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## Women and Green Consumerism -A Literature Review

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### Abstract

The notion of Green Consumerism has become popular as a means addressing environmental issues without endangering the market driven economy. The main objective of this paper is to explore the characteristics of the research on green consumerism among women. However, there has been little attempt so far to view the role of women consumers' green buying behaviour in India. There is a need for research endowed with additional information in narrowing the research gap with regards to understanding women consumers' green awareness and their green purchasing behaviour. The present study provides directions for future research on green consumerism among women.

**Keywords:** Environmental concern, Green Consumerism, Household behaviour, Review, Women.

### Introduction

Environmentalism has fast emerged as an important global phenomenon during the last few decades owing to increase in environmental related concerns and ecological pressures derived from non-governmental organizations, local environmentalists and governmental agencies. The trend had recently shifted to the consumers who have also become concerned with environmental problems and have started demanding more environmentally friendly products. The underlying importance of this concept relates to an economic perspective of how people use their limited resources to try to satisfy their unlimited wants. The present study is an attempt to analyze the research done so far on green consumerism.

### Meaning and Definitions of Green Consumerism

The existing literature gives wide variety of definitions to Green Consumerism and giving light to the task of identifying Green consumers. Indeed the terminology used in this area is varied, it includes: Green consumerism, environmental consumerism and ethical consumerism or sustainable consumption. Green consumer is defined differently in scientific works.

According to Wind (2004) green consumer is an inhabitant who approves the principles of green marketing and advocates eco-friendly lifestyle.

Ščypa (2006) has a notion that green consumer is a consumer who buys eco-friendly products not because it is becoming fashionable, but because he cares about environmental issues.

Vernekar and Wadhwa (2011) define the green consumer as a person "who adopts environmentally-friendly behaviors and/or who purchases green products over the standard alternatives".

We may quote the definition given by United Nations Commission Sustainable Development (UNCSD) on Sustainable consumption and production. The Commission defines it as "the use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations" (World Business Council for Sustainable, 2008).

### Methodology and Approach to the Literature

The methodology for investigation was a literature review, identifying and evaluating secondary data from academic journals, reports, text books, Ph.D thesis, policy documents

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and websites. The keywords used while searching the articles were green attitude, women consumers, green consumers, green products, green marketing, environmental marketing, and ecological marketing.

### Review of Literature

Since nineties, the researchers have started academically analysing consumers' green attitudes and behaviour, thus providing managerial insights to green marketers to market their green ideas and products more effectively. Focus of Green marketing was previously and primarily on the ecological context has now shifted to more sustainability issues in the marketing efforts and main focus now is on socioeconomic and environmental context.

### Survey of Previous Studies

#### A. Studies related to Consumer's attitude towards environment and purchase decision of green products.

Tang and Chan (1998) conducted a survey of 552 Hong Kong citizens to examine how consistent consumers' actions were with their attitudes towards seven environmentally sensitive products. The results showed consumers' environmental concern is not reflected in their purchasing behaviour. This calls for more education and initiative from both the government and businessmen to induce people to channel their attitudes into actions.

Wessells et al. (1999) suggested that environmental attributes of a product are more difficult for a consumer to assess compared to other easily observable product attributes.

A report by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (2002) also suggests that the difficulty in identifying and locating green products is one of the barriers to green product purchases. One way to overcome this issue is to utilize eco-labelling (or green labelling) programs to provide the customers with information while at the same time addressing environmental issues. An eco-label is a voluntary claim that a product has fewer impacts on the environment with either production or consumption of that product (Blend and van Ravenswaay, 1999).

#### B. Studies related to Consumerism and the Climate Change

Consumerism is a social as well as economic order which encourages the buying of goods and services in ever-greater amounts. It is an idea that purchase of material possessions creates happiness. Consumerism can be defined as the process whereby consumers will go on buying goods without paying any attention to the use, durability and environmental impact of those goods. All may agree that "the one unambiguous result of modern capitalism, of the industrial revolution, and of marketing ... is: In the way we live now, you are not what you make. You are what you consume" (Twitchell 2002, p. 1).

There are two main effects of consumerism on the environment namely: Environmental degradation and pollution.

Welford (1995) argues that the dangers of mass consumerism go beyond simply dipping in to the world's store of natural resources, he believes that mass consumption may cause such irreparable damage that humans may not even be able to live on the planet anymore.

### C. Studies that throw light on Women and Environment

Women Symbolize 'Prakriti' means 'Nature' in Indian Philosophy She creates and nurtures the creation to bloom She signifies 'shakti' - the power that drives the system True, that the status of Indian women has eroded significantly since the Vedic times. Nevertheless, with the spread of education and social reforms 20th century experienced reawakening and a gradual uprise. (Sharma Renu, 2011).

A substantial burden has been placed on women consumers to attend to the environmental crisis. With women's role as primary caretaker still intact within most segments of society (Ferree 1987; De Vault 1987), women have had to take on an additional role: that of caretaker of the planet.

Chapter 24 of Agenda 21 of UNCED calls for fuller participation by women at all levels of society and in all forms of decision making, particularly in areas affecting environment and development. The preamble to Women's action Agenda 21 entitled World's Healthy Planet states: "We, women of many nations, cultures and groups of different colors and class, have come together to voice our concern for the health of our living planet and its interdependent life forms".

Women as an active partner should participate in tackling the environmental degradation. On energy, water and waste, UNCED emphasizes the role of women thus:

- a) Conservation of energy starts in the household and women should perform this process.
- b) Designers of all water supply and sanitation systems should be required to consult women who are the primary users in the home and
- c) Women have often found ways to deal with waste economically and safely, whether by reuse or by responsible consumer behavior.

Consumers' environmental concerns are related to the interest towards the biophysical environment and its problems related to the consumer and the surroundings. It has been noted by foregoing research that women were more concerned about the environment than men (Murphy et al. 1978).

#### D. Green consumerism as 'female caring' for the Environment

Studies that have not taken demographic profiles of green consumers into consideration, have failed to review environmentalism effectively (Roberts, 1996). Baker and Ozaki (2008) also consider Gender as an important demographic predictor of Attitude towards Green Purchase Behaviour.

Turner (1994) identifies a large difference in the attitudes of men and women. Roberts (1996) shows evidence that majority of the green consumers are females. Females always performed more ecologically than males (Gilg et al., 2005). Females with higher education have a greater positive Attitude towards Green Purchase Behaviour and environmental consciousness (Oztek and Cengel, 2013).

Catriona Sandilands (1993) in her studies opines that if environmentalism is seen as household behaviour, then it is women's lives that come under the most intense scrutiny as the new private ecological morality economic growth comes into focus.

Recent studies found that females tend to be more ecologically conscious than men (McIntyre et al., 1993; Banerjee and McKeage, 1994).

Goswami Sadhana (2010) in her study in Kamrup district found out that even illiterate women were highly aware that they depended upon environment for food fodder and fuel. Smith Alexandra Nutter (2010) pints out that women have been theorized as somehow closer to the natural, nonhuman world because of their traditional feminine roles as mothers and nurturers. More recently, women have been situated closer to the environment for a somewhat different reason. Because the majority of household purchasing decisions are made by women (Rodino-Colocino 2006).

### Study Findings

An extensive review research papers on consumer green purchase behaviour revealed that a majority of studies failed to identify the determinants of green purchase behaviour. The major problem appeared to be defining and measuring both dependent and independent variables. An important suggestion that emerges out of this review among others is that more research should be carried out in the Asian countries, especially, India and China, etc. which are facing serious problems of environmental degradation (Stern Review, 2007). Comparative studies between developed countries and developing countries may be very useful to understand the differences between consumer preferences.

### Conclusion

There is very little academic information available about role of women consumers buying behavior in India. As resource managers, women should be consulted and supported in what they are already doing to protect the environment. The critical role of women, as resource managers, as community activists, as environmental advocates, must be recognized when strategies for the protection of the environment are being developed. There has been shortage of studies which compare the environmental attitude of male and female consumers. Since household purchase decision lies mainly in the hands of female consumers their responses have great weightage while formulating any policy decisions.

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