

A STUDY ON CONSUMER PERCEPTION TOWARDS ECO FRIENDLY PRODUCTS IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of the study is to analyze the consumers' perception on various aspects of eco-friendly products and assess the factors influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products in Kanyakumari District. Multi-stage sampling method has been used in this research for collection of samples. Cluster sampling method was used for selecting the sample in the first stage. In this method, six taluks of Kanyakumari district has been selected viz., Thovalai, Agasthees waram, Kalkulam, Vilavan code, Tiruvattar, and Killiyur. In the next stage, the researcher found consumers who are using eco-friendly products through convenient sampling method. For the present study, the universe comprises of the consumers, who are utilizing eco-friendly products in Kanyakumari district. The sampling units were selected by covering the six taluks of Kanyakumari district. The size of sample was 150 consumers who are utilizing eco-friendly products. The study reveals that the consumer of eco-friendly product consume them for maintaining the good health which ranks first followed by the fresh and natural which ranks second and quality of the product which ranks third based on their opinions. These three reasons hold the top three ranks for the usage of the eco-friendly products in the study area based on the responses given by sample consumer.

KEY WORDS: Perception, Eco-friendly products, Preference and Quality

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades concern for the ecological issues has been growing due to increased media exposure, raising awareness of environmental pollutions, the impact of major industry disasters and the expanding numbers of environmental activist groups. The increased environmental concern in the recent decades is mainly due to the factors like depletion in natural resources, global warming, depletion of ozone layer, degradation of land, acid rain, etc., and these make the consumers to think about their own survival which seems to be in danger if the environment is not properly taken care of. Today, the term "ecofriendly" is a widespread and most appealing word within general population across the world. Both the business organizations and the consumers are facing the challenges of preserving the natural resources of the planet along with its environment. Especially the consumers are taking environmental concern seriously and are making steps to establish ecological balance by practicing green consumption behavior.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As the concern and care for environment is increasing day-by-day, the most of the consumers now would give priority to buy and use eco-friendly products. Environmental awareness and concern for environment are changing the growing needs/preferences and the consumption pattern of consumers. The consumers are now aware of the fact that their buying behavior could actually bring a significant impact not only on their wellbeing but also on the environment protection. Therefore, environmental concern is greatly influencing the consumers' decision making and purchasing behavior towards the selection and purchase of required products. As a result, the business organizations are now in a position to incorporate the environmental-friendly strategies in the design and development of product, process of operation and the marketing activities of the products.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The success or failure of any business organization mostly depends upon the buying behavior of the consumers and the same is not only important for the manufacturers of the products but also the intermediaries or middlemen who carry the products from the manufacturers to the final consumers. Therefore, understanding the behavior of consumers helps to identify the weak points of the marketing aspects of the business which also indicates the favorable and positive aspects of the business towards its consumers. The purchasing behavior of consumers influence their buying decision whether to buy the eco-friendly product or not.

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Based on their purchasing decision and their purchasing and consumption pattern, a business organization can decide on the type of product to be manufactured, sustaining its production and selling the same to the consumers. This also helps the marketing personnel to take important decisions relating to formulating the suitable marketing strategies in future and also useful to identify the type of promotional offers or marketing campaigns to be conducted to increase their sales. The knowledge and understanding about the consumers' buying behaviour towards eco-friendly products are also useful to an organization to re-establish their policies and strategies relating to production and marketing of eco-friendly products.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To analyze the consumers' perception on various aspects of Eco-friendly Products in Kanyakumari District
2. To assess the factors influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products in Kanyakumari District

METHODOLOGY

Multi-stage sampling method has been used in this research for collection of samples. Cluster sampling method was used for selecting the sample in the first stage. In this method, six taluks of Kanyakumari district has been selected viz., Thovalai, Agastheeswaram, Kalkulam and Vilavancode, Tiruvattar, Killiyur. In the next stage, the researcher found consumers who are using eco-friendly products through convenient sampling method. For the present study, the universe comprises of the consumers, who are utilizing eco-friendly products in Kanyakumari district. The sampling units were selected by covering the six taluks of Kanyakumari district. The size of sample was 150 consumers who are utilizing eco-friendly products.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1

Awareness towards eco-friendly products

Sl. No	Awareness towards eco-friendly products	Mean Score	SD	Rank
1.	The benefits of eco-friendly products for health	3.9762	1.44	I
2.	The role of eco-friendly products in conservation of energy	3.7524	1.41	III
3.	The point of purchase of eco-friendly products	3.8540	1.38	II
4.	Various brands offering eco-friendly products	3.4508	1.40	IV

Source: Computed data

Table 1 highlights the mean and standard deviation of the sample consumer with regard to awareness towards eco-friendly products. The benefits of eco-friendly products for health is the important awareness towards eco-friendly products and occupies the first rank with the mean score of 3.9762, the point of purchase of eco-friendly products is the next important awareness towards eco-friendly products occupies the second rank with the mean score of 3.8540, the role of eco-friendly products in conservation of energy is another important awareness towards eco-friendly products and occupies third rank with the mean score of 3.7524 and various brands offering eco-friendly products is the last important awareness towards eco-friendly products and occupies the last rank with the mean score of 3.4508.

Association between educational qualification of the sample consumer and Factors influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products

To find out the association between educational qualification of the sample consumer and factors influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products, analysis has been made with the following null hypothesis.

Null Hypothesis (H_0) : "There is no significant association between the educational qualification of the sample consumer and factors influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products".

To test the above null hypothesis, one way ANOVA test has been used and the result is presented in the following table.

Table 2

One Way ANOVA for Factors influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products based on Educational qualification of Consumer

Factors	Educational Qualification	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Food Safety	Between Groups	226.522	4	56.631	2.757	.027
	Within Groups	12836.349	145	20.538		
	Total	13062.871	149			
Environmental Knowledge	Between Groups	169.302	4	42.325	1.497	.201
	Within Groups	17670.039	145	28.272		
	Total	17839.341	149			
Health Concern	Between Groups	23.625	4	5.906	.824	.510
	Within Groups	4480.064	145	7.168		
	Total	4503.689	149			
Price Factor	Between Groups	53.415	4	13.354	1.031	.390
	Within Groups	8066.258	145	12.947		
	Total	8119.674	149			

Source: Computed Data

The ANOVA test shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between educational qualification of the consumer and food safety factor influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products. Therefore, **H₀ is rejected** (p-value $0.027 < 0.05$) at 5% level of significance. That is the sample consumer differ significantly in the food safety factor influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products when they are classified based on their educational qualification. Hence it is inferred that the food safety factor influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products is differ among the different educational qualification of the consumer in the study area. It is suggested that the eco-friendly products shops may concentrate on the food safety factor while providing the eco-friendly products to the different educational qualification of the consumer.

The ANOVA test further highlights that there is no statistically significant relationship between educational qualification of the consumer and environmental knowledge factor influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products. Therefore, **H₀ is accepted** (p-value $0.201 > 0.05$) at 5% level of significance. Further it is found that the environmental knowledge factor influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products is not varied among different educational qualifications of the consumer.

The ANOVA test further shows that there is no statistically significant relationship between educational qualification of the consumer and health concern factor influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products. Therefore, **H₀ is accepted** (p-value $0.510 > 0.05$) at 5% level of significance. Further it is found that the health concern factor influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products is not varied among different educational qualification of the consumer.

The ANOVA test further highlights that there is no statistically significant relationship between educational qualification of the consumer and price factor influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products. Therefore, **H₀ is accepted** (p-value $0.276 > 0.05$) at 5% level of significance. Further it is found that the price factor influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products is not varied among different educational qualification of the consumer.

Association between marital status of the sample consumer and Factors influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products

To find out the association between marital status of the sample consumer and factors influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products, analysis has been made with the following null hypothesis.

Null Hypothesis (H₀) : “There is no significant association between the marital status of the sample consumer and factors influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products”.

To test the above null hypothesis, ‘t’ test has been used and the result is presented in the following table.

Table 3

‘t’ test for Factors influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products based on Marital Status of Consumer

Factors	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances			t-test for Equality of Means	
		F	Sig.	t	p Value
Food Safety	Equal variances assumed	.860	.354	1.224	.222
	Equal variances not assumed			1.209	.227
Environmental Knowledge	Equal variances assumed	1.000	.318	2.542	.011
	Equal variances not assumed			2.567	.011
Health Concern	Equal variances assumed	.246	.620	.709	.479
	Equal variances not assumed			.728	.467
Price Factor	Equal variances assumed	.003	.960	.910	.363
	Equal variances not assumed			.967	.334

Source: Computed data

The ‘t’ test shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between marital status of the consumer and environmental knowledge factor influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products. Therefore, **H₀ is rejected** (p-value 0.011 < 0.05) at 5% level of significance. That is the sample consumer differ significantly in the environmental knowledge factor influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products when they are classified based on their marital status. Hence it is inferred that the environmental knowledge factor influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products is differ among the different marital status of the consumer in the study area. It is suggested that the eco-friendly products shops may concentrate on the environmental knowledge factor while providing the eco-friendly products to the different marital status of the consumer.

The ‘t’ test further shows that there is no statistically significant relationship between marital status of the consumer and food safety factor influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products. Therefore, **H₀ is accepted** (p-value 0.222 > 0.05) at 5% level of significance. Further it is found that the food safety factor influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products is not varied among different marital status of the consumer.

The ‘t’ test further highlights that there is no statistically significant relationship between marital status of the consumer and health concern factor influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products. Therefore, **H₀ is accepted** (p-value 0.479 > 0.05) at 5% level of significance. Further it is found that the health concern factor influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products is not varied among different marital status of the consumer.

The ‘t’ test further highlights that there is no statistically significant relationship between marital status of the consumer and price factor influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products. Therefore, **H₀ is accepted** (p-value 0.363 > 0.05) at 5% level of significance. Further it is found that the price factor influencing preference to purchase eco-friendly products is not varied among different marital status of the consumer.

Reasons for selecting the eco-friendly products

Consumer have selected the eco-friendly products for several reasons namely maintain good health, high safety, good taste, quality of the product, fresh and natural, medicinal value, support local or small farmers and environmental concern. In order to find out the reasons for selecting the eco-friendly products among sample consumer, Garret ranking analysis was made. The results of Garret ranking analysis regarding reasons for selecting the eco-friendly products is presented in the Table 4.

Table 4

Reasons for selecting the Eco-friendly products

Sl. No	Reasons	Total Score	Average Score	Rank
1.	Maintain good health	9384	62.56	I
2.	High safety	6183	41.22	VII
3.	Good taste	5384	35.89	VIII
4.	Quality of the product	8441	56.27	III
5.	Fresh and natural	8945	59.63	II
6.	Medicinal value	7992	53.28	IV
7.	Support local or Small farmers	6807	45.38	VI
8.	Environmental concern	7383	49.22	V

Source: Primary data

As per the ranking regarding the reasons for selecting the eco-friendly products, maintain good health has been selected as first rank with a mean score of (62.56) which is followed by fresh and natural has been selected as second rank with a mean score of (59.63), quality of the product has been selected as third rank with a mean score of (56.27), medicinal value has been selected as fourth rank with a mean score of (53.28), environmental concern has been selected as fifth rank with a mean score of (49.22), support local or Small farmers has been selected as sixth rank with a mean score of (45.38), high safety has been selected as seventh rank with a mean score of (41.22) and good taste has been selected as last rank with a mean score of (35.89).

The above table explains the various ranks obtained for the several reasons for eco-friendly products are consumed. The ranking analysis reveals that the consumer of eco-friendly product consume them for maintaining the good health which ranks first followed by the fresh and natural which ranks second and quality of the product which ranks third based on their opinions. These three reasons hold the top three ranks for the usage of the eco-friendly products in the study area based on the responses given by sample consumer.

SUGGESTIONS

1. It is suggested that the manufacturers and marketers of eco-friendly products should avoid green washing, or making environmental claims that are false, due to regulations, or promote a socially responsible practice while engaging in other harmful practices.
2. It is also suggested that manufacturers and marketers of eco-friendly products can increase the consumers' perception and concern by way of promotional offers and explaining the benefits of using eco-friendly products and the impact of using the same on the environmental protection.
3. The study recommends the government and manufacturers/marketers to study the international environment-related practices relating to production and marketing of eco-friendly products and also make steps to incorporate those practices periodically.
4. It is suggested that the "Trust" on the eco-friendly products should be improved and the fixing of the "Price" for the eco-friendly products should also be reasonable and affordable for consumers.
5. It is suggested that the eco-friendly products shops may concentrate on the food safety factor while providing the eco-friendly products to the different educational qualification of the consumer.
6. It is suggested that the eco-friendly products shops may concentrate on the environmental knowledge factor while providing the eco-friendly products to the different marital status of the consumer.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that the consumer of eco-friendly product consume them for maintaining the good health which ranks first followed by the fresh and natural which ranks second and quality of the product which ranks third based on their opinions. These three reasons hold the top three ranks for the usage of the eco-friendly products in the study area based on the responses given by sample consumer. The study signifies that the consumers who perceive well relating to various aspects of eco-friendly products would have improved environmental concern, favorable purchase behavior and contribute more towards the environment protection. In other words, the more positive perception on the various aspects of eco-friendly products, the more environmental concern and favorable environmental buying behavior towards eco-friendly products. This study would immensely be useful to the manufacturers, marketers, policymakers, Government, etc. who formulate and implement policies and strategies relating to eco-friendliness of the products. The results of this

study will permit the management of business organizations who produce and sell the eco-friendly products to better understand the perception of consumers about the eco-friendliness of their products.

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