

PERCEPTION OF SELLERS OF ECO-FRIENDLY PRODUCTS – AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Global warming, pollution, water crisis and food shortage, increased frequency of disasters are all indications that humans have mishandled nature. Business and consumers have to act responsible and there is a strong need to mitigate and work towards stabilization of the natural environment. Consumers are also concerned about the environmental impact of products they buy. The organizations that often form the link between the businesses and the consumers are the retailers. The role of retailers is pivotal as they are the intermediaries between the producer and consumer. Retailers could contribute towards climate change, waste management and people and community by analyzing their business processes and addressing these issues. In this view the study has been undertaken to analyse the sellers' perception in marketing of eco-friendly products in Coimbatore. Purposive sampling technique has been used and primary data have been collected from 100 retailers through questionnaire. Percentage analysis, ANOVA, Kendall's coefficient of concordance have been used to analyse the data. The findings of the study revealed that the retailers have opined that majority of the consumers specifically identify eco-friendly products and show their interest to pay more for eco-friendly products. They also stated that there is lack of awareness among the consumers about eco-friendly products available in market and high investment required for business is the most common problem they face.

Keywords: Environmental issues, Retailers, Business processes, Challenges

INTRODUCTION:

The retail industry in India has been emerging as one of the largest sector and booming the country's economy. Retail marketing deals with identifying and meeting human and social needs, with the task of creating promotion and delivering goods and services to retail consumers. The Indian retail sector is a combination of structured and unstructured markets that contains different consumer products. It comprises of supermarkets, departmental stores, specialty stores and general shops. In the modern era of globalization, it has become a challenge to keep the manufacturers as well as consumers in touch to keep our natural environment safe, which has been the biggest need of the time to develop the practices for sustainability in the retail sector. The retail sector has undoubtedly a key role to play in sustainable production and consumption activities and also it play an important role by providing products with a lower environmental impact, and promoting them to consumers. The life cycle of consumer products enables influence on both production (greening the supply chain) and consumption (promotion of green products). Green products or environmentally friendly products that do not pollute the environment, do not waste resources and recyclable / reusable. It helps to maintain and improve the natural environment by saving energy or resources and reducing the use of toxic substances thereby controlling pollution. Hence, it is important to study the retailers' perception in marketing of eco-friendly products.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- To know the business profile of the retailers who sell eco-friendly products and the factors that influenced them to sell eco-friendly products
- To analyse the retailers opinion about consumers buying attitude of eco-friendly products
- To understand the problems faced by the retailers in selling eco-friendly products

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

With the objective to assess the awareness of government subsidy for solar water heaters among the people in Mumbai (India), Anupamaa S Chavan and Madhav N Welling (2013) have made a study through a sample of 120 consumers. The results of the study show that the majority of the respondents are not aware about subsidies/incentives for solar products. Product availability, after sale service and credit facility are the factors which influence purchasing solar water heater. It has been recommended that the manufacturers should spread awareness regarding the availability of government subsidy/incentives and arrange credit facilities for the buyers to promote the sales and also make the arrangements for after sales services.

To identify consumers' and retailers' efforts to promote less polluting electronic products, Mette Lise Jenser and Stig Yding Sorensen (2003)¹ have made an attempt by collecting primary data from 17 consumers and 10 suppliers who were interviewed for the study. The findings of the study have revealed that consumers do not demand less hazardous electronic products while purchasing in the shop. The study has also registered that the consumers and retailers did not take any initiative in promoting the sale of less environmentally hazardous products. It has also been suggested that marketers and manufacturers should educate the consumers and provide green advertisements to promote the products.

In order to discover the market awareness and consumers perception towards eco-friendly fast moving consumer goods, Nagaraju & Thejaswini (2014)⁵⁰ have done an analysis. Convenient sampling technique has been used to collect the data from 60 respondents. The findings of the study disclosed that majority of the respondents are aware of eco-friendly fast moving consumer goods and they agreed it will lead to sustainable future. It has also been observed that respondents consider eco-labels and green logos in identifying eco-friendly fast moving consumer goods. The study has concluded that majority of the respondents are satisfied with the quality of the eco-friendly FMCG products when compared with conventional products. It has been suggested that the government, environmental communities and social groups have joined

together to create awareness among the public about environmental issues and the benefits of eco-friendly products.

Surajit Dey, Sameena Rafat and Alam Sageer (2012)² have undertaken a study on “Retailers and Customers: Problems and Perspectives”, with the objectives to evaluate the problems and its causes to the retailers in retail business and to identify the problems faced by the customers in retail marketing. Interview schedule method has been applied to collect the data from a sample of 100 respondents. The statistical tools like percentage analysis, weighted ranking analysis, garrett’s ranking analysis, likert’s scaling technique and chi-square analysis have been used to analyse the data. Based on the findings it has been observed that majority of the retailers faced the problems in bad debts, heavy competition, limited financial resources and poor market condition. In addition, retailers should try to follow some ethics in price fixation and avoid the discrimination in fixing price failure of which would dampen their business growth in a long run.

METHODOLOGY:

The study is based on primary data collected from 100 retailers dealing in eco-friendly products through a structured questionnaire. Purposive sampling technique has been used and statistical tools like Percentage analysis, ANOVA and Kendall’s co-efficient of concordance have been applied to analyze the data and draw interpretation.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

Business Profile of Retailers:

Information about the retailers’ business profile namely, nature of ownership, type of retail shop, nature of products sold, period of trading eco-friendly products and monthly turnover of the shop have been shown in the table 1.

Table 1: Business Information of retailers

		No. of respondents	Per cent
Age	20-30 yrs	24	24.0
	31-40 yrs	41	41.0
	41-50 yrs	30	30.0
	Above 50 yrs	5	5.0
Nature of ownership	Sole proprietorship	74	74.0
	Partnership	26	26.0
Type of retail shop	Simple retail shop	57	57.0
	Departmental stores	12	12.0
	Speciality shop	31	31.0
Nature of products sold	Only green products	53	53.0
	Both green and other products	47	47.0
Period of trading in green products	Less than 1 yr	13	13.0
	1 -3 yrs	49	49.0
	4-5 yrs	24	24.0
	Above 5 yrs	14	14.0
Monthly turnover	Less than Rs.50000	32	32.0
	Rs.50001- Rs.100000	18	18.0
	Rs.1,00,000 – 1,50,000	17	17.0
	Above Rs.1,50,000	33	33.0
Total		100	100.0

Source: Computed

It has been noted from the above table that 41 per cent of the retailers belong to the age group of 31- 40 years, 30 per cent of them are in the age group of 41 – 50 years, 24 per cent of the respondents have been 20 – 30 years of age and 5 per cent of them are above 50 years. It is inferred that most of the retailers are in the age group of 31 – 40 years.

74 per cent of the respondents are sole traders and 26 per cent of them run their business on partnership basis. It is ascertained that majority of the respondents are the sole owners of their business.

57 per cent of the respondents have simple retail shops, 31 per cent of them have it in the form of speciality shops and 12 per cent of them have eco-friendly products in their departmental stores. Hence, majority of the respondents have simple retail shops.

53 per cent of the respondents sell only green products in their shop and 47 per cent of them deals with both green and other products. It is noted that majority of the retailers sell only green products in their retail shop.

49 per cent of the retailers have been running their business from 1 – 3 years, 24 per cent of them have been carrying out their business for 4 – 5 years, 14 per cent of the retailers have been carrying on their business for more than 5 years and 13 per cent of them have been doing the business for less than 1 year.

33 per cent of the retailers have stated that their shop's monthly turnover of their shop has been above Rs.1,50,000, 32 per cent of them have stated that their monthly turnover has been less than Rs.50,000, 18 per cent of the respondents' monthly turnover has been between Rs.50,000 – 1,00,000 and 17 per cent of them have stated that their monthly turnover have been between Rs.1,00,000 – 1,50,000. It is ascertained that majority of the retailers' monthly turnover has been above Rs. 1,50,000.

TYPE OF ECO-FRIENDLY PRODUCTS SOLD IN RETAIL SHOP:

Following table shows the type of eco-friendly products sold by the retailers in their shop.

Table 2: Type of eco-friendly products sold in their retail shop

Types of Green products	No. of Respondents	Per cent
Solar Products	27	27.0
Durables	15	15.0
Non-durables	33	33.0
Organic	14	14.0
Stationery	11	11.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Computed

It is noted from above table that 33 per cent of the respondents have sell non-durables viz., beauty, health and personal care products, 27 per cent of them sell solar products in their shop, 15 per cent of the respondents' sell durables viz., energy saving home appliances, 14 per cent of them sell organic products and 11 per cent of the respondents sell stationery products. Hence, it is seen that most of the retailers have sell non-durables because of demand for the same.

Factors That Influenced the Retailer to Sell Eco-friendly Products:

Descriptive statistics namely mean and standard deviation has been applied to find out the factors that influenced the retailers to choose select green products for sale in their shop.

Table 3: Factors which influenced the retailers to include green products in business

Factors	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S.D
Own interest	100	3	5	4.75	.457
To earn more profit	100	2	5	4.40	.752
To provide varieties	100	2	5	4.32	.802
Protect the environment	100	2	5	4.59	.587
To overcome competition	100	1	5	4.28	.888
Reduce health issues and safety	100	3	5	4.54	.610
Retain/satisfy the consumers	100	2	5	4.54	.610
Better business opportunity	100	1	5	4.25	.868
High demand	100	1	5	4.24	.854
Good product quality	100	3	5	4.50	.577

Source: Computed

On a five point scale the factors that influenced the retailers to include green products in their business have been assigned ratings by the respondents ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 represents strongly disagree, 2 represents disagree, 3 represents neutral, 4 represents agree and 5 represents strongly agree.

From the mean ratings computed based upon the response of the retailers it is evident that most of the retailers have strongly agreed that because of ‘own interest’ (mean 4.75) only they have included eco-friendly products for sale in their business, followed by ‘protect the environment’ (mean 4.59), ‘reduce health issues and safety’ (mean 4.54), ‘retain /satisfy the consumers’ (mean 4.54) and ‘good product quality’ (mean 4.50). Most of the retailers have agreed that they include eco-friendly products in business ‘to earn more profit’ (mean 4.40), followed by ‘to provide varieties’ (mean 4.32), ‘to overcome the competition’ (mean 4.28), ‘better business opportunity’ (mean 4.25) and ‘high demand’ (mean 4.24).

To know whether there has been significant variation among the respondents in the ‘factors that influenced them to include eco-friendly products in their business’, ANOVA has been applied and tested. The influence score has been identified by adding the ratings given by the retailers for the factors influenced them to sell green products.

H0: “There has been no significant difference in the scores of the factors that influenced the retailers to include green products in their business, when they have been classified based upon the age, type of retail shop, period of trading in green products and monthly turnover’.

The null hypothesis has been tested for each of the business related factors separately and is presented in the following table.

Table 4: Influence score for green products Vs. Business profile

		Influence score for green products			Table Value	F	Sig.
		Mean	S.D	No.			
Age	20-30 yrs	45.25	4.37	24	2.699	1.427	Ns
	31-40 yrs	44.73	3.61	41			
	41-50 yrs	43.30	3.39	30			
	Above 50 yrs	44.40	1.82	5			
Type of retail shop	Simple retail shop	43.96	4.11	57	3.090	.970	Ns
	Departmental stores	44.83	2.66	12			
	Speciality shop	45.06	3.23	31			
Period of trading in green	Less than 1 yr	43.98	3.69	13	2.699	1.235	Ns
	1 -3 yrs	46.15	3.97	49			
	4-5 yrs	44.54	3.16	24			

		Influence score for green products			Table Value	F	Sig.
		Mean	S.D	No.			
products	Above 5 yrs	44.07	3.52	14	2.699	1.694	Ns
	Less than Rs.50000	43.78	3.83	32			
Monthly turnover	Rs.50001- Rs.100000	42.88	3.75	18			
	Rs.1,00,000 – 1,50,000	44.94	3.95	17			
	Above Rs.1,50,000	45.03	3.31	33			
Total		44.41	3.71	100			

Source: Computed NS – Not significant

The F-ratio value has proved that there has been no significant difference in the factors that influence the respondents to include green products in their business, when they have been classified based on age. Hence, the null hypothesis has been accepted.

A high mean score of 45.06 have been found for the respondents who are running speciality shops. A low mean score of 43.96 have been identified for the respondents who are running simple retail shop. With the F-ratio value it has been noted that there is no significant difference in the factors that influence the respondents to include green products in their business, when they have been classified based on type of retail shop. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Influence score is found to be low for the retailers those who are trading in eco-friendly products for the period of less than 1 year (mean score 43.98) and a high mean score of 46.15 has been found for the respondents those who are trading in green products for the period of 1–3 years. With the F-ratio value it has been concluded that there is no significant difference in the factors that influence the respondents to include green products in their business, when they have been classified based on period of trading in green products. Thus, the null hypothesis has been accepted with respect to the factor ‘period of trading in green products’.

The respondents whose monthly turnover of the shop is above Rs.1,50,000 have a high mean score of 45.03 and a low mean score of 42.88 is found for the respondents’ whose monthly turnover ranges between Rs.50,001 – Rs.1,00,000. The F-ratio value has revealed that there is no significant difference in the factors influenced the respondents to include green products in their business, when they have been classified based on monthly turnover of the shop, thereby, the null hypothesis has been accepted.

The overall results of ANOVA has shown that the factors that influenced the retailers to include eco-friendly products in their business have not varied significantly, when they have been classified based upon the age, type of retail shop, period of trading in green products and monthly turnover. Hence, the null hypothesis has been accepted.

To study the variations in the factors influenced the retailers to include green products in their business, when the respondents have been categorised into two groups, t-Test has been applied. The factors influenced the respondents ‘to include green products for sale’ have been averaged and the mean scores have been used as dependent variable for t-Test and the independent variables considered has been the ‘nature of ownership and nature of products sold’.

H0: “There has been no significant difference in the influence scores of the retailers when they have been classified based upon ‘nature of ownership and nature of products sold’.

Table 5: Influence score Vs. Business variables

		Influence score			Table Value	T	Sig.
		Mean	S.D	No.			
Nature of ownership	Sole proprietorship	44.31	3.85	74	1.984	0.449	Ns
	Partnership	44.69	3.32	26			
Nature of products sold	Only green products	44.34	4.03	53	1.984	0.200	Ns
	Both green and other products	44.49	3.35	47			
	Total		44.41	3.71			

Source: Computed NS – Not Significant

It has been clear that the overall opinion of the respondents have not varied much when they have been classified based upon ‘nature of ownership’ and ‘nature of products sold’. The t-Test value confirms that there has been no significant difference in the influence scores when they have been classified based on ‘nature of ownership’ and ‘nature of products sold’. Hence, the null hypothesis has been accepted.

Retailers Opinion about Consumers Buying Attitude of Eco-friendly Products:

Consumers’ preference and buying behaviour of the green products has been a major deciding factor that provokes the retailers to deal with the eco-friendly products. Hence, it is mandatory to identify the consumers’ preference and buying behaviour to make sure that the best has been delivered to them.

Identification of green products by the consumers:

Table 6 represents whether the consumers specifically identify the eco-friendly products while making the purchase.

Table 6: Identification of green products by the consumers

Identification of green products	No. of Respondents	Per cent
Yes	95	95.0
No	5	5.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Computed

It is inferred from the table 6 that majority (95 per cent) of the retailers have mentioned that their consumers specifically identify eco-friendly products while purchasing and 5 per cent of them have mentioned that consumers have not been able to identify eco-friendly products specifically. Hence, majority of the respondents have mentioned that their consumers specifically identify green products.

Factors that help the consumers to identify green products:

The retailers have been asked to state their opinion towards the factors help their consumers to identify eco-friendly products, has been analysed and presented.

Table 7: Factors that help the consumers to identify eco-friendly products (Multiple Response)

Factors	No. of Respondents	Per cent
Green Products Certifications	46	52.3
Labels/Logos	65	73.9
Green seal	21	23.9
Written instructions in the pack	46	52.3
Special section for green products	31	35.2
Reputation/brand	24	27.3

Source: Computed

From the table 7 it is inferred that 73.9 per cent of the respondents have said that their consumers have been identifying green products by its specific ‘labels and logos’, 52.3 per cent of them opined that their consumers identify eco-friendly products by ‘green products certifications’ and ‘written instructions in the pack’. 35.2 per cent of them have stated that their consumers identify the eco-friendly products through ‘special section’, 27.3 per cent of their consumers identify the products through ‘reputation or brand’ and 23.9 per cent of the respondents have said that their

consumers identify the eco-friendly products through ‘green seal’. Hence, most of the retailers have stated that their consumers identify eco-friendly products by its specific ‘labels and logos’.

Consumers’ willingness to pay more for eco-friendly products:

The following table depicts the retailers’ opinion about consumers’ willingness to pay more for eco-friendly products have been analysed and presented.

Table 8: Consumers’ willingness to pay more for eco-friendly products

Consumers’ willingness to pay more for eco-friendly products	No. of Respondents	Per cent
Yes	89	89.0
No	11	11.0
Total	100	100.0

Source: Computed

It is inferred from the table 8 that majority (89 per cent) of the retailers have agreed that consumers are willing to pay more for green products whereas, 11 per cent of them have opined that their consumers are not willing to pay more for eco-friendly products. Hence, majority of the retailers have agreed that consumers are willing to pay more for eco-friendly products.

The following table indicates the retailers’ opinion about consumers’ willingness to pay more for the selected eco-friendly products.

Table 9: Consumers’ willingness to pay more for eco-friendly products (Multiple Response)

Reasons	No. of Respondents	Per cent
Health and safety consciousness	51	57.3
Environmental protection	39	43.8
Energy efficient	55	61.8
Sustainability	75	84.3
Quality and reliability	42	47.2

Source: Computed

Out of the 89 retailers have said that their consumers are willing to pay more for eco-friendly products, 84.3 per cent of the retailers have stated that ‘sustainability’ of eco-friendly products is the significant reason to pay more, 61.8 per cent of them opined that their consumers are ready to spend more for green products because of ‘energy efficient’ feature, 57.3 per cent of them said ‘health and safety consciousness’ attitude of consumers is the reason to pay more for selected green products, eco-friendly products are good in ‘quality and reliability’ is the reason to pay more by consumers said by 47.2 per cent of retailers and 43.8 per cent of the retailers opined that the consumers are ready to pay extra for ‘environment protection’. Hence, it is concluded that majority of the retailers have said that sustainability of the eco-friendly products is the significant reason to pay more.

The following table shows the retailers opinion about the reasons owing to which, consumers are not willing to pay more for green products:

Table 10: Consumers’ unwillingness to pay more for eco-friendly products (Multiple Response)

Reasons	No. of Respondents	Per cent
Cannot see the benefit	3	27.3
Product cost is high	8	72.7
Environmental issues is a trick	4	36.4
Similar products are available at low cost	4	36.4

Source: Computed

Out of the 11 retailers’ opined about the consumers who are not willing to pay more for green products, 72.7 per cent of the retailers said that consumers are not willing to pay more for eco-friendly products because they feel ‘cost is high’, 36.4 per cent of them said consumers have opined that ‘environmental issues is a trick’ and ‘similar products are available at low cost’ and 27.3 per cent of the retailers said consumers are not interested that they ‘cannot see the benefit’ of eco-friendly products. Therefore, most of the retailers said consumers are not willing to pay more for eco-friendly product because they feel cost is high.

Problems Faced By the Retailers in Selling Green Products:

Retailers have been requested to rank their problems in selling green products, thereby, they have given the rank 1 to the major problem and 6 to the least problem they have faced. The mean value of the ranks have been found and shown in the following table.

Table 11: Problems faced by the retailers in selling green products

S. No	Factors	Mean Rank	Final Rank
1	Lack of awareness among consumers	3.37	III
2	Requires high promotional cost / high capital investment	3.29	II
3	Tough competition	3.86	V
4	High cost of product	2.32	I
5	Less varieties	4.38	VI
6	Not easily available /	3.78	IV

Source: Computed

From the above mean rank table, it has been confirmed that majority of the retailers have opined that ‘lack of awareness among consumers’ about eco-friendly products is the major problem and hence it have been ranked by the retailers as number one (mean rank 2.32), followed by ‘requires high promotional cost / capital investment’ (mean rank 3.29), next followed by ‘high cost of product’ required for selling green products thus it have been ranked as three (mean rank 3.37), ‘not easily available’ have been given fourth rank (mean rank 3.78), fifth rank have been assigned to ‘tough competition’ (mean rank 3.86) and sixth rank have been assigned to ‘less varieties’ in green products. Kendall’s coefficient of concordance (W) has been used to find the extent of similarity among the respondents in the order of assigning the ranks to the problems faced by them in selling green products listed in the above table 11. Kendall’s (W) ranges between 0 and 1, higher the volume of W, more will be the similarity among the respondents.

Table 11a: Test Statistics – Kendall’s Coefficient of Concordance

Kendall’s W	0.139
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Source: Computed

From the table 11 a, it has been noted that the ‘W’ 0.139 shows that there exists low level of similarity among the respondents in assigning ranks to the problems faced by the respondents in selling green products that vary based upon their own experience in selling green products.

CONCLUSION:

The analytical study on “Perception of Sellers of Eco-friendly Products – An Analytical Study” in Coimbatore helped in identifying the retailers’ business profile, their opinion about consumers buying attitude of eco-friendly products and the challenges faced by them in promoting eco-friendly products. It has been acknowledged that majority of the retailers have said because of own interest only they include eco-friendly products in their business. The study has also acknowledged that consumers are willing to buy eco-friendly products because of the sustainability feature of the green products and also they have stated that the most significant

problem they have faced as lack of awareness among the consumers about the eco-friendly products and huge capital is required for investment. To overcome these challenges the marketers provide advertisements about the eco-friendly products to create awareness among the public and also government should provide subsidy or loan facilities to the sellers.

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