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CONTENTS

Sr. No.	TITLE & NAME OF THE AUTHOR (S)	Page No.
1.	ROLE OF TRAINING FOR MAINTAINING AN ISO 9001 SYSTEM <i>DR. VINOD N. SAYANKAR</i>	1
2.	AN ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF SMALL SCALES INDUSTRIES' SECTOR IN INDIA <i>SONIKA CHOUDHARY & DR. M. L. GUPTA</i>	4
3.	REDUCING PATH CONGESTION AND FAILURE IN AN INTERACTIVE NETWORK APPLICATIONS <i>S. SATHYAPRIYA, A. KUMARESAN & K. VIJAYAKUMAR</i>	7
4.	SEGMENTING THE SHOPPERS OF GREEN FASHION PRODUCTS ON THEIR SHOPPING BEHAVIOUR <i>DR. MANOJ KUMAR</i>	11
5.	SEARCHING THE CAUSES OF ORGANIZATIONAL FAILURE IN CONTROLLING DRUG ADDICTION IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF SOME RELEVANT VARIABLES IN BANGLADESH WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SYLHET <i>ABDUL LATIF & SARUAR AHMED</i>	14
6.	AN ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY OF SERVICE DELIVERY IN ETHIOPIAN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS <i>DR. SOLOMON LEMMA LODESSO</i>	20
7.	A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF INSUFFICIENT SLEEP, CHANGES IN THE SLEEPING AND FOOD HABITS OF NIGHT SHIFT WORKERS <i>CHHAYA P. PATEL</i>	26
8.	ELECTRONIC COMMERCE ADOPTION BY MICRO, SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZED ENTERPRISES <i>BISWAJIT SAHA</i>	47
9.	THE WORKING CAPITAL ANALYSIS OF DISTRICT CENTRAL COOPERATIVE BANKS IN TIRUNELVELI REGION, TAMILNADU <i>DR. A. MAHENDRAN & R. AMBIKA</i>	50
10.	QUANTIFICATION OF QUALITY AS PER USER PERSPECTIVE IN SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT <i>SHABINA GHAFIR & MAMTA SHARMA</i>	58
11.	A STUDY ON CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY <i>M. UMREZ, B. SWATHI & K. LAVANYA</i>	65
12.	COMPUTERIZED ACCOUNTING INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND SYSTEM RISK MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIAN BANKS <i>DR. DAFERIGHE, EMMANUEL EMEAKPONUZO & DR. UDIH, MONEY</i>	67
13.	EVALUATION OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION ON BROADBAND INTERNET SERVICE USERS OF ETHIO TELECOM <i>ADEM MOHAMMED HABIB & YIBELTAL NIGUSSIE AYELE</i>	73
14.	EXPERIMENTATION IN OSPF MULTIPATH ENVIRONMENT WITH OPTIMAL INTERFACE TIMERS <i>KULDEEP DESHMUKH</i>	80
15.	FINANCIAL INDICATORS FOR BUY BACK OF SHARES <i>PRERNA SEHGAL & DIMPY HANDA</i>	86
	REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK & DISCLAIMER	90

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SEGMENTING THE SHOPPERS OF GREEN FASHION PRODUCTS ON THEIR SHOPPING BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT

A variety of customers come to fashion retail stores to purchase green fashion products. While some of them are regular consumers of these green fashion products by choice, others are experimenters with ecofriendly products, still others buy these products under the influence of some reference group and so on. There seems to be an apparent need to understand the segments of these green fashion products shoppers and to understand their profiles. This can go a long way in formulating better marketing strategies for these products. There have been numerous efforts to segment shoppers of different product categories on their demographic characteristics. In the case of green fashion products the one of the effective way of segmentation can be segmentation on the basis of their shopping behaviour as behavioral cues can reveal many psychographic patterns. Additionally, as buyers for these products belong to various demographic groups understanding them through their behaviors at stores can be more useful and obviously more factual for laying down marketing and retailing strategies for these products. The current research is broadly a descriptive research aimed at identifying the different segments on the basis of observational studies, questionnaires and interviews carried out in shops. The shoppers for green fashion products have been classified into 18 segments and segment profiles have been developed for them. The study has also included the preference and consumption of different segments in order to suggest product mix for these segments which can be perceived as value maximisers by respective segments. The research intends to provide an alternative framework to understand shopping behavior of green fashion products' shoppers.

KEYWORDS

Green fashion products, Retailing, shopping, behavioral segmentation, Dubai, psychographic patterns.

INTRODUCTION

Green fashion products refer to those fashion products which are environment friendly and contributes to the larger cause of sustainability. The process of segmentation is the key to marketing. In order to produce and distribute the right products to right group of people with right marketing strategy one unequivocally requires doing the right segmentation first. The process of segmentation is basic and carries the typical importance of foundation stone in the world of marketing. When something is basic, any mistake related to that can have far reaching consequences. And when something is important, it must be looked and re looked with various possible perspectives at different points of time to ensure the continuous improvement and adaptation.

In marketing various bases for segmentation have been identified and they have been grouped under heads like geographic, demographic, psychographic etc. The marketing of green fashion products is a phenomenon of comparatively new origin. The growing awareness about the environmental issues and the phenomenon of more and more people opting for environmentally fashion products is reason of celebration for entire humanity. Fashion is largely a psychological choice based on various factors related to sociocultural issues, recent happenings in surrounding, reference groups' behaviours and so on. Hence the choice of people of going for green fashion products impacts the behaviours of others and the process continues.

It is needless to say that retail is the point where marketer and consumers come in direct contact like never before. Hence there is a need and relevance of segmenting the shoppers so that marketing can be done in a better way. Shoppers indulge in search of products with various motives. The search processes give shoppers an opportunity to ensure that they take the right decision. In addition, they also derive emotional satisfaction (Tauber, 1972). Behaviour has been studied using one or a combination of three methods. The first method is based on the manipulation of the store variables such as display or promotions and measuring the change in sales pattern through inventory and purchase audit (Cox, 1964). Similarly, various other attempts have been made. The segmentation at retail level is of paramount importance due to various reasons. The segmentation of shoppers will help the retailers to provide the most suited products to different segments of consumers and the most effective sales promotion schemes, advertising; visual merchandising and other promotion and pricing strategies and tactics can be devised for different segments. Retailing is a location bound business and there is a defined catchments area consequentially defined customer group. Undoubtedly, the customer satisfaction can be put on risk. The dissatisfaction of customers in a way is the costliest for retailing as there is hardly any way to change the customers for a retail situated at a particular location. Retail is a service and encounters must be satisfactory to make customers visit the retail in future. Actually, there is a need to be first time right. It can be done by understanding customers' needs and wants thoroughly. And segmentation is required for this.

The process of segmentation requires the identification of bases for segmentation. In segmenting the shoppers the shopping behaviour can be utilized as a basis of segmentation more effectively than other bases as demographic or geographic. The demographic and geographic bases actually decide impact the fact which customers will visit retail store and who will not. But, for segmenting the shoppers, their behaviour and attitude can act as better basis for segmentation.

The shopping behaviours of consumers change with shops' visual merchandising and information displayed in different shops.

OBJECTIVES

Objectives of this research can be summed up as following:-

- 1) To examine shopping behaviour for green fashion products,
- 2) To segment the green fashion products' shoppers on the basis of shopping behaviour,
- 3) To know the factors impacting consumption of green fashion products; &
- 4) To know the psychography of green fashion products' shoppers.

METHODOLOGY

The current research is broadly a descriptive research aimed at identifying the different segments on the basis of observational studies, questionnaires and interviews carried out in shops.

In the research of studying behaviours of shoppers, the observational technique was actually the most appropriate method to get the primary and the basic information. The research design is by and large descriptive because the research intends to describe the behaviours and attitude of shoppers, not going into the depths of exploring why they behave in such manners.

But carrying out the observational study was a challenge, as the process of observation needs to remain hidden from the shoppers. The feeling of being observed changes the behaviours of human beings in almost all the circumstances. And it makes the researches in humanities more challenging than researches in natural science.

Researchers made it a point that their presence as observers was not disclosed to shoppers. They did not disturb the shoppers in the process of shopping. They followed the shoppers clandestinely and they acted as they were also shopping in the same store.

In a few of the shops, the arrangement was made with the grateful attitude of retailers to facilitate the presence of investigators in the disguise of retail staff. The contribution of retailers at the various shops of Dubai, deserves all the possible praise. It was done by making them understanding the purpose of the research and the usefulness of its outcomes to encourage the consumption of green fashion products and help into marketing of green fashion products.

In sampling, both the breadth and depth were taken into consideration. Here, breadth refers to the number of shoppers being observed, while the depth refers to the time spent to observe each observed shopper and the dimensions of observations. The dimensions include study of moods, behavioural patterns, studying their eyes' movement, the way they observed the information on the product, the time for which they observed different products, the time they took to zero down on particular product, their talking with fellow shoppers (people accompanying them), their timing of shopping and profile related information conjectured through observation and so on.

Observers were instructed to use the tiny pieces of paper and recording equipments. The usage of recording equipments both audio and visual was largely possible due to availability of cellular phones with multimedia facilities and the tendency of students to own these latest gizmos in fashion institutes.

Apart from observational studies (which actually formed the backbone of research methodology), questionnaires and interviews were used as tools to get the additional information from shoppers wherever and whenever it was feasible, and shoppers and retailers assisted in gathering information through these tools.

The research was carried out in the city of Dubai and in total 450 shoppers formed the sample for the research. The number of 450 shoppers was less than targeted, but it was the number which could be achieved in the period of two months by a research team. The findings are based on the data available from observations, questionnaires and interviews of these shoppers.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The findings and analysis of this research is based on the observation of 450 shoppers with the additional use of questionnaires and interviews.

The stores selected belonged to fashion items those which also had a good collection of green fashion products like green textile products, green gift items and other consumables under fashion category. In order to ensure better or adequate representation stratification was done in terms of locations within the city, store formats, mall and stand alone stores and new and comparatively old stores. The rationale behind this stratification was to gauge the percolation of environment friendly products' consumption among shoppers. The lifestyle products are largely consumed by people with fair educational and economic background. Hence, the study is based on shopping behaviour of urban consumers. Undoubtedly, it also includes a few of the shoppers with non-urban background with the psychography of awareness about environmental concerns. The active role of media to propagate and inculcate environmental concerns definitely has a major role in making these green products popular. The news and discussions about Kyoto protocol, Copenhagen summit really contributed to consumption of these products. According to media reports, the media in the UAE is comparatively more active in environmental and sustainable issues. Hence, the selection of Dubai luckily was a good choice for this study. Although the selection of this city is due to the fact because it is the city where I work and it was easy to carry out research with the help of students and people known to me in fashion industry and academics.

The selection of stores was also based on the cooperation extended by retailers for this research. There was a conscious effort made to make the study equally representing the different strata but due to obvious reasons of retailers' cooperation and reachability it can't be termed as absolutely free of biases. Nonetheless, it provided a good scope of study facilitating and building platforms for further researches in related areas.

On the basis of this study 18 different segments could be identified on the basis of shopping behaviour. These segments can be described as following:-

1. **CONSCIENTIOUS**-These shoppers go for green products because of their conscience. They feel that consumption of products which impact the environment is sin. This category of shoppers has a tendency to look for these products making special efforts and asking a lot of questions to retail staff about the products and their origins. They believed in going to different stores in search of products of their choice, if they were not satisfied with the products available in stores they visited initially.
2. **ECOFASHIONABLE**-These are the shoppers who have green products as fashion statement. These shoppers buy these products due to the snob value of these products or the reason that the consumption of these products will make them being perceived as eco-conscious shoppers and consumers. These consumers were seen talking to retail staff about the other green products available in different locations of the country and abroad. The price consciousness among these shoppers is comparatively low and they believe in buying products well known for their environment friendly nature.
3. **SOCIALITE**-This is the group of customers those who are buy the products to be worn or used in social functions. These are actually socialites with environment friendly bent of mind. These customers are influenced by aspirational groups like celebrities or page-3 people.
4. **IMPULSIVE**-They buy the products without previous thoughts or much thinking. They make the buying decision at spur of the moment. The number of such customers is also significant. At many occasions, they made the purchase because some of these products caught their attention when their eyes were surfing the products on retail shelves or sometimes they were informed about the nature of these products by the salesmen/saleswomen at retail counters.
5. **CHANGE DRIVEN**-These customers have begun shopping these products due to their tendency of looking for change in their consumption habits. They bought these products just for change, not for any commitment towards green products or any intention to buy these products regularly in future. These shoppers were mostly found in malls and in high-end lifestyle retail stores.
6. **EXPERIMENTER**-Customers of this segment are experimenters. They purchase green fashion products as an experiment. Their future purchase of these products will be dependent on their level of satisfaction achieved on the consumption of these products. The unique aspect of these shoppers are that their purchasing is based on promises of retail sales staff or promises of manufacturers printed on product packaging or on point of purchase materials.
7. **ASSORTMENT HUNTER**-Assortment hunters are always looking for a variety of products under different category. For these types of customers the satisfaction comes from choosing from a large number of options. They frequent the shops with a large number of green products. The satisfaction in these customers comes from the power of discretion to choose among various alternatives.
8. **IMITATOR**-This is the segment of customers who bought these products because they saw other shoppers buying it. They did not have knowledge about these products, but their behaviour was shaped by typical phenomenon of service industry i.e. impact of fellow customers' behaviours. These customers mostly belong to middle class and they were found in both stores in malls and stand alone stores.
9. **DISILLUSIONED**-This is a group of customers those who had a some sort of disillusionment of products they bought in past. It was sometimes related to their uncomfortable experiences on skin with other products or sometimes they were did not feel about disposal of these products (as products were non biodegradable).
10. **VALUE SEEKER**-These shoppers buy the product where the perceived value is maximum. Hence, their buying criteria includes price, guarantee or warranty available, health benefits etc. with products
11. **GREEN LOVERS**-This is the class of shoppers who can be termed as green lovers. They love any product which can be termed as green. Their shopping behaviour was not confined to shopping. They believed in keeping the surrounding at their homes and work places green. One unique aspect of these customers are preference for buying from the stores with green ambience. Hence, the green visual merchandising acted as a very strong cue for their purchasing.
12. **MEDIA INSPIRED**-This segment of shoppers are highly influenced by media. And for the purchasing was a pull phenomenon at retail counter not the push by retailers (no hard selling retailing)
13. **CONSULTATIVE**-This is the segment of shoppers highly influenced by retail staff. Their behaviour in a way a just opposite to that of media inspired. They believed in consulting retail staff, and product or brand selection was based on what retail staff told or advised.
14. **GROUP PLAYER**-They come to shop in group, and the selection of product and brand is a group decision. In most of the cases, it was group of friends or housewives belonging same demography. These groups normally try many products before buying and a fair amount of discussion takes place.

15. **CONFUSED**-These shoppers were confused or indecisive regarding the selection of products. For them, alternative choices have different comparative costs and benefits in comparison to other alternatives.Hence, they try different products at different buying occasions and their brand or product selection was unpredictable.
16. **ACCIDENTAL**-Their purchase of green fashion products is accidental, they do not buy it regularly. They purchase it when they come across such products in the course of shopping, and they like it.
17. **BRAND LOYAL**-These are the customers who stick to a particular brand for a long time. They repeatedly purchase the products of same manufacturer.
18. **DIFFERENCE SEEKER**-These customers have typical attitude of buying something different. They go to various shops to find out different products. They believe in trying new items over old.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that green fashion products are being purchased for different reasons by different groups of buyers. A few people purchase it due to its obvious contribution to environmental safety, while various others purchase it because it is itself a fashion for them. Many people buy it under the impact of retail staff while many other buy it just to experiment with it. A few people are brand loyal even in this category while others are value seekers.Hence, marketers and retailers need to develop different marketing strategies to market these products successfully. There is an apparent need to understand the needs, wants and behaviours of different segments. And the segmentation on the basis of shopping behaviour seems to be an effective proposition for marketing of these products.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This research was to understand the shopping behaviours of people those who buy green shopping products. On the basis of observations made and data collected from them through questionnaires and interviews, they were segmented in 18 segments on the basis of their shopping behaviour.The habits of shoppers were studied and a few observational studies about the reasons of their shopping was also made.

But the research findings are based on the study of green fashion products in a particular city. There is an obvious scope to carry out such studies in different cities and in larger geographical areas to reach conclusive segmentation of shoppers of green fashion products.

Secondly, there are scopes to carry out researches in other product categories. Researches can also be carried out in single product categories for in-depth study.

The research can be carried out on the impact of in store promotion and overall promotion to so that further insights can be generated to increase the sales of green products.Similarly,researches can be carried out related to age group, income group and other variables and the correlated shopping behavior related to these products.

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