advent of present age has witnessed consumer and corporate environmental consciousness which has stemmed from a feeling of responsibility on part of the consumer that seemed to have directly percolated to companies. Therefore the companies have realised that the erstwhile behaviour of excess would only leave a negative imprint on the minds of the masses, thereby reflecting negatively on their sales. Firms seem to have improved their efficiency in terms of energy usage and supplies, to using efficient and improved logistics management by means of cutting down transportation emanations; and, some firms have adopted novel techniques albeit small scale they leave larger footprint over a longer period like transforming plastic waste into pencils, donating workers used eyeglasses. The ever-shifting Green landscape has led to a system where all company activities are scrutinized at all levels with a magnifying glass. In order to be ahead of the race, companies will have to adapt or shift to green marketing practices to gain favour in the eyes of the customer.

Corporate Social Responsibility and Green marketing have a lot working in common because together they tend to make a natural harmony. Green marketing pushes enterprises, customers to imbibe Environmental awareness by inculcating principles such as “say no to pollution”, “use non-hazardous ingredients”, “no waste”. When such practices are undertaken they are actually performing Corporate Social responsibility. And so, CSR and Green marketing go hand in hand as they are known to be working in unison.

Reasons to go Green:

1. Green Marketing and CSR viable tools to a better future.
2. Green Marketers, have made a difference to the manufacturer / consumer relationship and have and have pioneered new segments of growth.
3. CSR coupled with the unconditional objective to go green, has set unforeseen competitive advantage, which have led to sustained viable solutions to the world.

Green Marketing and CSR viable tools to a better future

The very thought of having unrelenting respect for the environment we live in must be an act of CSR for not just the individual but the society as a whole. By taking up Green marketing as a viable tool to accomplish CSR one is paving way to respect and to safeguard the interests and desires of the customers by manufacturing, marketing, disposing products/goods that do not pose a threat to the individual or the environment as a whole. By doing so, one is totally eliminating use of unsafe technologies, materials that are hazardous in nature and other elements that could be extremely detrimental. Taking up green marketing not only protects/safe guards the interests of the customers but also makes a deliberate effort to safe guard the environment as a whole.

Over the past couple of decades, the world has been witnessing a rapid change in climate, energy shortages, pollution, acid rain, global warming and so on. By adapting the right Green marketing strategy one can contribute a lot to the environment, which can otherwise deteriorate in a rapid manner causing a very bad catastrophe to all of mankind and other living organisms. Government, customers and industries should be motivated and should seriously considering taking up Green marketing as a workable tool/key to accomplish their Corporate Social Responsibility duties.

Green Marketers, have made a difference to the manufacturer / consumer relationship and have and have pioneered new segments of growth

A developing Country such as India needs people to be positive influencers on the society. By taking up Green marketing initiatives, an individual or an organization tread on territory that is yet to be walked upon. To be a trendsetter in this market has been difficult but has reaped major dividends, with not only goodwill, but slowly there is a see change with regard to how green businesses are now perceived.

They are looked up as role models because they are being a big influence on masses. They have helped the common man come to terms with the importance of environmental sustainability and how it is directly proportional to one's own wellbeing.

New segment of technology have been pioneered by the thought to dwell into the psyche of environmental consciousness, for example the 70s were a time when a lot of people were advocating philosophies which translated to Oneness with Earth. Although the thought was there but the means to go forward was not.

Since then many sustainable solutions have come to the fore on a major way outpacing conventional foundations, like Hydel Energy, Geo Thermal energy, recycling and others, things that did not seem to go hand in hand with profit making, probable 50 years ago, have turned to be game changers reaping immense profits today.

Governments have also started to reward even the smallest sections of society with tax benefits and subsidies like giving tax benefits to people and companies which do rain harvesting or have a small carbon footprint.

Many things started, as one off projects have turned into major companies which have tapped into the potential of Green Marketing. This in turn motivates the others to follow green practices, thereby contributing to their Corporate Social Responsibility duties.

CSR coupled with the unconditional objective to go green, has set unforeseen competitive advantage, which have led to sustained viable solutions to the world

Competitive advantage puts industries/companies over a higher pedestal over the others through with it tends to get higher returns and profits. Industries these days are realizing the advantages of going green and the returns it will get by doing so, they understand that in order for an industry to gain competitive advantage it must start thinking green in all the arenas of Production and Marketing; it has to incorporate environmental thinking.

One of the best examples of companies that promote Sustainable Marketing and has gained a Competitive advantage by doing so is "Nike". Nike goes by the concept- "People, profit, planet". This not only boosts sales but also improves their relations with the stakeholders, create a proactive business and brings about a better environmental performance and is sure to cultivate goodwill. This particular strategy brings in a win- win notion because it not only improves the company's image and status but also uplifts the environment. Another example is Coca Cola which was once a major polluter but has gained the 'gold' rating by US Green Building Council (USGBC) award, although there is yet a long way to go but the intention to go green is telling on one of the most profit making companies of the world. King Salman, King of Saudi Arabia has taken out directives trying to steer the Saudi economy away from the oil economy and towards more sustainable energy sources by funding various projects that are alternatives to fossil fuel, mainly in part due to the problems our planet faced due to Global warming.

For most companies now, in order to gain an edge over the others and to stand out in a competitive market, sustainability has to be the fundamental consideration of any industry.

Challenges to Green Marketing

1. Novel Concept- Green Marketing is a concept that is fairly new in a developing country such as India. To convince Industries to go green in by doing their CSR duties will be a challenging task. Although good on paper, the idea to go green is very difficult, with little to no checks in manufacturing, companies are extremely wasteful, going as far to getting rid of untreated effluent into streams and river which are drinking water source for thousands of people.

A conscious change is difficult as change costs money which Small and medium level industries do not have. Co-operatives have come up in places like the leather tannery business near Ambur, Tamil Nadu, who pitched in their resources and set up effluent treatment plants to treat the waste that goes into the rivers.

2. Cost Factor- A lot of industries find that Green marketing is taxing because of the cost factor that comes associated with it. Green products/materials are compared to be costlier vis-a-vis other products. Mainly due to setting up costs and as a lot of money has to be pumped in for R&D and other promotion activities. Although it generates abundant results later, it does pose to be a challenge initially.

3. Convincing customers- Many customers may not consider the firm's strategy of Green marketing to be as per their understanding or choice. The company therefore should make sure that they undertake all possible ways to convince the consumer about their green product. The best option possible is by adverts and implementing Eco-labelling schemes. Eco-labelling schemes offer its approval to environmentally safe products.

4. Sustainability- The initial returns tend to be low, as renewable and recyclable products and green technologies are comparatively expensive. Green marketing is viable when usage is over wider ranges, ie. Bigger markets as with more users the viability of a particular product increases and thus does better in the long run. And so, the company needs to be patient and plan and prepare for the long term strategy rather than the short term. At the same time it should steer clear of falling into the bait of unethical practices to make returns in short term.

5. Non Cooperation- Non Cooperation poses to be yet another challenge in Green Marketing. The firms that have adapted Green marketing have to put in tremendous in convincing the stakeholders, and many a times it proves to

be unsuccessful, especially while convincing them about the long term advantages of Green marketing when compared to short term expenses.

Suggestions:

Green marketing is still in its infancy. Every new concept comes with its own challenge, but if Greening is one of the fastest growing Business Models the world over, and adaptation is the right strategy at this crucial juncture. Owing to the vast problems due to the unhealthy consumer behaviour now the time is not far when business would be forced to come up with sustainable and eco-friendly methods to conclude their business.

Some suggestions to be ahead of the curve, are mentioned below:

1. A good robust business plan, keeping in view the changing market trends, so as to not be left wanting.
2. Implementing eco-friendly, marketing techniques, and challenging the status quo, and strategies the business is likely to expand and grow
3. Understand and be aware of the customers changing needs and wants.
4. Create green awareness among customers by means of campaigns and educate the customers on green practices and its benefits.

Conclusion:

It is widely accepted and believed that the only way a country such as India can move ahead of other nations and develop faster is by creating Environmental Awareness in all the spectrums of our society, which many of the western countries have already adopted. The only way to proceed forward is to, ride the wave of Green awareness which India has started to adopt, which consumers have become aware that by going green, they are not just protecting the environment, but paving a way for a better future. Green Marketing is the way ahead and forcing companies to adhere to the 'New Line' by the adage of **Corporate Social Responsibility**, in a way would be the way forward. Thus Industries that implement green practices as soon as possible will definitely have a cutting edge and will be able to sail forward despite fierce competition.

References:

1. Researchgate.net, Mdpi.com, sciencedirect.com, ccenet.org, cyberleninka.ru, emerald.com, blog.nnc-services.com, diva-portal.org, the rules of Green Marketing by Jacquelyn. A. Ottman, Green Marketing Management by Robert Dahlstrom, Agri-input marketing in india by pingali venugobal and Ram kaundinya.