

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE, ECONOMICS & MANAGEMENT

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**CONTENTS**

Sr. No.	TITLE & NAME OF THE AUTHOR (S)	Page No.
1.	THE DEVELOPMENT OF THAI HERBAL TRADITIONAL RECIPES FOR TREATMENT IN COMMUNITIES <i>DR. PATTHIRA PHON-NGAM</i>	1
2.	DO FINANCIAL VARIABLES INFLUENCE MARKET PRICE OF BANK SHARES IN BANGLADESH: A CASE STUDY ON NATIONAL BANK LTD. AND ISLAMI BANK BANGLADESH LTD. <i>MOHAMMAD ARIFUL ISLAM &amp; M. MUZAHIDUL ISLAM</i>	5
3.	MEASURING STUDENTS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS UNIVERSITY SELECTION: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION ON MALAYSIAN POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS <i>ABDULLAH AL MAMUN SARWAR, AHASANUL HAQUE &amp; AHMAD ZAKI HJ ISMAIL</i>	13
4.	USAGE OF RUBRICS FOR EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM EVALUATION <i>DR. MD. ABBAS ALI &amp; DR. T. VENKAT RAM RAJ</i>	21
5.	THE IMPACT OF WORK RELATED ATTITUDES ON TASK AND CONTEXTUAL PERFORMANCE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE BANKS IN SRI LANKA <i>U.W.M.R. SAMPATH KAPPAGODA</i>	23
6.	CALL CENTRE OUTSOURCING PRACTICES ADOPTED BY MOBILE PHONE COMPANIES IN KENYA <i>LEWIS KINYUA KATHUNI &amp; NEBAT GALO MUGENDA</i>	27
7.	EXERCISE OF CADRE COORDINATION BY WORKMEN BY VIRTUE OF PROPER TRAINING AT OPEN CAST MINES AT NORTHERN COALFIELDS LIMITED, SINGRAULI (MADHYA PRADESH) <i>ABHINAV KUMAR SHRIVASTAVA &amp; DR. N. C. PAHARIYA</i>	35
8.	RURAL HEALTH- AN ENGINE FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT <i>SHEETAL SHARMA &amp; DR. PAVNESH KUMAR</i>	40
9.	ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOR OF MEMBERS OF SELF HELP GROUPS AND ITS IMPACT ON GROUP PERFORMANCE <i>C.MURALIDHARAN, R.VENKATRAM &amp; K.MANI</i>	45
10.	A COMPARATIVE STUDY TO ANALYSE THE REQUIREMENT OF AN EFFECTIVE AND VALUE-BASED HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM WITH REFERENCE TO INDIA <i>DR. RAMESH KUMAR</i>	49
11.	INEQUALITY AMONG STATES OF INDIA: HUMAN DEVELOPMENT ASPECT <i>SUNEEL KUMAR</i>	54
12.	A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF HOUSING SHORTAGE IN INDIA <i>DR. MOOL CHAND &amp; DR. RAJ PAL SINGH</i>	61
13.	BANK'S EMPLOYEES PERCEPTION ON QUALITY OF WORK LIFE AND ITS RELATION WITH JOB SATISFACTION IN MALWA REGION OF PUNJAB <i>DR. GIRISH TANEJA &amp; LALITA KUMARI</i>	70
14.	STUDY OF CONSUMPTION PATTERN OF COSMETIC PRODUCTS AMONG YOUNG MALES IN DELHI <i>ABDULLAH BIN JUNAID &amp; DR. RESHMA NASREEN</i>	77
15.	SELF HELP GROUP IN SOCIO ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION WITH SPECIAL REGERENCE TO COIMBATORE <i>DR. SARAVANAKUMAR &amp; S. MAMTA</i>	87
16.	INDUSTRIAL EXPANSION AND GLOBAL WARMING <i>DR. MANZOOR A SHAH</i>	94
17.	GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS II: IMPLICATION ON INDIA (BOON OR BANE??) <i>DR. ANUPRIYA PANDEY</i>	97
18.	FACTORS THAT ENCOURAGE IMPULSE PURCHASE & IMPACT OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING ON THE PURCHASE DECISION OF WOMEN FOR BEAUTY PRODUCTS IN GUJARAT <i>MITAL THAKOR &amp; SANDIP G PRAJAPATI</i>	101
19.	STUDY GROUPS, GROUPING CRITERIA AND THE SYNERGY IN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM: A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AMONG FDP PARTICIPANTS <i>SIMON JACOB C</i>	105
20.	INCOME GENERATION AND EMPOWERMENT OF DALIT WOMEN IN LUCKNOW DISTRICT <i>DR. KAUSHIKI SINGH</i>	109
21.	TESTING THE WEAK FORM EFFICIENCY IN WORLD STOCK MARKET: A CASE STUDY IN AUSTRALIA <i>DR. REKHA GUPTA</i>	118
22.	A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ON HOME LOANS OF PUBLIC & PRIVATE SECTOR BANKS IN INDIA <i>PUSHPA SANGWAN &amp; KANWAR BHAN</i>	121
23.	IMPLICATIONS OF THE SHIFT IN GLOBAL ECONOMIC POWER: AN ANALYSIS <i>DR. JAYA PALIWAL</i>	126
24.	CONSUMERS' COMPLIANCE TO ADOPT ECO-FRIENDLY PRODUCTS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY <i>JYOTI GOGIA &amp; NANDINI SHARMA</i>	130
25.	AN INNOVATIVE MODEL OF SOCIALWORK EDUCATION AND PRACTICE <i>M.YALADRI, DR. R. SUDHAKAR GOUD &amp; K.NARSAIAH</i>	136
26.	EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT: A NEED FOR COPORATE SURVIVAL <i>DR. V. TULASI DAS, DR. P. HANUMANATHA RAO &amp; DR. B. VENKATA RAO</i>	139
27.	HUMAN RIGHTS: AN OVERVIEW IN INDIAN FRAMEWORK <i>ZAINAB FATIMA &amp; MOHD YASIN WANI</i>	143
28.	TERM STRUCTURE OF INTEREST RATES AND FISHER EFFECT IN INDIA: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS <i>RANJAN KUMAR MOHANTY &amp; BRAJABANDHU NAYAK</i>	149
29.	EMPLOYEE RETENTION <i>SWATI GUPTA, DR. PUNEET JAIN &amp; DR. BHAVNA AGARWAL</i>	159
30.	SOCIO-ECONOMIC UPLIFTMENT OF GUJJAR TRIBE IN JAMMU & KASHMIR <i>SWATI GUPTA &amp; FARHAT BANO BEG</i>	162
	REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK	167

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### ABSTRACT

*We live on the planet Earth and regard it as our heavenly home and so do we owe certain duties and moral obligations towards it. We are a part of something bigger than just ourselves; we are a constituent of this environment. A healthy natural environment is significantly essential for all eco-systems and it is our prime responsibility to protect it. The present world is awakening to the critical need to protect the nature and to conserve resources of land, air and water as nearly as possible in their natural states for the benefit of mankind. The need of the hour is to anyhow protect and preserve our environment and exhaustible resources. This could be potentially accomplished if Eco-friendly products are produced and consumed. The paper primarily analyzes the responsiveness in the consumption pattern of the consumers towards the green products. It studies the level of awareness of the consumers about the environmental concerns and availability of eco-safe products in the market and also the willingness and attitude of the consumers to include such products in their purchase-roll. It was found that people are aware but they pose a low attitude for making a shift towards green consumption. It also considers the parameters influencing the buying-behaviour of the customers. The paper provides certain significant recommendations which if employed leads to sustainable consumption that shall further head to the attainment of Environmental Sustainability; a pivotal concern at hand!*

### KEYWORDS

Consumer Buying-behaviour, Eco-Friendly Products, Environmental Sustainability, Green Consumerism, Sustainable Consumption.

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### INTRODUCTION

**T**o waste, to destroy our natural resources, to skin and exhaust the land instead of using it so as to increase its usefulness, will result in undermining in the days of our children, the very prosperity which we ought by right to hand down to them amplified and developed.

**Theodore Roosevelt**

In the recent past, the rapid economic growth has witnessed increasing consumers' consumption worldwide causing environmental deterioration through over-consumption and utilization of natural resources (Chen & Chai, 2010). Across the earth, forests are cut, animals become extinct, and air and water are being polluted (Greenpeace, 2012). This is leading to the dire consequences which are becoming substantial in increasing proportions. Natural resources are running out at a fast pace (Harris, 2007), and we, people are still taking the world surrounding us, for granted. On the whole, this shall detract us from the gains of development and worsen the standard of living of the people in the long run.

The survival and well-being of a nation depends on sustainable development. It is a process of social and economic betterment that satisfies the needs and values of all interest groups without foreclosing future options. To this end, we must ensure that the demand on the environment from which we derive our sustenance, does not exceed its carrying capacity for the present as well as future generations.

Caring for the environment involves a conscious effort in every individual. It can range from joining an environmental group which supports specific environmental causes like caring for the seas, planting trees, reduction of greenhouse gases or the protection of endangered species to the use of eco friendly products, etc. The point to be emphasized is that people should know that unless they take measures with great urgency, they will inevitably be faced with a great deal of problems. One step to save our environment is to go green.

"Going green" means to pursue knowledge and practices that can lead to more environmentally friendly and ecologically responsible decisions and lifestyles, which can help protect the environment and sustain its natural resources for current and future generations. The best way is to adopt Eco-friendly products and services to be consumed by the consumers.

### ECO-FRIENDLY PRODUCTS

Eco-friendly products mean much more than just saving the environment and protecting the planet, they ensure that our future is secure in both the fate of our families and in the health and safety of our children. This term most commonly refers to products that contribute to green living or practices that help conserve resources. Many such products are also aimed at lifestyle changes which benefit the environment, so even if the product itself is not totally neutral, the actions undertaken by the consumer after buying the product are beneficial.

Green products are becoming increasingly popular as consumers are becoming more aware of the hazards of chemicals and toxins in their food, their households and their outdoor environment. As the profile of ecologically sustainable products becomes more prominent in the economic world, there are more and more incentives for businesses to supply consumers with what they want. Green has become popular with its benefits (diagrammatically represented below through the figure 1), and so today one is able to find eco- friendly products everywhere.

FIGURE 1 – GAINS FROM GREEN PRODUCTS



Certain positive impacts of Ecological products includes Protection of the Environment, as they being manufactured with post-consumer recycled materials or chemicals, do not release harmful substances into the air, hazardous global warming and other climatic disorders can also be combated by reducing carbon foot print. Energy-efficient appliances reduce the use of natural resources while lowering energy and utility bills and saving costs. Most of the Green products do not contain the harsh chemicals and so they reduce dangers that regular cleaning products do pose, so users have less chance of developing allergies, skin rashes or burns, respiratory problems and other gastrointestinal ailments. Manufacturing of eco-safe products is a smart way to ensure that the renewable resources are continually brought back and never wiped out completely and so it is an appreciation to our nature. Consumption of eco-protected products makes us feel good as we realize that by doing so we are making efforts to make the world a healthier place and this brings in peace of mind.

### GREEN CONSUMERISM

The green movement has created a new niche market of consumers who are highly concerned about the environment and are willing to do and spend more to be environment-friendly. Green consumers are those who consistently and primarily discriminate product purchases in favour of the environment. Today's green consumers are most concerned with issues such as reducing their "carbon footprint", waste management, and natural ingredients, which in turn means consumers are increasingly demanding greener products from retailers and brands that have adopted green practices throughout the entire supply chain.

The idea is that when awareness of environmental problems penetrates deeply enough into the community consciousness, the purchasing power of the mass market will force all manufacturers to turn green both their products and their manufacturing processes, on pain of being rejected in the market-place by green-aware consumers. It is impossible to achieve an environmental awakening without awakening the people. The need is to communicate and educate the common people to an optimum level so as to develop an environmental awareness (Pradhan D., Tripathi T., 2011). If all goes according to plan only those companies which adapt to the demand for greenness will survive. This approach to environmentalism is seen as being consistent with our existing mainstream culture.

### RESEARCH METHODS

With the principal objective of analyzing the level of awareness of the consumers about the emerging green products in the market and also their willingness and attitude towards accepting the environment-friendly products, a primary study was conducted. The region focused in the study was mainly the Agra District of the Uttar Pradesh state in the Indian national border. The mode of the data collection was a Structured Questionnaire that the 150 conveniently generated sample consumers were asked to fill in. Out of the 150 respondents, 144 turned up to respond us, thereby depicting the response rate as 96%. The strategy to recruit the questionnaires to the respondents was followed with an intention of encircling the range of consumers with a variety in age groups, gender, socio-economic conditions that included educational and professional status, monthly income and the weekly frequency of visiting a marketplace.

The type of Scale and Methods included in the questionnaire analysis were the Five-Point Likert Scale and the Ranking method. The five-point Likert Scale (1= Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree) tabulated in an implicit manner, certain prominent issues to be studied. It placed the statements to be rated in a manner, so that it covered every issue in three terms, consecutively. These three aspects were –

1. Awareness of the environmental issues and eco-safe products to the consumers.
2. Willingness to make a positive move towards following green consumerism.
3. Attitudinal reaction to responsibly approach the eco-friendly products and activities.

The computer application software applied in the research study for the data analysis purpose had been Microsoft Excel (MS Excel). The arrangement of data had been facilitated through the employment of Graphs and Charts.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

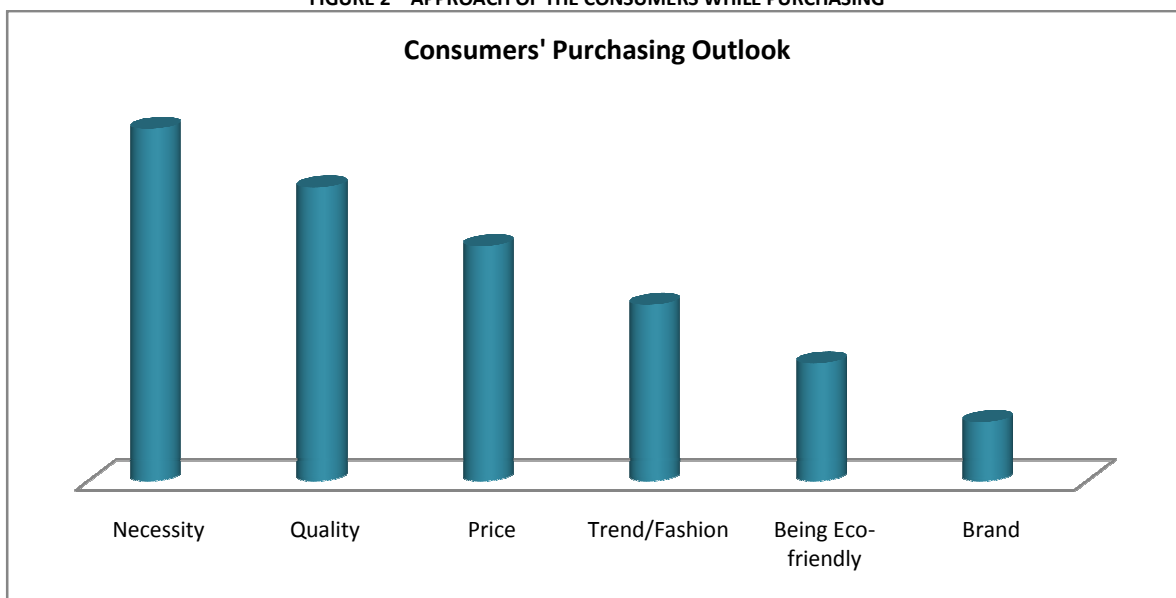
Certain results were drawn out through the Research work and have been reported in this section. It majorly discusses the consumer buying behaviour. Consumer behaviour captures all the aspects of purchase, utility and disposal of products and services. Social, cultural, individual and emotional forces play a big part in defining consumer buying behaviour. An individual buying behaviour is influenced by motivation, perception, learning, beliefs and attitude.

#### CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR AND THE INFLUENCING FACTORS

Consumer behaviour represents the study of individuals and the activities that take place to satisfy their realized needs. That satisfaction comes from the processes used in selecting, securing, and using products or services when the benefits received from those processes meet or exceed consumers' expectations. A process of buying starts in the minds of the consumer, which leads to the finding of alternatives between products that can be acquired with their relative advantages and disadvantages.



FIGURE 2 – APPROACH OF THE CONSUMERS WHILE PURCHASING



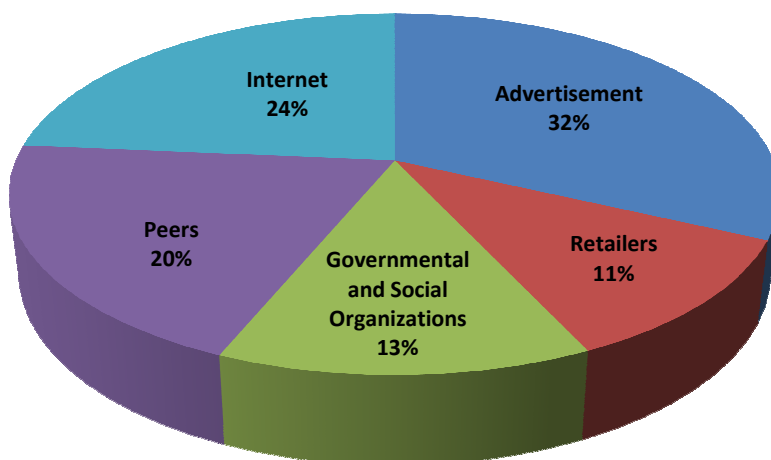
In the research analysis, through the ranking method, it was found that the main criteria of the sampled respondents while making a purchase had been to look for the items that were necessary or a matter of need when they went for shopping. Then other important features that they preferred were quality in products and then thirdly the prices, as depicted in the above figure 2. The consumers are often reported to prioritize the economic concerns over the environmental concerns (Kulshrestha L. R., Sauni P., 2011). A low preference was given by the consumers to seek if the products were Eco-friendly and choose such products over the matters of quality, prices and trend/ fashion, excluding the necessity aspect, which is obvious to remain the first interest for every customer while buying products.

Next, it is important to understand what or who are influencing the customers, especially when it comes to the decisions they make when buying. There can be many influencing factors. Some of these include –

- **Retailers** – When customers are making buying decisions, they look at what the retailers offer. Oftentimes, they also perceive a specialist company, for they have greater knowledge and expertise and the products or services are considered to be better than from companies that are generalists. What a retailer presents and prompts as a suggestion while a consumer is on the shopping mode is very important. It is of primary importance to affect the customer’s buying behaviour.
- **Governmental and Social Organizations** – Governmental Organizations directly affect buying decisions. An example is when governments bring down budgets. If there are tax increases then this can mean that customers may not have the money to spend that they did before. At the same time, if NGOs work for environmental concerns and initiate activities that influence green buying, consumers’ decision to buy non-ecological products could be changed.
- **Friends and Family** – In certain categories, friends and family play a big part as influencers in buying decisions. This is seen every day with consumer products such as food and the influence of the family on what is bought.
- **Advertisements** – The influence of advertisements, opinion leaders, and media has been around for a long time and now advertisements all over the globe can now have an influence on the customers in our country.
- **Online Opinion** – As more customers’ buy products or services online and people review or talk about products or services, what is written or viewed or heard can influence the customers’ decisions, even if they ultimately purchase offline. This can occur on social networking sites, comparison shopping sites and reviews for example.

FIGURE 3 – PARAMETERS INFLUENCING CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR OF ECO-FRIENDLY PRODUCTS

Influencing Parameters for Buying Green



The figure 3 displays the opinion of the respondents regarding the various awaking parameters which avail them the knowledge of the availability or coming up of the eco-safe products in the market. It was analyzed that the maximum information is provided by the Advertisements followed by Internet, Peers and by Governmental and Social Organizations and the least information is provided by the Retailers, which otherwise, is the very important factor to influence green buying.

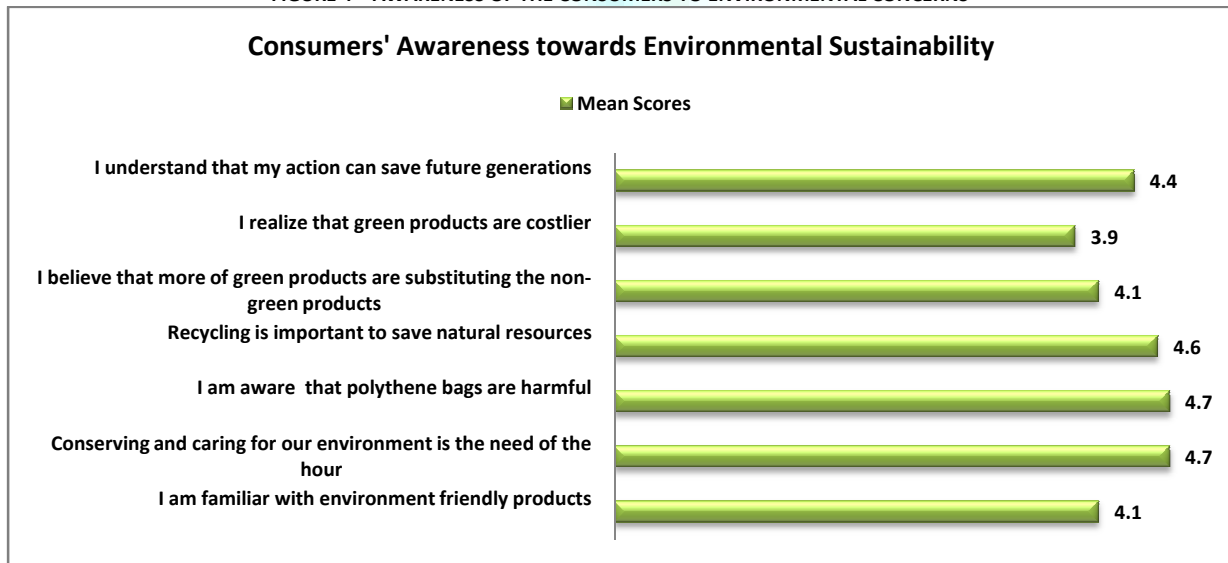
**CONSUMERS' RESPONSIVENESS TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

On today's planet, development can no longer follow the traditional path of emphasizing heavy industry while paying little attention to the surrounding environment. Sustainable development is the catchphrase of the day, which means that care must be taken to preserve existing environmental resources for the benefit of generations to come. The responsiveness of the consumers which includes their level of awareness, willingness and attitude towards environmental concerns, and green products, which as a whole leads to accomplish Environmental Sustainability, had been examined in the paper. The results are reported as –

• **Consumers' Awareness**

The Latin phrase "Caveat Emptor" means "Let the Buyer beware", however, in the present world the preferred motto should be, "Let the Buyer be more aware". A responsible consumer is one that has a healthy concern for the quality of goods and services he considers buying and does a proper research. He knows about the variety of products and services available to him and he sets his pattern of consumption in a way causing potential benefit to the society, economy and the environment where he is living. Such consumers want to live more sustainably by consuming products and services which tread 'lightly' on the environment. Certain parameters of consumers' awareness in interest of environmental sustainability were studied in the research. They included statements like – (i) Understanding that participation in the environmental activities today will save the nature for future generations, (ii) Realizing that green products are costlier or not, (iii) Believing if more of green products (in terms of availability, quality, quantity and variety) are substituting the non-green products, (iv) Recycling is important to save natural resources and it will also minimize pollution, (v) Being aware that polythene bags are harmful, (vi) Conserving and caring for our environment is the need of the hour, and that (vii) The consumers are familiar with environment friendly products or not.

**FIGURE 4 – AWARENESS OF THE CONSUMERS TO ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS**



Consumer awareness of environmental issues has proliferated in recent times and so had been depicted in our result, in the above figure 4, whereby the mean score of 4.7 of the respondents showed their admittance that conserving and caring for our environment is the need of the hour, together with the same proportion that agreed that polythene bags are harmful. The lowest number of respondents with the mean score of 3.9 realized that green products are costlier. "There is a very common mind-set right now which holds that all that we're going to need to do to avert the large-scale planetary catastrophes upon us is make slightly different shopping decisions," said Alex Steffen, the Executive Editor of Worldchanging.com, a Web-site devoted to Sustainability issues.

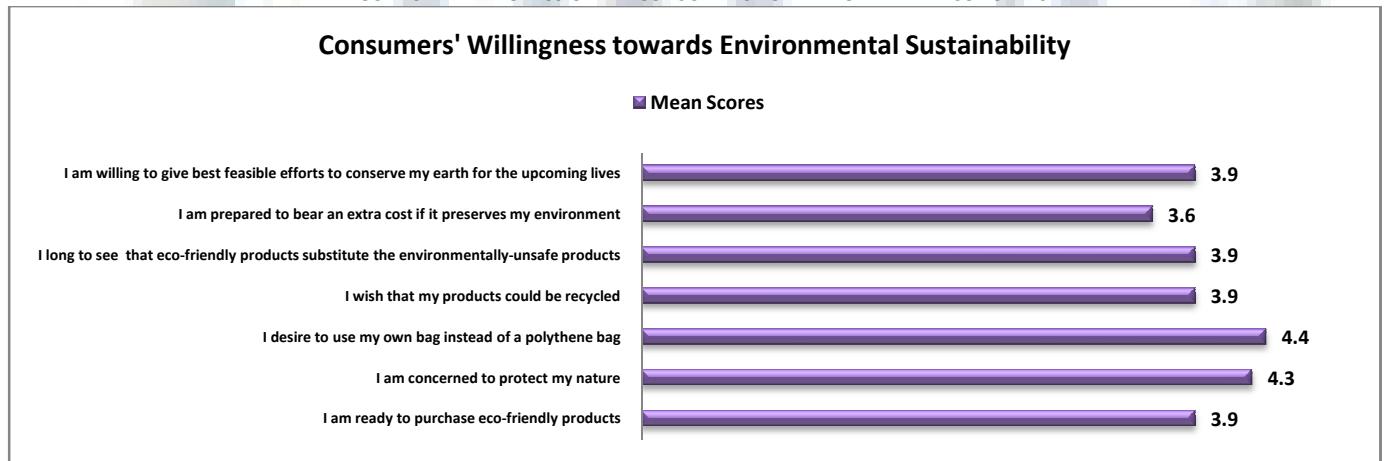
• **Consumers' Willingness**

*"It doesn't matter how much you want. What really matters is how much you want it. The extent and complexity of the problem does not matter was much as does the willingness to solve it."*

Ralph Marston

Green Consumption is a principle with three implications. Under this principle, people are encouraged to choose green products that are unpolluted or good for public health, wastes are to be treated under special surveillance to avoid pollution, and public understanding of consumption is to be changed so as to raise people's awareness of a healthy lifestyle, environmental protection, and energy conservation in their pursuit of a comfortable life. Later the awareness is generated; the next important step is to create willingness within to move for a positive change. To examine the level of willingness of the citizens of Agra to purchase green products and support environmental sustainability, some statements were given to the respondents to rate on five-point Likert scale. These statements read as follows – (i) I am willing to give best feasible efforts today so to conserve my earth for the upcoming lives, (ii) I am prepared to bear an extra cost if it preserves my environment, (iii) I long to see that a variety of qualitative eco-friendly products substitute the environmentally-unsafe products, (iv) I wish that my products could be recycled, (v) I desire to use my own bag instead of a polythene bag, (vi) I am concerned to protect my nature, and (vii) I am ready to purchase eco-friendly products.

**FIGURE 5 – WILLINGNESS OF THE CONSUMERS TO ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS**



Analyzing the responses of the consumers, we found that in terms of being willing to bring about a better change in the environmental conditions, many were enthusiastic to use their own bag instead of a polythene bag as the mean score, shown in the above figure 5, was 4.4 and the average score for the willingness of the people to show concern in protecting the nature was 4.3. The lowest average score was 3.6 which interpret the neutral readiness of the consumers to bear an extra cost for a green product even if such a step of theirs preserves the environment. The consumer is indeed confronted to his budget constraint that may limit his expenses, particularly in green products (Torgler, Vilanas G., 2007).

• **Consumers' Attitude**

*"Words and thoughts concerning compassionate actions that are not put into practice are like beautiful flowers that are colourful but have no fragrance."*

Thich Nhat Hanh

For those not already receptive to a green message, Attitude change is a prerequisite to influence their purchase behaviour. Changing attitudes, whether it be towards the environment or any another issue, can be a tall order, however and this prominently includes the purchasing and consuming of products that have minimal impacts on the environment (Mainieri, et al., 1997). Such products are Green products and they can be defined as products that will not pollute the earth or deplete natural resources, and they can be recycled or conserved (Mostafa, 2007). To check the attitudinal response of our respondents regarding their outlook on turning up green, we mentioned the following issues, like – (i) Working and taking initiatives in the direction to protect the environment for the expected world, (ii) Paying more to protect the mother Earth, (iii) Switching over to the green products from the consumption of the non-green products, (iv) Giving products for recycling, (v) Refusing the shop-keepers for providing polythene bags and instead carry a cloth / paper bag, (vi) Actively participating to safeguard the environment, and (vii) Buying eco-safe products.

FIGURE 6 – ATTITUDE OF THE CONSUMERS TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS



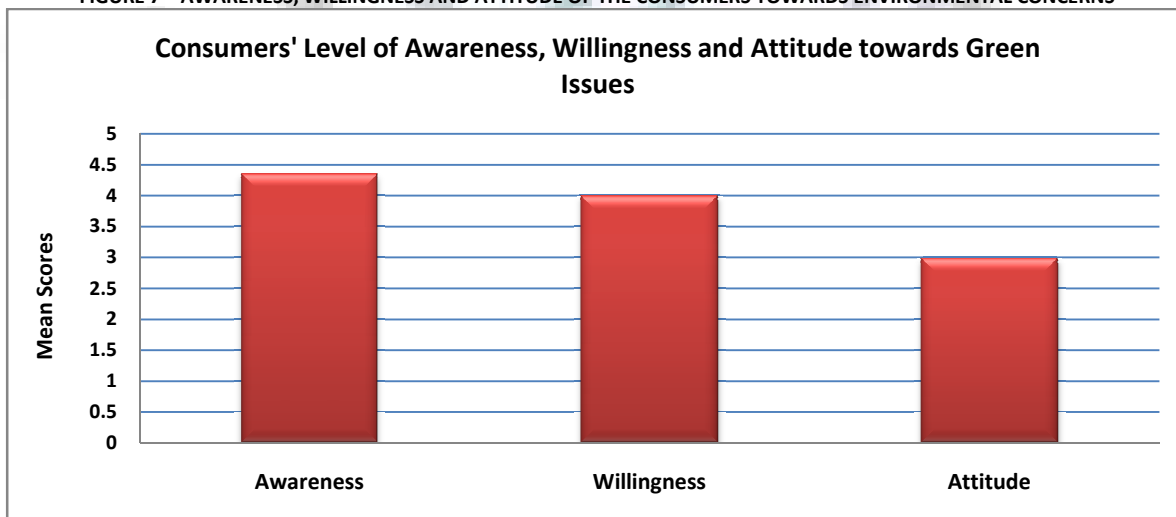
The above figure 6 displays the mean scores of the ratings done by the respondents, where their attitude on shifting and going green was explored. The lower mean scores in the range of 3-point depicts the neutral reaction in the green actions of the consumers. 3.4 mean value portrays that the maximum customers practice refusing the shop-keepers for providing polythene bags and instead they carry their own cloth / paper bag and also equally they admit their positive approach and actions which are in alignment with active participation so to safeguard the environment. Minimum respondents give their products for recycling and it has been illustrated by the mean score of 2.1 only, which shows mere dejection to it.

Certain easy actions and positive ways to celebrate green consumerism can be through taking steps toward the purchase of hybrids, putting solar panels at homes, making purchase decisions based on the lifecycle of the product and reputation and commitment of the company, etc.

• **Consumers' Level of Awareness, Willingness and Attitude towards Environmental Concerns**

The level of Awareness, Willingness and Attitude towards Environmental issues and Eco-friendly products were studied of the consumer respondents, so as to know the present status of each component is in their case and hence can the required implementations be scrutinized and applied, accordingly, to attain Environmental Sustainability.

FIGURE 7 – AWARENESS, WILLINGNESS AND ATTITUDE OF THE CONSUMERS TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS



The above figure 7 illustrates altogether the level of awareness, willingness and attitude of the consumers towards the environmental issues and eco-safe products. It depicts clearly that the level of awareness has been the most with lower willingness to be a part of the eco-friendly change and with lowest level of present participation in the green change. It thus interprets that in present day world, people are very well aware of the environmental issues, damaged nature, and the level of harm being caused to the atmosphere as also they are aware of the solutions that if applied can safeguard the nature. It is portrayed by a high mean score of 4.35. There is still less willingness to adopt environmentally-protective measures and is displayed by the mean score of 4.0. People at present are very passive in indulging into green activities and be a part of positive green change, with a mean score of 2.99, which displays their neutrality in this component of attitudinal change. However, the demand for green products shall only rise with the number of consumers who are sensitive to environment matter and especially their sensitivity degree (Cremer H., Thisse, J. F., 1999).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Protection of the environment has to be a central part of any sustainable inclusive growth strategy, lest there will be no time left to adapt to any change of either the ecological or anthropological systems. The predictions of global warming are dire. If no immediate steps are taken by the world leaders, climate change could prove much more than just an economic threat but a survival threat. (Maulick B., 2011). Here is the need for complementary efforts to scrutinize and rethink existing schemes that may add to vulnerabilities.

Consumers are powerful enough to bring about a change in the production pattern. It is produced what they demand. Thus, if they demand eco-friendly products, they shall be produced and retailed. They can easily bring about green movement in an economy. This will be backward linkage to products retailed, produced, and also the raw materials used. All of it would go green and a sustainable living can be assured easily. But the matter of fact is that the consumers today, need to be aware of the urge of supporting nature and also it is necessitated to develop a concern for it. They are required to safeguard their environment through all possible activities like going for recyclable products, getting them recycled, reusing things that could be reused, refilling, carrying cloth bags and refusing plastics, checking for eco-labelled products and using them. The sense of belongingness and protecting our nature needs to be nurtured in roots deep, through education, right from the pre-primary level.

As consumers, we can all consciously try to buy less. We can also make simple changes to our shopping patterns and use our purchasing power to support eco-friendly products, which are less damaging to the environment. As studied, the Consumers are well-informed about most of the environmental issues, thus by developing eco-friendly products at reasonable prices and with better communication of their benefits, the masses which give more importance to their economic well-being over environmental concerns could be easily reached (Singh D. P., 2011)

Producers also need to turn to green manufacturing set-ups and use raw-materials that could be recycled. Initially, it will be bearing a high cost but more of production of green products than non-green ones will bring down the cost of eco-safe products. Green Supply Chain Management is a relatively less explored domain of Supply Chain Management, which needs urgent attention of researchers in the present scenario of economic turbulence. Incorporation of green practices in long, complex, energy and capital-intensive supply chains is urgently needed to arrest the heavy damage to the global environment caused by the supply-chains (Shukla A., et al., 2009).

Government has been spotted by many respondents as the major factor that can influence and bring on the eco-friendly products, green production and healthy eco-protected lifestyle. It can take various stringent measures to control environmental pollution and in past it has been found effective also, like the banning of polythene-bags. Additionally, it is recommended that they provide certain amount of incentives and subsidies to the producers and benefits to the retailers dealing in eco-friendly products. This shall act as a motivation. They should check and also bother producers and retailers to get their products eco-labelled and certified, build up certain strategies and schemes to hype eco production and consumption. They are suggested to take measures to educate and make aware and persuade the masses for going green. The greener, the safer, the better and more sustainable world would it be!

## CONCLUSION

Green, a symbol of life, good health, and vigour, is also a colour that reminds us of hope. All around the globe, the word is associated with energy conservation and environmental protection. Environmental consciousness has a positive impact upon the attitude of the citizens towards the eco-friendly companies and products. As a strategy to save the planet, it urges to confront the mass of consumers in industrialized countries, where the consumers need to inform themselves about major environmental problems and then, by being cross-informed through product labelling, they should only select environmentally benign product and green life-styles to match their new consumption tastes. Purchasing eco-friendly products is a great way to show that we people care about our environment. Such products are classified as such because the way they are produced, cuts down on the use of natural resources or makes use of previously used resources to create brand-new products. If we want to know how to help in keeping the environment safe and viable for people in the future, knowing the benefits of using green products can help in accomplishing this goal. This will also bring about a significant shift in the manufacturing products and techniques. Thus, Green Manufacturing and Green products shall be motivated which shall head towards Environmental Sustainability on this planet Earth!

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