

## INITIATING CONSUMER EDUCATION IS IMPORTANT FOR GREEN MARKETING TO BE FLOURISHED: A PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

Md. Shahzalal\*

### **Abstract**

Nowadays everyone is looking for, such a marketing, which will educate all the stakeholders to behave for community, environment, and economy, and ultimately, will make consumers truly happy. The research is to gain insights on the importance of initiating consumer education for green marketing to be flourished and to provide directions how this initiative can be fruitful. The researcher, by reviewing past researches, has tried to predict the future of green marketing with and without initiation of consumer education. In this exploratory research, a simple correlation matrix is used to test the hypotheses. The findings suggest that, there should be a 'Consumer Education Department' in a green marketing company to assist 'Marketing Department' in: going through teaching and learning simultaneously with all stakeholders, generating savvy consumers to grow with green habits spontaneously, motivating supplier to involve in environmentally lasting initiatives, attracting investors, and building sustainable corporate culture for green marketing to be flourished.

Keywords: Consumer Education, Green Marketing, Initiation, Stakeholders, Consumer Behaviour, Sustainable Consumption.

\* Lecturer, Department of Marketing, Begum Rokeya University, Rangpur, Bangladesh

## Introduction

Consumers truly win, when marketers help them in decision making that satisfies not only them but also their community and their environment, but, because of lack of consumer education most of the consumers can't make a wise decision to win. Many people still believe that marketing only persuades them to buy whatever marketers produce therefore, adding only adjectives to the term- 'Marketing' does not carry extra value to consumers, unless, they view marketing truly help them to win. In order to capture consumers and keep them as long term patrons, green marketers badly need to initiate consumer education for making them skilled, rational, and responsible in their decision making, consuming, using, and disposing. According to Singh (1991) an ordinary consumer treats consumer education (CE) as information, assists in choosing goods; a businessman treats CE as a activity that assists in selling services and products; a bureaucrat thinks CE is a program to complement and supplement laws and regulations that fosters trade competition; a consumer advocate believes CE is to protect consumers from deceptive business practice and an educator views CE is to develop necessary skills and knowledge that assist consumers to play their roles as a responsible consumer . The goal of green marketing is to satisfy customer and society's need in a sustainable way (Peattie, 1995), and the direction of green marketing is toward sustainable development and satisfying various stakeholders (Karna, et.al, 2001). To make this direction true consciousness for sustainability is obvious. Therefore, for all stakeholders like shareholders, customers, employees, managers, investors, suppliers, government, society, local community, environment, and the future (Crowther and Seify, 2010), consumer education is equally important. CE teach which products to buy, how to buy/use/dispose, for satisfying needs (Hellman-Tuitert, 1999) of individual, society, environment and the planet.

## Aim and objectives of the research

The aim of the research is to justify, whether to initiate consumer education is inevitable for green marketing to be flourished, through literature review and primary research. The specific objectives of the research are - to understand the importance of initiating consumer education for green marketing to be flourished, to identify the tasks that will be accomplished by the assistance of the 'Consumer Education Department' in a green company, to analyze consumers' opinions to justify whether it reflect the research title, to provide some useful guidelines in initiating

consumer education for green marketers, and to provide some directions for the future researchers.

### **Research methodology**

This is an exploratory research. The researcher has drawn some hypotheses based on the literature review and tested the hypotheses by statistically analysing the surveyed data.

#### **Research methods**

The primary data were collected based on a structured questionnaire with ten different questions. A nine point Likert scale was used to collect respondents' opinion. The secondary data were collected from different books, research articles, online journals, and websites. The researcher has used convenience sampling as it is less time consuming and less costly. The sample size was 100, which consists of undergraduate students of a public University in Bangladesh. The survey was conducted in October 2012. Data were analyzed by using SPSS software. Hypotheses were tested on the basis of correlation matrix. The frequency table is used to show the percentages of respondents who acknowledge that at present consumers are not getting sufficient consumer education; therefore, it is important to initiate CE for green marketing to be flourished.

### **Why consumer education is important for green marketing to be flourished?**

Consumer education provides “The skills range from learning to cope with present circumstances, to participating as citizens to influence change” (Green, 1982; Hellman-Tuitert, 1999, p. 15). Since, an informed consumer looks at any product analytically and critically, he/she does consider six angles (health, environmental, safety, economic, legal, and social) of “Topic Web” (Consumercraft I, 1980; Hellman-Tuitert 1999) therefore, green marketers need to make these angles visible to their products/services in order to successfully capture consumers for a long time. Marketers are using the terms like: ‘Green’, ‘Pro-environmental’, ‘Sustainability’, ‘Environmentally Friendly’ and ‘Ecology’ to describe green firms’ processes that consume less energy, lessen waste and pollution, and preserve natural resource as well as produce recyclable products (Awan, 2011). Green marketing is spread across various communication platforms such as word-of-mouth, reference groups, opinion leaders, media activities, advertisements, internet marketing, cellular marketing etc. (Subhani et.al, 2012). Utilizing, all these traditional strategies, unfortunately green marketers are not getting the expected response from consumers; as a result,

in most countries of the world green marketing is still in its primary stage (Sharma, 2011). Knowledge about ecological issues is a significant predictor of environmentally friendly behaviour (Laroche, et.al, 2001). Not all consumers have strong desire for green products, only, who are knowledgeable about environmental problems prefer environmentally friendly brands (Subhani et al., 2012), and more willing to pay a premium price for green product ( Laroche, et al., 2001). In order to accomplish the objective of making everybody knowledgeable , bringing everybody in green habits and creating better market place, green marketers need to educate and empower tomorrow's consumers today ( Knights, 2000). Consumer education provides a wide array of information and discussions on sustainable consumption, social justice, human rights, ethical values and overcoming poverty (Oogarah-Hanuman, and Boojihawon, 2011). Consumer education also leads to form a more realistic expectation about environmental impact of products and services on the part of the buyers (Hellman-Tuitert, 1999). Moreover people need to understand environmentally compatible behaviours (Laroche et al 2001) for example, the notion of the individual, and his/her belief for right and wrong about the products/brands in the market (Subhani et al. 20012). Two important drawbacks de-motivate people going green, one is their low perceived level of self-involvement toward the protection of environment and another is their belief, that, the preservation of environment is the responsibility of government and/or big corporations (Laroche et al., 2001). Marketers in Europe and other parts of the developed world has been trying to shift marketing strategy from traditional to sustainable, specially, after the world summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg in 2002 ( Maheshwari, and Malhotra, 2011). In his book, Ottman (2011) gives low emphasize on traditional ads instead, he said that, the educational messages can achieve credibility through the demonstration of how environmentally superior products can help consumers safeguard their health, preserve the environment for their grandkids, or protect the outdoors for recreation and wildlife. Many companies launched their own green product ranges, but the substance was missing (Grant, 2007). People are motivated but, not at a level, which is needed to be eco-friendly. Many researchers have proved that, all the public and private initiatives directed toward a sustainable world still unsuccessful because, people are not changing their own habits and lifestyles. Only, green marketing alone cannot bring the critical change in people. But, when, consumer education will be provided by green marketers then, the true green consumers will be created who,

ultimately will bring the changes in society. Ottman (2011) said that, the truly green consumers are well educated and know a lot about the green products, their characteristics and where to find them; they make informed decision that is a key to green consumption. Research has found that for several reasons people do not believe in green strategy and reject high price of green products, which, affects the sales of the company, therefore, a smart marketer (Welling and Chavan, 2010) needs to make environmental benefits tangible through compelling illustrations and statistics, to make consumers feel as if their choices would make a difference (Ottman, 2011). Consumers want that marketing should do social jobs by becoming an engine for producing happier, not satisfied consumers, (Norton, et. al 2010). As it is marketer's responsibility to make consumer conscious, when they are doing wrong, it is noticeable, that CE is important everywhere.

Information provision about greenness is a key component of green marketing, if the targeted consumers view greenness as 'motivating' variable, firms should develop alliances with stakeholders to provide clear, comprehensive and credible information with wider dissemination and lower access cost (Prakash, 2002) otherwise, attraction for green products, will be reduced and pessimism about green products will be increased. The necessity of consumer education in green marketing is also found in Ottman's (2011, p. 111) speech: "The fundamentals of good green marketing is that consumers must be aware of and concerned about the issues, feel empowered to act, must know what's in it for them." So it is clear that, companies have to concentrate more on CE regarding sustainable issues than to exploit green agendas for commercial ends (Shammot, 2011). CE is different from other forms of school, college and formal education and to provide CE is also different from traditional marketing activities, which can happen at work or in a wide range of social context ( Office of Fair Trading, 2004) at any time to influence consumer behaviour. McGregor (2000, p. 172) said that, green marketing "Contribute to society as a whole by creating more active and informed citizens, leading to a more even balance of power between the producer and consumer". In order to generate rational and responsible consumer and making them long term patrons green marketing needs to appreciate, patronize, and empower 14 million green communities (Ottman, 2011). If marketers provide CE to the early stages, with passes of time it can increase consumers' concern toward environment and subsequently influence to become green consumers (Shammot, 2011). CE also

will help eliminating irresponsible marketing and confusing claims about products and services and generating ideas on how professional marketing techniques and awareness-raising campaigns can be used effectively (OECD: Committee on consumer policy, 2008). From the above discussion it is very clear that, there will be two different outcomes, if green marketing initiate consumer education and if do not (see Figure: 1 in Appendix).

Unfortunately, the researcher has found that almost 80% (See Table: 1 in Appendix) consumers said that green marketing do not provide CE at a satisfactory level and only 17% said that green marketing provides some sort of CE. From the above discussion it is viewed, that only by initiating CE; true green marketers can attract stakeholders toward them for building long term relationship.

### **Initiating consumer education**

For green marketing to be flourished, the following activities are needed to be done: going through teaching and learning simultaneously with all stakeholders ; generating skilled, rational, and responsible consumer to grow with green habits; motivating supplier to involve in environmentally lasting initiatives; attracting investors in green projects; building sustainable corporate culture; encouraging active participation of government, environmentalist, local community, and media in the market place. For effective consumer education to all stakeholders, a formal 'Consumer Education Department' (see Figure: 2 in Appendix) is inevitable for green marketing. If stakeholders are provided with consumer education, then, they will become sustainable consumer and once they become sustainable consumer, they obviously, will understand what are truly lasting initiatives deserved by other stakeholders from them. Therefore, it is the responsibility of green marketing to provide consumer education to all the stakeholders.

Marketers can connect themselves with 'Consumer Educators' Network' (CEN) (Singh, 1991) to bring active consumer educators together on a platform for exchanging ideas, experiences, and resources in order to assist in consumer education efforts through participatory and cooperative environment. Besides academicians, the educators can be opinion leaders from public, private, and voluntary sectors and even individuals, who are committed to work with consumers. Consumer Education Department (CED) of a green company can share CE materials quickly to community to be popular among consumers. The use of case study method by highlighting

everyday life situations and problems to primary school children - who are to purchase, using their pocket money, can help improving skills in decision-making and influencing their parents in buying and disposing (Steffens, 1991). The use of teaching kit's video make young consumers creative and discerning through raising awareness, as a result, they can carefully observe advertising, trends, marketing, objective of information before making choices in their daily life (Becker, 1991). Green marketers can sponsor 'School Consumer Clubs' (Zaini, 1991) in many developing countries, where consumer education is not part of the formal education syllabus. After, normal school hours, arranging discussions, talk shows, and exhibitions can be an excellent approach to develop critical awareness among members. For rural women, use of surveys, audio-visual presentations, demonstrations, and seminars (Iacovou, 1991) can be helpful in developing critical awareness while purchasing goods and taking action when things go wrong. Green marketing can keep eyes to monitor young consumers' ways of consuming at home, at school and in peer groups as a part of implementing CE in order to promote sustainable consumption (OECD, 2008).

CE can be provided in the form of consultation to discerning and knowledgeable customers (Office of Fair Trading, 2004). CED can consulate consumers about their daily problems in choosing/consuming/disposing products and can give them opportunity to share their experiences about non green and green products, and sometimes can advocate against their wrong doing and together can invent lasting solutions. Consumer education department firstly, can position a particular sustainable theme that every stakeholder should behave for community, environment and economy. Green marketing can run several sustainable campaigns like: 'First community then I', 'Safety for the Environment', 'Buy for the Economy', and 'The fewer efforts but the greater change' etc. This department can assist in preparing advertisement in the form of drama, comedy, scientific evidence, and testimonial. It can ensure environment friendly package and informative and true label about how to consume/use/dispose the company's product in an environment friendly manner. Moreover, this department can arrange 'Green Seminars', 'Green Job Fairs', and can publish 'Green Booklets' and 'Green Magazines'. CED can involve in research to generate new methods of education so that marketing can easily cultivate truly green consumers. Green marketing can take the opportunity of collaborative innovation with customers or users for the development of new products and services (Greer and Lei, 2012). Green

marketing can participate in home management teaching, by which, people will be taught on purchase/consumption/disposition of foods, clothing, energy and household work process management, waste management, recycle management (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2009). Green marketing also can use some online based teaching resources like, frequently asked questions, downloadable materials, help line, accessible company blogs, and online magazines etc. CED can effectively use the company's website to provide access to consumers as a prime source of information. Employees can use personal blogs for sharing their experiences, ideas, and can suggest consumers why they should use a particular green product. CED can use social networks to disseminate the new green innovations and to teach others about sustainable habits. To create a unique, acceptable, and lasting corporate culture, this department can teach employees and to motivate them to grow with green habits. Ultimately, wherever the employees move they can teach consumers about what they have learnt through consumer education materials and their daily green habits. CED can assist concerned body in preparing company prospectus to attract green investors by highlighting company's green orientation and consumer orientation. CED can provide education to managers because he has to know how product will be packaged and labelled, how consumers will be informed and educated. CED can provide consumer education to suppliers in order to make them knowledgeable about what green marketers want from a supplier to contribute in making ultimate consumers happy. CED can provide consumer education to government for making government a sustainable buyer to purchase green products and making bias to patronize environmentally lasting projects. This department also can work with local community and media to monitor whether true green practices are existed in the marketplace. CED can provide consumer education to environmentalist in assist them to perform their duty effectively and to identify their scope of work so that they can contribute in creating people aware about anti environmental activities of marketers.

### **Hypotheses testing**

Although, most of the hypotheses have already been proved true from the above literature review but, from the correlation matrix, by comparing the strength of associations between variables (the value of  $r$  i.e. Pearson correlation significant at the 0.01 level), the researcher has tried to evaluate statistical merits of the hypotheses.



$H_0$ : Initiating CE is not important for green marketing to be flourished.

$H_1$  : Initiating CE is important to go through teaching and learning simultaneously with all stakeholders for green marketing to be flourished: The correlation matrix shows, there is a strong positive correlation ( $r = .803$ , Sig. at  $.000$ ) between going through teaching and learning simultaneously with all stakeholders and green marketing, which indicates the null hypothesis  $H_0$  is rejected and the alternative hypothesis  $H_1$  seems to be true. Therefore, green marketing must initiate CE to go through teaching and learning simultaneously with all stakeholders to be successful.

$H_2$  : Initiating CE is important to generate skilled, rational, and responsible consumer to grow with green habits spontaneously for green marketing to be flourished: For this case  $r = .886$  , a value close to 1.0, which means that initiating CE to generate skilled, rational, and responsible consumer to grow with green habits spontaneously, is strongly associated with green marketing. Moreover the positive value of  $r$  represents a positive relationship.

$H_3$  : Initiating CE is important to motivate supplier in involving in environmentally lasting initiatives for green marketing to be flourished: Again there is a strong positive correlation ( $.773$ ) between motivating supplier to involve in environmentally lasting initiatives and green marketing therefore,  $H_0$  is rejected which, means  $H_3$  seems to be true.

$H_4$  : Initiating CE is important to attract investors for green marketing to be flourished: There is a positive correlation ( $.617$ ) between attracting investors and green marketing therefore,  $H_0$  is rejected, which indicate green marketing must initiate CE to attract green investors.

$H_5$  : Initiating CE is important in building sustainable corporate culture for green marketing to be flourished. In this case the correlation matrix shows that  $r = .777$  implies a strong positive relation between building sustainable corporate culture and green marketing. So, green marketing must initiate CE to build sustainable corporate culture for success.

$H_6$  : Initiating CE is important to encourage active participation of government, environmentalist, local community, and media in the market place for green marketing to be flourished: The correlation matrix shows a weak but, positive correlation ( $.471$ ) between encouraging active participation of government, environmentalist, local community, and media in the market place and green marketing. The reason of weak relation is that, it is a tuff job for green marketing to inspire a government by CE to patronize in a sustainable project unless the government

understand the necessity of sustainable development or sustainability. Green marketers can encourage and attract local community to patronize environmentally beneficial programs as well as jointly work with media to educate consumers in the marketplace.

H<sub>7</sub> : It is important to generate consumers from high income group for green marketing to be flourished: The value of  $r = .066$  indicate very weak and insignificant (.515) positive correlation between generating consumer from high income group and green marketing. Here, H<sub>0</sub> seems to be true and H<sub>7</sub> is not accepted. This means that green marketing don't need to generate consumers only from high income group to be successful instead, green marketing can target consumers from any income group for long term sustainability.

### Conclusion

At present consumers is not getting consumer education from the green marketers as much as it is needed for them. As a result, green marketing is struggling to be flourished. The research suggests that by initiating CE, green marketing can go through teaching and learning simultaneously with all stakeholders, generate skilled, rational, and responsible consumer to grow with green habits spontaneously, motivate supplier to involve in environmentally lasting initiatives, attract investors, build sustainable corporate culture, and depend on consumers of any income group instead of only high income group. Overall, a CED in a green company can contribute in achieving success for green marketing.

### Limitations and directions for future study

Every research has its limitations; this research is not out of limitations. The sample size is only 100 and the respondents are all undergraduate student of a university, so, surveying a large sample from a diverse group of consumers from different countries can produce more attractive outcomes in future. This is an exploratory research to justify the potentiality of initiating consumer education for green marketing to be flourished and what a 'Consumer Education Department' can do to make green marketing successful. So in future, research can be conducted to test the feasibility of the initiation of CE for green marketing in terms of cost and implementation , to justify the role of 'Consumer Education Department' to initiate CE, and to evaluate the effects of CE on sales.

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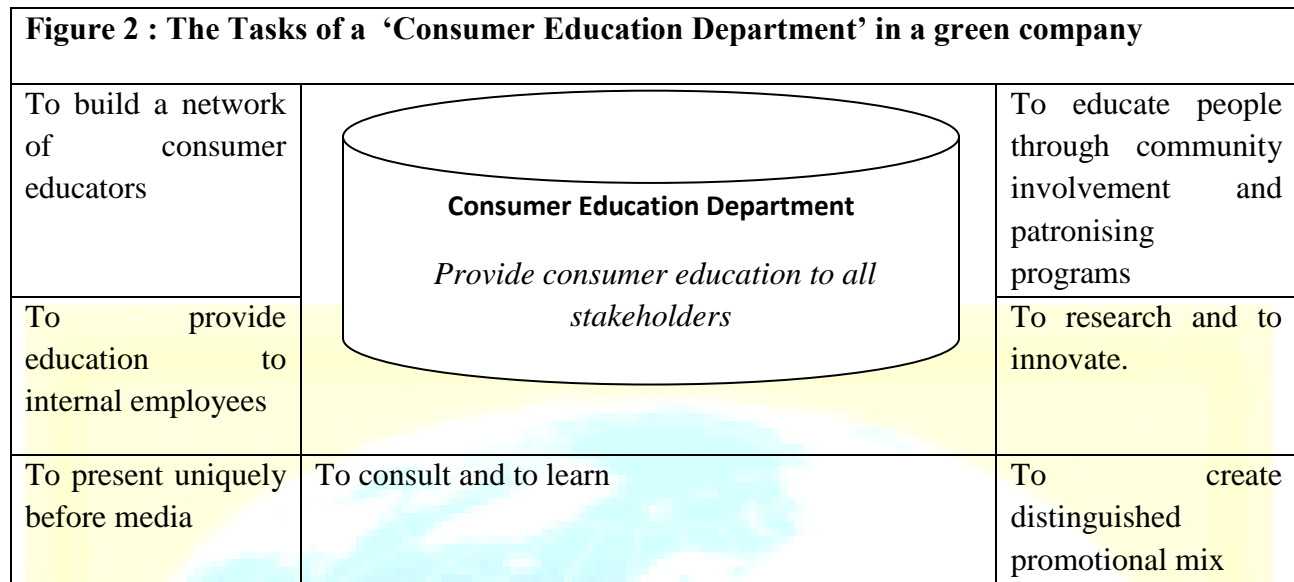
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Appendix

**Figure:1: Consequences: if green marketing initiate consumer education and if do not.**

If green marketing initiate consumer education	If green marketing do not initiate consumer education
Marketers go through a teaching and learning process with consumers.	Marketers do not go through teaching and learning process with consumers.
Marketers teach people how to buy, use, and dispose of products/services to fulfill their needs	Marketers only offer green products/ service through traditional promotional activities.
Consumers will receive clear idea about the cumulative effect of individual decision on community, economy, and environment.	Consumers will receive vague idea about the effect of individual decision on community, economy, and environment.
Consumers will participate actively and confidently in the marketplace to make a wise decision.	Consumers will participate inactively with lack of confidence in the marketplace to make a decision.
Consumers will be empowered to create pressure on marketers to make them responsive to individual and environmental needs.	Consumer will not be empowered to force marketers to make them responsive to individual and environmental needs.
Consumers will move toward green habits and share values with others to build green community.	Consumers will not have such intention to share green values with others and to build green community.
Consumers will accept only green products and support only green practice.	Consumers obviously will have possibility to buy non-green products and to support non-green practice.



**Table: 2 Correlations**

		Green Marketing
Going Through Teaching and Learning Simultaneously with All Stakeholders	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.803** .000 100
Generating Skilled, Rational, and Responsible Consumer to Grow with Green Habits Spontaneously	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.886** .000 100
Motivating Supplier to Involve in Environmentally Lasting Initiatives	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.773** .000 100
Attracting Investors	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.617** .000 100
Building Sustainable Corporate Culture Through Internal Marketing	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.777** .000 100
Encouraging Active Participation of Government, Environmentalist, Local Community, and Media in the Market Place	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.472** .000 100

Generating Consumer From High Income Group	Pearson Correlation	.066
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.515
	N	100

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

