

Consumers' preferences on the use of eco-friendly bags: A green marketing perspective

Jonathan C. Gano-an¹

¹ Compostela Valley State College, Maragusan, Comval, 8808, Comval Province, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

There has been a radical shift in consumer behavior towards a green lifestyle. Environmentalists were involved in massive green marketing campaigns trying to reduce the impact of plastic products to the environment. However, the problem is prevalent and evolved continuously. This paper furnishes a vital overview on the current environmental issues caused by plastic bags being used by hypermarkets and supermarkets. Consumer preferences and their perceptions on the use of eco bags were the highlights of this research. A total of 230 respondents were surveyed who are the local consumers in the City of Tagum. A quantitative research design was used in this paper. The study revealed that consumers have the highest perception on the use of Eco Bags in terms of environmental benefits. High level of consumer awareness about Eco Friendly bags as part of the green marketing campaign was found out. Further, research showed that consumers have no doubts of accepting the new marketing campaign as public acceptance exhibited a result of high level. The green marketing efforts of businesses generates substantive insights from the perspective of the consumers, as such, it is imperative that these efforts be intensively carried out and endlessly promote the green marketing efforts as the consumers affirmed their support by putting a greener value to it..

ABSTRAK

Telah terjadi pergeseran radikal dalam perilaku konsumen menuju gaya hidup hijau. Para pemerhati lingkungan terlibat dalam kampanye pemasaran hijau untuk mengurangi dampak produk plastik pada lingkungan. Namun, masalahnya masih umum dan terus berkembang. Penelitian ini memberikan gambaran penting tentang isu lingkungan saat ini yang disebabkan oleh kantong plastik yang digunakan oleh hipermarket dan supermarket. Preferensi konsumen dan persepsi mereka tentang penggunaan eco-friendly bags merupakan fokus penelitian ini. Sebanyak 230 responden yang disurvei yaitu konsumen lokal di Kota Tagum. Ini merupakan penelitian kuantitatif, yang mengungkapkan bahwa konsumen memiliki persepsi tertinggi tentang penggunaan Eco Bags terkait manfaat lingkungan. Tingkat kesadaran konsumen yang tinggi tentang eco-friendly bags sebagai bagian dari kampanye pemasaran hijau ditemukan. Selanjutnya, penelitian menunjukkan bahwa konsumen tidak memiliki keraguan untuk menerima kampanye pemasaran baru karena penerimaan publik menunjukkan hasil tingkat tinggi. Upaya pemasaran hijau dari bisnis menghasilkan wawasan substantif dari sudut pandang konsumen, oleh karena itu, sangat penting bahwa usaha-usaha ini dilakukan secara intensif dan tanpa henti mempromosikan usaha pemasaran hijau karena konsumen menegaskan dukungan mereka dengan memberikan nilai lebih hijau untuk hal tersebut.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ecology has been greatly disturbed due to the indiscriminate use of plastics that do not decompose for a long period of time. Environmental consciousness had been a concern of the past decades (Thi &

Giang 2014), in fact, ecological problems were marked as early as 1980 which include: global warming, greenhouse effect, pollution and climate change and these are present in the industrial environment. (Sandu 2014).

* Corresponding author, email address: ¹ ganoan.jonathan@gmail.com.

At present, environmental problems and the effects of climate change is apparent (Polo 2015) and environmentalism has fast emerged among consumers and started demanding eco-friendly product especially in developed countries. In response to the increasing demand of the health and environmentally conscious customers, business firms turned green and started implementing green marketing strategies (Jain & Kaur 2004).

Eighty percent of Indian consumers prefer eco-friendly brands for they believe that these products are less harmful to the environment. The highly negative environmental effects of plastics, the demand for eco-friendly products created necessary pressure to guarantee a cleaner ecosystem. Thus, consumers showed great interest in green products since its performance was significantly affected by environmental beliefs (Radesh, Ndia & Maheshwari 2014). While the natural environment of Vietnam is at alarming level, Vietnamese consumer seemed to have limited and insincere insights on environmental protection and the demand for environmentally friendly products are low (Thi & Giang 2014). Thai consumers, on the other hand showed special interest in buying green or environmentally friendly products, however, the environmental relevance or benefit of these products are still unclearly perceived by a wider market (Arttachariya 2010).

The growing concern about the environment gave birth to the green marketing efforts in different nations especially in the Philippines (Gregorio 2015). It cannot be denied that the rapid economic growth brought by shopping malls to the cities and towns have some associated environmental costs. For instance, plastic bags used by supermarkets or hypermarkets that scattered in riversides, schools, public parks, restaurants, parking spaces and national highways may lead to pollution, contamination and may produce diseases to the public. Although, some measures had been introduced to mitigate the problem such as the use of oxo-biodegradable plastic bags but the efforts seemed lacking since the problem is prevalent.

The drive to support the green consumerism must not be confined within the company's perspective and from the viewpoint of the government or environmentalists, instead it will take into account the significance of the local consumers, their behavior and perception to it. Although there were studies about green marketing in the Philippines, however published findings on the ecological and green marketing issues within the context of developing cities and towns in relation to the use of Eco-

Friendly Bags are apparently unavailable. In view of the foregoing reason, the researcher was prompted to conduct a study regarding this issue to understand the perception of local consumers and consider this gap to evaluate the preferences of consumers on the use of eco-friendly bags in shopping.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Objectives of the Study

In an attempt to curb the use of plastic bags when shopping, several environmentalists in cooperation with the government sector launched environmental campaigns trying to create environmental awareness among consumers. The fundamental purpose of this study was to evaluate the perception of the local consumers in the City of Tagum, Philippines towards the use of eco-friendly bags. Furthermore, this study was done to determine the level of perception among consumers in the city in terms of:

1. Awareness of the campaign on using eco-friendly bags
2. The perceived benefits of using eco bags
3. The level of public acceptance
4. The influence of prices of eco bags as substitute for cellophanes/plastic shopping bags; and
5. Identify the level of significance of the demographic variables that influenced the consumers in using eco-friendly bags.

Framework of the Study

This study is based on the "Theory of planned behavior approach to understand the purchasing behavior for environmentally sustainable products" by (Kumar 2012) who stated that environmental knowledge incorporates the level of environmental consciousness among individuals, relationships with various aspects of ecosystem and a sense of understanding to keep the environment undamaged for the next years. He also stressed that a consumer's knowledge about his/her environment is the key factor to consider in buying environmentally sustainable products, which in this study, the Eco-friendly bags. Consumer's knowledge largely stimulates the way they think and act in an environmentally conscious way.

For determining the consumers' perception regarding the campaign of eco-friendly bags, the researcher used the aforementioned variables in parallel to the studies of (Altaf 2013; Jain & Kaur 2004; Mayank & Amit 2013) on consumer awareness, The Marketing Mix in Green Marketing Strategies

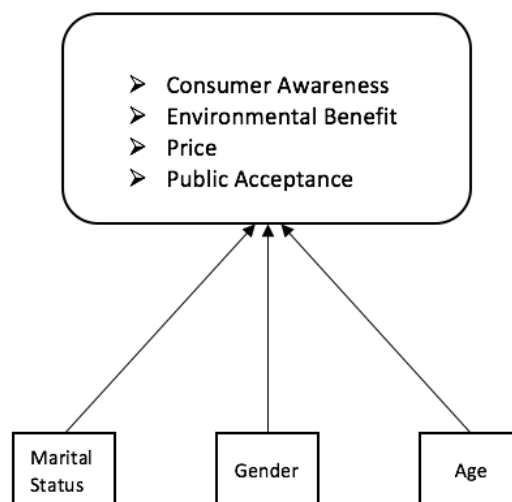


Figure 1
Schematic Diagram of the Study

Theory of Ginsberg and Bloom (2004), The Green Marketing Concept by (Bradley 2007) and the Green Product Concept (Boztepe 2012).

3. RESEARCH METHOD

To shed a light to the research questions of this study, the researcher developed a survey questionnaire to gain substantive understanding regarding the perception of the consumers on using eco-friendly bags. Items on the questionnaire were based on various literatures on ecological, green and environmental marketing. The questionnaire has two parts: The first section consists of the demographic features of the respondents such as age, gender and marital status (see Figure 1). Part II consists of the research questions using the 5-point Likert Scale to measure and obtain the necessary information about the four variables of this research.

Using the random sampling method, the questionnaires were distributed to a total sample of 230 consumers. The survey was done in the major shopping malls and centers of the city. 43% of consumers who participated the survey were males while 57% were females. As to the age distribution, majority of the respondents or 33% were young professionals (ages 20-29), young consumers (ages 19 and below) registered 8%, 23% were between ages 30-39, for consumers between 40-49 years old were 22%, 11% for ages 50-59 and only 3% participated for ages 60+.

Regarding the marital status of the respondents, 29% were single and 71% were married. T-test, One-Way ANOVA and mean were used to analyzed and evaluate the level of awareness on the campaign of using eco-bags.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Consumer Awareness

Based on the statistical result in Table 1, survey reveals that consumers were aware about the efforts of environmentalists and government to reduce the use of plastic bags and begin using tote/eco-friendly bags when shopping. With the mean score of 4.09, it appears that consumers drew high awareness about the green marketing initiatives and showed above medium interest in it. Boztepe (2012) provides that environmental awareness on the harmful effects of plastic products to the environment. The overwhelming awareness of the consumers about the environmental benefit of Eco-bags can be the best step to attain sustainable economic growth in the developing cities. Furthermore, a consumer who is environmentally aware has been defined by Boztepe (2012) as an environmentalist who fully comprehends their role against environmental pollution and their social responsibility to the next generation and humanity in general.

Environmental Benefit

The perceived environmental benefit on the use of Eco-bags registered a mean score of 4.25. The result conspicuously confirmed that consumers highly recognized the environmental advantages and benefit of eco-friendly bags as an alternative of plastic bags used by supermarkets. It also appears that they showed commendable understanding on how to protect the environment. Environmental benefits typically an advantage of business firms in the purchase decision process of the consumers, but habitually value and quality are the main factors that will influence the consumers.

Table 1
Significant Differences of the Consumers' Perception when Grouped according to the Demographic Variables

Demographic Variables		Mean	t/f-value (Computed)
Gender	Male	4.10	2.21*
	Female	4.24	
Marital Status	Married	4.14	1.75
	Single	4.20	
Ages	19 & below	4.15	0.75
	20 – 29	4.21	
	30 – 39	4.20	
	40 – 49	4.17	
	50 – 59	4.15	
	60+	4.15	

* Statistically significant at 0.05 level of significance.

In a study conducted by Altaf (2013) in Srinagar City, Indian consumers strongly agree on the advantages of green products. He infers that their beliefs are associated with its green benefits. In another locale in India, green customers positively react about buying products that are less damaging to the environment, this is confirmed by 80% of the consumers (Radesh et al. 2014). The environmental concerns of consumers are closely associated with their value towards the biophysical environment (Fuiyeng & Yazdanifard 2015).

Price

Prices of eco/tote bags range from 15-35 pesos depending on the size. An average shopper can utilize up to two medium sized eco bags when shopping. Based on the survey consumers are willing to purchase eco bags at these price ranges. As shown, the mean score is 4.18, described as high. Although the consumer needs to spend for this bag, they are still willing since they may still use it for the next time they shop. Contrary to the study of (Mayank & Amit 2013), consumers felt that green products are priced higher than conventional one, however, they have revealed that they prefer the green products over conventional products while purchasing.

Survey also revealed that consumers considered the ill effect of the manufacturing and consumption on natural environment and the price of the green product affects their purchase behavior. As consumers consider these effects to the natural environment it can be said that green marketing practices not only lead to social good but also makes a good business sense. Consumers are willing to pay more for a greener lifestyle for them to be vertically known with the companies that were green complaint (Fuiyeng & Yazdanifard 2015). Consumers, within the context of green marketing initiative are always ready to pay a premium if they

perceive a good additional value to the product (Tiwari 2001).

Public Acceptance

Generally, local consumers welcome the green marketing initiatives of environmentalists and the government. This is evidenced by a mean score of 4.15. The high degree of market acceptance is basically driven by the overwhelming awareness of consumers about the detrimental effects of plastics to the ecological balance of the environment. Social acceptability within the context of green product concept according to (Arslan & Göğce 2013), is primarily based on the concept that a product or business must not be destructive or may cause damage to any living creature and the natural environment.

Statistical significance is noted when the perception of the consumers on the use of eco-bags when analyzed according to gender. At 0.05 level of significance, the computed t-value (2.21) is greater than the tabular value (1.96). Hence, the hypothesis is rejected. Considering the mean scores, females posted a mean of 4.24 while males obtained a mean of 4.10. In this respect, female shoppers were found to be more aware and showed significant interest about the campaign of using eco bags than males.

In a study conducted by (Boztepe 2012), he confirmed that female consumers showed significant interest in green marketing promotions, thus, companies should take gender into considerations in their green marketing strategies.

In this study, environmentalists and the promoters of green marketing initiatives should bank on the features of eco bags and extensive advertisements in various forms must be carried out. For men, male oriented programs in relation to green marketing initiatives can be a good strategy as well. When consumers are grouped according to marital

status, statistical results showed that significant difference does not exist. However, it is imperative to note based on the mean scores, unmarried consumers who posted a mean score of (4.20) pay great interests on the campaign of using Eco-friendly bags and were impressively affected by the green initiatives.

Empirical findings of (Boztepe 2012) confirmed that single consumers were affected by promotional activities of eco-friendly goods and green marketing promoters must put bigger emphasis in advertisements featuring the eco-friendliness to make the campaign more appealing and charming. Conversely, (Saxena & Pradeep K. Khandelwal 2010) proved that married consumers were found to be more interested and seemed to have a positive views about green products.

Age, the third demographic variable of this research, appeared to have no moderator effect on the model of the study. With the computed *f*-value of 0.75, it is lower than the computed *f*-value of 2.10, thus the hypothesis is not rejected and there is no sufficient evidence to claim that age significantly affect the way they perceive the green marketing initiatives. Majority of the responses of this study came from ages 20-39 and statistics shows that this age group pays attention to the green marketing campaigns of using Eco-friendly bags. In a similar study by (Sengupta, Mandal & Kumar 2015), no significant difference was found on account of the age of the consumers except for the factor concerning environment.

5. CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, SUGGESTION, AND LIMITATIONS

As the detrimental effects of plastics continue to disturb the planet, consumers, especially urban dwellers were now willing to take suitable measures to mitigate the environmental problems. The campaign on the use of Eco-friendly bags drew a significant interest among the local consumers. This was due to the high concerns of the consumers for a greener lifestyle. Statistically, the level of consumer awareness on this campaign found to be high. Consumers appear to have an even knowledge about the campaign so as with the environmental consequences of using plastic bags. This study also infers that the perceived environmental benefits of Eco-friendly bags are at high level. In deciding whether to use plastic bag or a tote/Eco-bag, consumers would tend to consider the environmental advantage of an Eco-bag.

Although the bag entails costs, but consumers still showed interest and they perceived themselves

to be ready to pay for its price to reduce pollution and support to the environment. The high level of perception about the price of Eco-bags is a good claim that consumers are putting a greener value to this bag. Basically, the consumers considered the opportunity cost of cellophanes, in this case. The society, at large is ready to accept the challenge of protecting the environment as public acceptance is at high level as well. Consumers never doubted to welcome the campaign.

The loving natures of Filipino consumers for the environment was shown and were readily available to embrace the green marketing initiatives. As to the demographic or moderating variables of the study, only gender showed a significant difference, survey reveals that female consumers showed more interest on the green marketing efforts. Marital status and age are not statistically significant in this case, therefore there is no sufficient evidence to claim that age and marital status have an influence on the way consumer perceive the green marketing efforts of private and public sectors.

Moreover, the idea to promote this marketing initiative must be emphasized incorporating the 7 major components of marketing such as price, place, people, physical evidence, promotion, process and the product itself. This initiative must also be shaped integrating the preferences of the consumers, durability and convenience within the sphere of the triple bottom line (Altaf 2013).

Although green marketing is still neophyte in the Philippine business and economic environment, it is noteworthy that green marketing initiatives such as using eco-friendly bags must remain in transit to reach the ultimate goal of reducing pollution. Efforts like this must be intensified through private-public partnerships (PPP). It is recommended that the local government might consider forging an ordinance with a sound implementing rules that will encourage green marketing initiatives and put everything in action. Perhaps, the local government can also enact laws and ordinances prohibiting shopping centers to use plastic bags and use tote/Eco-friendly bags instead. For sure, this can be a good measure since it has a dual effect, first it will reduce the costs incurred by business in procuring plastic bags and second, pollution can be reduced.

In parallel to the policies enshrined in Republic Act 9003 otherwise known as Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000, local governments may supply eco bags for free in cooperation with the local environmentalists and environmental in-

stitutions. Wide dissemination on the ecological marketing efforts and continuous education of the injurious impact of plastics must be intensively carried out. The smart use social media can definitely help reach the target group of consumers and can be a good step towards a green lifestyle.

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