

Green Marketing: A Journey Towards Sustainability

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Abstract

Green marketing has evolved to address specific environmental problems and balance profitability with environmental responsibility by promoting environmentally safe goods and services. The increasing awareness of environmental issues among consumers has allowed firms to use green marketing to gain a competitive advantage.

Green marketing involves a broad range of activities, including modification of product, changes in process, packaging and promotion all aimed at minimizing detrimental impacts on the natural environment.

We can trace the evolution of green marketing from ecological green marketing, which focuses on addressing specific environmental problems, to environmental green marketing, which aims at designing innovative products to reduce pollution and waste, and finally to sustainable green marketing, which challenges companies to balance profitability with environmental responsibility.

Environmentally conscious consumers are demanding eco-friendly products and services and expect organizations to be socially responsible. However, actual environmentally friendly purchasing behavior does not always result from positive attitudes toward environmental issues.

Consumers are not willing to sacrifice other product attributes for the sake of environmental responsibility alone. Hence, firms must focus on satisfying customers' needs and wants for quality, performance, and convenience at an affordable price that is not detrimental to the environment.

There are various reasons why firms adopt green marketing strategies, including opportunities for market growth, social responsibility, governmental and competitive pressures, and cost or profit issues. However, firms have struggled to gain a competitive advantage solely from expressing environmental concerns.

To achieve superior performance, firms must be market-oriented, manage their resources correctly, and allocate dedicated resources to green strategy development and implementation. Resources such as environmental program timing, environmental strategy focus, and top management support contribute to the success of green marketing strategies.

Effective green marketing strategies involve the development of green policies and the innovation and deployment of green products throughout the supply chain. Innovation in green products will continue to be driven by the need to reduce human impact on the planet.

The three main aspects of the impact of green policies on firm performance are market performance, financial performance, and service quality. Resource advantage theory suggests that firms that leverage resources in a market-oriented way will outperform their competitors. Green Marketing has its challenges and complexities also.

Overall, green marketing is a journey towards sustainability that needs support from all stakeholders. Governments cannot achieve a green economy alone, and the private sector must be encouraged to adopt green business practices. Consumers' increasing preference for green products and services can drive companies to reduce their environmental impact, provide positive social impact, and generate profits.

Keywords: green marketing, evolution, strategy, awareness, sustainability

1. Introduction

Businesses and consumers are concerned now with protecting and preserving the natural resources and environment. With the increasing awareness of environmental issues, more and more consumers are seeking eco-friendly products and services, resulting in green marketing, which involves promoting environmentally safe goods and services. Green marketing has become the dominant concept and strategy in this world of unlimited wants and limited resources.

Most people associate green marketing with the advertising promotion of Environmentally Friendly products. They recall terms like Recyclable, Refillable, Ozone Friendly, Phosphate Free, etc. However, Green marketing is much more than that for facilitating sustainable development. Before the advertisement and promotion of the product, a broad range of activities like modification of the product, process changes, and packaging happen. The purpose of the article is to explore the various aspects of green marketing from its evolution and its significance in today's world.

2. The Evolution of Green Marketing

Green marketing has undergone several phases of development. Ecological green marketing, focussing on addressing specific environmental problems like pollution, was the first one. Environmental green marketing aimed at designing innovative products to reduce pollution and waste followed it. The latest phase is sustainable green marketing, which emerged in the late 1990s and challenges companies to balance profitability with environmental responsibility.

For Pride and Ferrell (2004), Green marketing refers to an organization's efforts at creating and distributing products right from designing to promotion and pricing so that it will not harm the environment. They use divergent aspects of green marketing like energy-efficient operations, recyclable and biodegradable packaging, and better pollution controls in creating ecologically safer products. Hallin (1995) and McCarty and Shrum (2001) link people's environmental behavior to their desire to become role models by helping to preserve the environment and solve environmental problems.

Peattie (2001) identified three phases in the evolution of green marketing as under:

- ★ Ecological green marketing is characterized by the concern of all marketing activities to help for closely defined environment problems like pollution, oil spills, etc., to help and provide remedies. Henion and Kinnear (1976) trace the first wave of Green Marketing to the publication of the first books on green marketing. Ecological Marketing began on the proceedings of the American Marketing Association (AMA)'s first workshop in 1975. Books of Ken Peattie (1992) and Jacquelyn Ottoman (1992) followed. AMA defined Green marketing then as the marketing of products presumed to be environmentally safe.
- ★ Environmental green marketing: Here, the focus is on clean technology by designing innovative new products to reduce pollution and waste.
- ★ Sustainable green marketing came in the late 1990s, with increased environmental concern (Johri & Sahasakmontri, 1998).

Green marketing bridges business interests with ecological concerns, aligning profit-seeking motives with societal and environmental well-being. Stiglitz (2007) highlights the origins of Green marketing rooted in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the need for equitable and sustainable policies.

For Polonsky (1994), Green Marketing means all activities to satisfy human needs or wants with minimal detrimental impact on the natural environment. In his work from 1994, Polonsky defined Green Marketing as encompassing all activities aimed at meeting human needs or desires while minimizing negative impacts on the environment.

We can thus see that the evolution of green marketing has been characterized by a shift towards energy-efficient operations, recyclable and biodegradable packaging, and better pollution controls to create ecologically safer products.

3. Role of Customers

Green marketing connects consumers who want to have an ecologically responsible lifestyle possible. Hayes (1990) traces this awareness to the belief that the world's supply of natural resources is finite and the ecological balance of the environment may be at a critical disruption stage. However, as Laroche, Bergeron, and

Barbaro-Forleo (2002) point out actual environmentally friendly purchasing behavior does not result from indications of positive attitude towards environmental issues by customers. Market forces are realizing that their production and consumption behavior will impact the environment directly.

Yam-Tang and Chan (1998) found that most consumer's purchase decisions are based not on environmental concerns alone, and they are not ready to forgo other product attributes for a better environment. Deshpande (2011) sees customers promoting Greener products and services that is affordable and not detrimental to the environment, when it satisfies the needs and wants without compromising on convenience, quality and performance.

For more than three decades, environmental concerns have been on the agenda of Industry and Academia. According to Laroche (1996), most consumers now understand the direct impact of many ecological problems on their purchasing behavior. Banerjee (2002) found that Environmental issues also have strategic implications for organizations.

Customer value is formed in a green marketing context as the offering moves from policy to product across the offering's life, as with most marketing strategies. Consumers are keen to know the particulars of the environmental initiative and how their purchase impacts the planet.

4. Why Firms Choose Green Marketing?

Drawing on earlier research, Polonsky identified several key reasons why firms choose to engage in green marketing.

- ★ Opportunities: Scholars such as Keller (1987) and Shearer (1990) have highlighted the potential for firms to capitalize on opportunities through green marketing initiatives.
- ★ Social Responsibility: Ramakrishnan (2022) points out, Society and business are inter -dependent and business must fulfil societal expectations and the concept of sustainable development hovers around sustainable environment.

Authors like Davis (1992), Keller (1987), McIntosh (1990), Shearer (1990), and Freeman & Liedtka (1991) have emphasized the importance of social responsibility as a driving force behind firms' adoption of green marketing practices.

- ★ Governmental Pressure and Competitive pressure: The National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG) in 1990 underscored the influence of governmental regulations and competitive pressures as factors motivating firms to embrace green marketing strategies (NAAG 1990), and
- ★ Cost or profit issues: Scholars Azzone & Manzini (1994) have pointed to cost and profit considerations as additional motivations for firms to engage in green marketing efforts.

Schlossberg (1990) opines that some consumers are changing their consumptive and purchasing behaviors, as 84% of consumers expressed concern about issues related to the environment based on previous research. Fisher (1990) also corroborates the same. Ottman (1992) found this concern for the environment to be sincere and felt most consumers are likely to buy green if the price is not too high for environmentally safe products and do not have to change their lifestyle drastically in using them. It is important not to generalize the green consumer as they are different in many aspects and more psychographic than demographic.

Porter and van der Linde (1995) explained the fundamentals of greening as a competitive initiative and saw investments in greening to be resource-saving, eliminating waste, and improving productivity.

Incomplete, inefficient, or ineffective use of resources results in waste and pollution of environment by release of harmful substances, or energy forms. Handling, storage, and disposal of discharges of these without creating value for customers adds cost to companies. There are other hidden costs buried in the life cycle of the product. Pollution is like defects that reveal flaws or mistakes in the product design or production process. Hence, organizations must avoid or reduce pollution using the same basic principles of quality programs.

5. Green Marketing Strategies

Porter and van der Linde (1995) assert that many firms elevate the uncertainty of the benefits of innovation when they lack knowledge about environmental impacts. Green marketing strategy consists of many closely related constructs. Ellen, Webb, & Mohr (2006) quoting previous research, assert that strategies influencing firm corporate social responsibility and consumer pro-social thought may give firms a competitive advantage.

Hunt & Morgan (1996) hold that firms must be market-oriented to achieve superior performance by remaining competitive in the marketplace and based on Resource Advantage Theory. Barney (1991) concurs using a Resource-Based View of the firm. For Hunt (2011), effective green marketing is valuable, rare, inimitable, and organizationally specific when firms manage them correctly.

According to Lubin & Esty (2010), Firms have expressed environmental concern publicly for decades but could not make a competitive advantage from this alone until recently. Morgan & Piercy (1998) defines three main performances of green marketing as

- Market performance — the management's perception of its ability to achieve market share, sales growth, and customer retention compared to the competition.
- Financial performance — the managerial evaluation of the firm's financial success, including current and expected ROI relative to the competition within their industry.
- Service quality — the managerial perception of the service delivered to its customers compared to the competition.

6. Green Policies

Richey et al. (2014) look at the impact of a firm's green policies on these performances and attribute resources as responsible for superior performance. The Key resources that contribute to competitive advantage through green policies are:

- ❖ Environmental program timing that will create the window of opportunity,
- ❖ Environmental strategy focus supported by Top management and
- ❖ Allocating dedicated resources to green strategy development and implementation.

Firms that do not leverage resources with a market orientation will suffer a comparative disadvantage in the marketplace. Priem & Butler (2001) opine that firms that make up effective in the development process of green policy and innovation of green products deployment of the supply chain may generate superior value.

McDonagh (1994) concluded that for different people, 'green' will relate to one or more of the following components after examining what 'green' means without the context of advertising, and this gives out the different meanings of 'green' for individuals, based on their perception and range of experience.

- Ecological
- Political
- Corporate and social responsibility
- Fair Trade
- Conservation
- Not for profit
- Eco-conscious consumers
- Sustainability
- Equality
- Humanitarian

The transition to a green economy can happen only when everyone cooperates, and Governments cannot do it alone. The private sector must be encouraged to invest on new technologies that promote sustainable practices.

According to Nidumolu, Prahalad, and Rangaswami (2009), the need to reduce human impact on the planet in the coming years will drive innovation. Mani and Ramakrishnan (2018) concurs that Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) is required to address the complex economic, societal, environmental and cultural challenges. Interdisciplinary cooperation on the basis of disciplinary excellence is required for building a sustainable world that will optimize the interactions between nature, society, and the economy,

Sustainability embodies a delicate equilibrium among four core objectives: the judicious use of natural resources, safeguarding our environment, fostering inclusive social progress, and sustaining economic growth and employment opportunities.

By acknowledging these various factors, Polonsky's definition of green marketing underscores the multidimensional nature of the concept and the diverse motivations that drive firms to adopt environmentally conscious practices. Consumers need to be aware to increasingly prefer to purchase green products so that Companies adopting a 'green' policy can reduce environmental impact, provide positive social impact, and generate profits.

7. Challenges and Complexities of Green Marketing

- 1) **Consumer Skepticism:** One of the main challenges in green marketing is consumer skepticism. Consumers are increasingly skeptical of green claims made by companies, leading to a lack of trust in

green products and initiatives and making it challenging to gauge the impact of green marketing on consumer behavior. A study by Janice Fernandes, YouGov data (2022) revealed that 60% of global consumers are skeptical while another 28% are unsure about green claims made by brands.

- 2) **Greenwashing:** Another challenge is the practice of Greenwashing, where firms falsely advertise their products as environmentally friendly to appeal to eco-conscious consumers. This deceptive tactic can mislead customers and damage a company's reputation. Several fast fashion brands have been accused of greenwashing by promoting "sustainable" or "eco-friendly" collections while still contributing to significant environmental harm through their production practices and supply chains. (Blessersholt, 2021) In 2015 Volkswagen was found of having installed software in their diesel cars to manipulate emissions tests, leading consumers to believe their vehicles were more environmentally friendly than they actually were. This scandal highlighted how a reputable company engaged in deceptive practices to portray a false image of environmental responsibility (Jong & van der Linde, 2022).
- 3) **Higher Costs:** Implementing sustainable practices and producing eco-friendly products can often come with higher costs, especially for small businesses, posing a challenge to maintain profitability while going green (Purwandani & Michaud, 2021).
- 4) **Lack of Standardized Metrics:** The absence of standardized metrics for measuring sustainability and green practices makes it difficult to compare the effectiveness of green marketing strategies across industries and companies.
- 5) **Complexity of Environmental Impact Assessment:** Measuring the long-term environmental impact of green marketing strategies, such as carbon footprint reduction or resource conservation, requires complex calculations and data collection.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, green marketing has emerged as a crucial strategy for organizations to address the increasing environmental concerns and fulfill the growing demand for eco-friendly products and services. Green marketing has evolved through different phases, from Ecological and environmental to sustainable green marketing. Each phase has aimed at addressing and reducing specific problems of the environment while also considering the profitability and responsibility of the organization.

Consumers' awareness and concern for environmental issues accelerate the demand for green products and services. However, it is crucial to note that consumers' purchasing decisions are not solely based on environmental concerns but consider other product attributes and costs. Therefore, organizations need to find the right balance amongst profitability, responsibility to the environment, and meeting consumers' needs and wants.

Green marketing is not limited to advertising environmentally friendly products; it encompasses a range of activities, from product modification and process changes to packaging and promotion. Green marketing aims to satisfy customer needs and wants while minimizing the detrimental impact on the natural environment.

By implementing green marketing strategies, Firms will have a competitive advantage and contribute to their market performance, financial performance, and service quality. Resources, timing, strategy focus, top management support, and dedicated resource allocation play a crucial role by leveraging green policies for superior performance. The transition to a green economy requires collaboration between governments and the private sector and consumer awareness and preference for green products. Green marketing has also challenges in complexities in the form of Consumer skepticism, Green washing, difficulty in measurement etc.

Green marketing is thus a journey towards sustainability, aiming to protect and preserve the earth's resources and the environment while meeting the needs and wants of consumers. Achieving a greener and sustainable future requires a holistic approach and collaboration of all stakeholders.

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