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**SEGMENTATION STUDIES FOR GREEN MARKETING AND THEIR LIMITATIONS**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Sustainable business practices emerge as a definitive market differentiator given the large market gains accruing to such companies. There is steady increase in the public's interest in, and willingness to act on sustainability, both as citizens and as consumers. Green products and campaigns can be an effective marketing tool when attracting customers; however, different segments of green consumers may react differently to these products and messages. The present article explores the results of various researches done on different variables of segmentation and their implications for green marketing. Segmentation approaches on the basis of demographic, socioeconomic as well geographic variables have proved to be futile. Psychographic segmentation seems to be more appropriate and has been recommended by many in academics, but, it only delivers part of the truth.*

**KEYWORDS**

demographic, green-marketing, psychographic, segmentation, socioeconomic.

**INTRODUCTION**

Market segmentation is grouping of potential customers with similar needs or characteristics who are likely to exhibit similar purchase behaviour. Market segmentation is a marketing strategy which involves dividing a broad target market into subsets of consumers, businesses, or countries who are perceived to have, common needs, interests, and priorities, and then designing and implementing strategies to target them. Market Segmentation is the key to making better marketing decisions, building better marketing strategy and competitive advantage.

Market segmentation strategies are generally used to identify and further define the target customers, and provide supporting data for marketing plan elements such as positioning to achieve certain marketing plan objectives. Businesses may develop product differentiation strategies, or an undifferentiated approach, involving specific products or product lines depending on the specific demand and attributes of the target segment. Market segmentation is the most powerful tool available for generating strategic marketing advantage.

As green markets continue to exist in a somewhat infantile state of development further research is needed to see if there is an existence of clearly defined green consumer segments. Green products and campaigns can be an effective marketing tool when attracting customers; however, different segments of green consumers may react differently to these products and messages. Improving the understanding of green consumer segments and developing their profiles becomes increasingly important in effective targeting. For many companies the segmentation process has even become a vital part in creating a sound marketing strategy when positioning their products (Peter and Olson, 2004).

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

But some researchers argue that we are wasting our time even discussing green consumers because being green is not a fixed characteristic of a consumer. The same consumer may choose a green product in one situation but not another. Further it has been found that language can be a very effective means to reach people already persuaded of a subject's importance, but can actually decrease compliance among those people for whom the importance is not clear. This makes targeting these consumers an often frightful task as green buying behavior hinges on more than the characteristics of the consumer (Rex & Baumann, 2006).

The language we use in messaging is frequently assertive, reflecting that assumption. But that may not be the most effective way to get our target audience to take action. In the January 2012 edition of the Journal of Marketing, Ann Kronrod, Amir Grinstein, and Luc Wathieu say that it depends entirely on the target audience. Their research- "Go Green! Should Environmental Messages Be So Assertive", shows that imperative language can be a very effective means to reach people already persuaded of a subject's importance, but can actually decrease compliance among those people for whom the importance is not clear.

This is particularly interesting given that this same team reports that in an examination of real slogans from <http://www.ThinkSlogans.com>, environmental slogans were nearly three times more often assertive than a random mix of slogans for consumer goods (57% vs. 19%). Examples used of such imperative messaging included Greenpeace's "Stop the catastrophe" and Denver Water's "Use only what you need."

According to Kronrod et al, "The drawbacks in assertive phrasing have been extensively documented by researchers in communications, consumer behavior, and psycholinguistics. The overwhelming evidence accumulated thus far is that assertiveness interacts with consumers' drive for freedom in a counter persuasive manner." Nobody wants to be told what to do unless they already intend to do it. This brings us to the flip side of these findings. For an audience that is already committed to the importance of an issue, softer language can be irritating, as the message is perceived to be out of line with the urgency felt.

**STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

In other words, communication in environmental and social justice messaging can do more harm than good, depending on who is on the receiving end. It is critical to align language to the perception of the particular segment in order to be effective. Thus, in order to have effective messages or otherwise we need to have a deeper understanding of green-market segments.

**OBJECTIVES**

In past decades, attempts of learning more about green consumers were done via various methods of market segmentation. The following are the main objectives of the study:

- a. To investigate the different green market segments available.
- b. To understand how effective the previous attempts at segmenting the green consumers have been

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS****DEMOGRAPHIC SEGMENTATION**

There are number of studies made in the past to research on the demographic characteristic toward buying green energy. Fuches & Arentsen (2002) have made a good client analysis based on demographic of the general customers segments which may have potential to buy green electricity. They have divided these target groups in to four main groups. The study of consumers' demographic helps the investors to understand the market trend and consumer behavior based on age, gender, income and education which could affect the consumer decision to buy green electricity (Robert, 1999). Jain & Kaur (2006) studied behaviour of the demographic attributes of 206 Indian green customers, based on age, gender, education, type of school studied, occupation and income. Parker et al. (2003) studied demographic characteristics of Canadian green consumers based on age, gender, income and education, in the scenario of restructured electricity market. Diamantopoulos et al. (2003) studied the demographic of British consumers to study their green behaviour. The demographic characteristics they used



for the study were gender, marital status, age, number of children, educational level and social class. Mainieri et al. (1997) studied the influence of environmental concerns on the behaviour of American consumers' by studying their demographic characteristics. The above mentioned researchers studied the impacts of demographic characteristics in awareness and knowledge of environment protection, that how this knowledge can influence the purchasing decisions of green consumers.

**AGE:** The variable 'age' has especially been discussed extensively (e.g. D'Souza et al., 2006; Jain and Kaur, 2006; Roberts, 1996; Samdahl and Robertson, 1989). Yet it remains questionable how relevant this variable is when trying to distinguish regular consumers from green consumers (do Paco et al., 2009).

There are number of theories that support the argument that younger are more concern towards green energy, especially those who are grown up in environment where green energy was a salient feature are more conscious to this issue (Robert, 1999). Younger people are more interested to pay more for green electricity as compare to older. Older age 55-65 years, are willing to pay less amount \$3.33 (per month) for green energy, similarly older than 65 years can pay less amount \$6.79 for green energy Zarnikau (2003). Jain & Kaur (2006) found that the audiences belonging to age group of 18-35 years are more aware of environment protection and friendliness. Similarly Parker et al. (2003) reveals that the consumers of young ages play a vital role in choice of green products while purchasing and the people of young age are enthusiastic and willing to change their existing electricity supplier with a supplier who provides green energy. On the other hand Diamantopoulos et al. (2003) and Mainieri et al. (2010) states that age plays no significant role in awareness of environmental issues and in consumers' choice of green products.

While some academics such as Kinnear et al. (1974) and McEvoy (1972) argue that there is no significant association between age and environmental behavior, others have found a significant negative correlation (Van Liere and Dunlap, 1981; Zimmer et al., 1994) as well as a confirmed positive relationship between the two items (Diamantopoulos et al., 2003; Roberts, 1996; Samdahl and Robertson, 1989). Despite these mixed results, the overall tendency according to Straughan and Roberts (1999, p.559) has been that "younger individuals are likely to be more sensitive to environmental issues".

**GENDER:** The variable 'sex' has also been thoroughly investigated. Theoretically, it has been argued that women are supposed to be more environmentally concerned than men, as they consider the effect of their actions on others more cautiously (Eagly, 1987). In practice, the findings have been equivocal once again. A number of studies found no significant association between gender and participation in environmental action or consciousness (e.g. Arbuthnot, 1977; Samdahl and Robertson, 1989). However, other researchers such as Diamantopoulos et al. (2003), Roberts (1996) and Van Liere and Dunlap (1981) could confirm the theoretical contemplations by Eagly. In turn, Mainieri et al. (1997) found that on the one hand women are more ecologically conscious with regard to purchasing environmentally friendly products and being active in recycling. On the other hand there was no significant difference between the two sexes with respect to participation in environmental activism. While in general results tend to favor women as the more environmentally conscious gender, findings are not completely conclusive.

#### **SOCIOECONOMIC SEGMENTATION**

Two additional variables that have also been carefully explored are 'education' and 'income', which fall under the category of socioeconomics.

**EDUCATION:** It is normally thought to be positively linked to environmental awareness and concern. This means the higher the educational level of an individual, the more likely he/she is to display a sense of responsibility for the environment. Granzin and Olson (1991) found e.g. that education was positively associated with environmental action (walking instead of driving) but these results could not be confirmed by Mainieri et al. (1997). Taking a holistic view, most of the studies that examined the relationship between level of education and environmental action or concern found a positive link between the pair (Roberts, 1996; Van Liere and Dunlap, 1981; Zimmer et al.). Yet, Samdhal and Robertson (1989) discovered a negative association between education and environmental attitudes, while Kinnear et al. (1974) found no considerable correlation. Although the study results of the link between education and environmental aspects have been more consistent than those of the aforementioned demographic variables, "a definitive relationship between the two variables has not been established" (Straughan and Roberts, 1999, p.561).

**INCOME:** The other socioeconomic variable 'income' was also heavily inspected. In most cases, researchers believe that income is positively related to environmental sensitivity, as people with higher incomes are able to afford the higher costs that are usually associated with ecologically friendly products and services. Several studies have confirmed this hypothesis (Kinnear et al., 1974; McEvoy, 1972; Zimmer et al., 1994). Though, other researchers found a negative relationship between income and environmental behavior or concern (Roberts, 1996; Samdahl and Robertson, 1989) and e.g. Van Liere and Dunlap (1981) have found no significant effect at all. In addition to that, Roberts (1996) also theorizes that earlier research results which have shown a positive link between income and environmental concern may not be up-to-date anymore, as there has been enormous growth in environmental awareness across all income levels, which is also in line with the aforesaid argument by the author of this paper that 'green' has become mainstream.

#### **GEOGRAPHIC SEGMENTATION**

Another type of segmentation approach that academics have also considered in the past is geographic segmentation. Several studies investigated if the variable 'place of residence' was connected to environmental attitudes and behavior. For these studies, results have been fairly consistent as most researchers found that there was a positive correlation between the two items (McEvoy, 1972; Samdahl and Robertson, 1989; Van Liere and Dunlap, 1981; Zimmer et al., 1994). The findings suggested that consumers living in urban areas were more likely to hold positive attitudes towards environmental matters. Only a study by Hounshell and Liggett (1973) found no connection between place of residence and ecological concern. Theoretically though, it could be argued that people living in rural areas might feel a closer connection with the environment and hence might also be likely to be more concerned with environmental issues. Another alternative, which would be in line with the reasoning in this study, might be that no considerable differences concerning place of residence among green and non-green consumers will be found anymore, as ecological awareness and concern have affected the wide masses regardless of geographical habitation. Hitherto it can be noted that demographic as well as socioeconomic and geographic segmentation have not delivered conclusive results. Neither of the approaches provided a convincing characteristic summary of the green consumer. Especially the effectiveness of demographic and socioeconomic variables has been questioned by many researchers (e.g. Ottman, 2009; Shrum et al., 1995; Straughan and Roberts, 1999). So the aforementioned profile of the 'typical green consumer' cannot be verified.

#### **PSYCHOGRAPHIC SEGMENTATION**

The inconclusive results of the preceding segmentation approaches have led several academics to believe that psychographic segmentation is a more appropriate tool to define the green consumer market (e.g. Ottman, 2009; Straughan and Roberts, 1999). Ottman (2009, p.3) maintains for instance that "the green consumer is really a psychographic rather than a demographic". This means that consumers are segmented according to their lifestyle, values and personality (Belch and Belch, 2003).

**POLITICAL ORIENTATION:** One factor that has been examined is 'political orientation'. It was generally assumed that consumers with liberal political beliefs are more likely to exhibit environmental attitudes and behaviors than conservative consumers (e.g. Van Liere and Dunlap, 1980). This assumption was confirmed by Roberts (1996, p.226), who found that "liberals are more prone to act in an ecologically conscious manner". While this assumption probably still holds today, as is evident in such liberal political parties like Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, also more conservative parties like e.g. the CDU in Germany, nowadays promote the protection of the environment as essential elements in their political programs (CDU, 2009). This again constitutes another substantiation of the widespread green development among consumers.

**ALTRUISM:** Another variable that is supposed to influence ecologically conscious consumer behavior (ECCB) is 'altruism'. Stern et al. (1993) introduced the concept of social- and biospheric altruism versus egoism. Social-altruism constitutes the need to ensure the well-being of others, while biospheric altruism is the regard for all non-human aspects of the environment. Although all three constructs had a significant influence on the 'willingness to take political action', they showed no predictive power concerning 'willingness to pay higher gasoline taxes'. The factor altruism has also been further explored by Straughan and Roberts (1999, p.568) who discovered that altruism was one of the strongest predictor variables in their model. Hence, they conclude that companies must not fail to communicate the "link between their environmental strategies and beneficial outcomes", while at the same time sufficiently displaying how others benefit as a consequence.

**PERCEIVED CONSUMER EFFECTIVENESS**

In addition, 'perceived consumer effectiveness' (PCE) has also been examined by a number of researchers (Berger and Corbin, 1992; Kinnear et al., 1974; Roberts, 1996; Straughan and Roberts, 1999; Weiner and Doescher, 1991). According to Straughan and Roberts (1999, p.562) PCE is "the premise that consumers' attitudes and responses to environmental appeals are a function of their belief that individuals can positively influence the outcome to such problems". The construct of PCE is also closely related to the concept of the 'locus of control'. According to do Paco et al. (2009, p.20), the locus of control "describes the extent to which the individual perceives that a reward or improvement depends on his behavior". Generally, it has been established that PCE does have a significant positive influence on ECCB. Especially, Roberts (1996) and Straughan and Roberts (1999) have observed that PCE was in both their studies the strongest predictor variable. They also note that this has important implications for marketers who must ensure that consumers will be informed on how they are contributing in preserving the environment by buying green. PCE as well as the locus of control, illustrate a situation in which the consumer is motivated by the conviction that he/she can make a difference by engaging in environmentally friendly behavior.

**THE NATURAL MARKETING INSTITUTE'S SEGMENTATION**

**NMI**, a leading business consultant and marketing research firm, has also been segmenting green consumers since the 1990s. NMI tracks more than 100 different driving forces of consumer behavior and divides them into five categories.

The "**LOHAS**" (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability) group (16%) is very progressive on environment and society issues. This group constantly looks for ways to do more and is not affected by premium pricing.

The "**Naturalites**" (25%) use many natural products for personal health and well-being. They are interested in doing more to protect the environment but concentrate on their health first.

The "**Conventionals**" (23%) are interested in supporting environmental issues to the extent that results can be measured. They want a cost effective way to take care of the issues that will sustain.

The "**Drifters**" (23%) are not overly concerned about the environment. The "Drifters" admit there are issues but feel there is plenty of time to handle the problems. Although they do not make many green purchases, they do like to maintain a socially acceptable image. Therefore, if this group happens to be involved in green purchasing it may be for social acceptance.

The "**Unconcerned**" (14%) are the least involved in environmental issues. They are not interested in knowing about green products and make purchases primarily based on price, value, quality, and convenience.

**THE ROPER ORGANISATION'S GREEN GAUGE STUDY**

This study conducted for 1993 described five categories of green consumers. Three of these categories describe environmentally active consumer segments and the other two describe inactive segments. All of these segments defined differ in terms of behaviors, attitudes and demographics.

The "**true-blue greens**" are the most environmentally aware and show high levels of behavioral change in their purchase, consumption and disposal patterns.

The "**green-back greens**" are also inherently committed to making green decisions, but are not quite as far along as the true-blue greens.

The "**sprout**" segments have acknowledged the need for change and are just beginning to adjust their behaviors.

The "**grouzers**" believe it is the companies' responsibility to make environmentally responsible decisions.

And finally, the "**basic browns**" don't think that they can make a difference or they just do not care (Iyer 1993).

The Roper report examines the stewardship potential of aiming environmental education programs more effectively at sizable and highly influential target segments of U.S. community leaders. The largest of these segments ((20%) of adults) are Roper Environmental Information Seekers. Some 35% of this segment is likely to perform pro-environmental behaviors, compared to 23% of the general public. Another, smaller segment (10%) called the Roper True Blue Greens is a significant segment that "walks" the environmental "talk." As would be expected, this segment shows high levels of pro-environmental behaviors. Importantly, this segment has a nearly one-half overlap with the Influential Americans segment (also 10%). But they may have even more in common when it comes to environmental education and stewardship. This indicates that Influential Americans (i.e., those with the financial prowess to make a difference) could possibly be associated with those same segments that are environmentally active (Coyle, 2004).

**HARTMAN GROUP'S STUDY**

There are also other green consumer segmentations published by the Hartman Group, which is a Seattle-based market research firm who has been tracking green consumer behavior since the 1980s. The Hartman Report on Sustainability categorizes five different green consumer groups.

The "**Radical Engagement**" group (36%) feels that our future will fall apart if we do not band together and radically change our behaviors.

The "**Sustained Optimism**" (27%) believes rationale intelligence can be used to sustain a promising future.

The "**Divine Faith**" (20%) feels God will take care of all of our needs.

The "**Cynical Pessimism**" (9%) thinks we cannot save ourselves, much less the planet.

And the "**Pragmatic Acceptance**" (8%) feel they have no control over environmental issues therefore they are not inclined to be concerned about environmental problems (The Hartman Group, 2007).

**OTTOMAN J. SUBSEGMENTS (2009)**

According to Jacquelyn Ottman *president*, J. Ottman Consulting, a *green marketing consultancy* there are four green sub segments "Resource Conservers", "Health Fanatics", "Animal Lovers" and "Outdoor Enthusiasts" Ottman, J. (2009).

**Resource Conservers** hate waste. Spot them wearing classically styled clothing, toting cloth shopping bags and sipping from reusable water bottles. Avid recyclers of milk jugs and Tide bottles, they drop off old electronics at Best Buy. Ever watchful of saving their "drops" and "watts," they install low-flow showerheads and compact fluorescent bulbs branded with EPA's Energy Star labels. Shunning over-packaged products, they only turn on the lights when they have to, and they plug their appliances into power strips for easy shut-off when they leave for work.

**Health Fanatics** worry about overexposure to the sun, fear pesticide residues on produce, and fret over contaminants in children's toys. They apply sunscreen, scout out natural-food stores for the latest in organic foods, buy only natural cosmetics and pet care, and have switched out the toxic cleaning products for the non-toxic ones under the sink. They look for products marked with the "USDA Organic" seal of approval or EPA's Design for Environment logo.

**Animal Lovers** are likely to be vegetarian or vegan, belong to People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), and boycott tuna and products with real fur. They seek out synthetic handbags and faux fur jackets, and favor the faux-meat options at restaurants. They perk up to news stories featuring animals in need, from manatees and polar bears to strays in their neighborhood, and are likely to volunteer at the local animal shelter. Out of concern for marine life, they eschew plastic bags.

**Outdoor Enthusiasts** spend their free time camping, rock climbing, skiing, and hiking. They vacation in national parks and plan their next adventure using tips from *Outdoors Magazine*. they seek to minimize the impact of their recreational activities. When shopping, they look for FSC (sustainably harvested) labels on their products, are also likely to purchase outdoor gear made from recycled materials

**RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

We find that, traditional segmentation approaches such as demographic, socioeconomic as well geographic segmentation are not ideal in characterizing the green consumer market. Some research finds little to no connection between demographic characteristics and environmental behaviors and attitudes. Although income, age, education etc., work well to target consumers in some markets, green consumer targeting seems to be quite different (Shrum, McCarty, & Lowrey, 1995). So, profiling according to variables such as 'age' or 'income', despite their popularity among marketers, should not be first choice when trying to understand and learn more about the green consumer market.

However, some studies find psychographic variables to have more differentiating power (Levin, 1990). Though going green is resonating with many consumers the intensity level of these reactions is driven by differing variables, in particular, lifestyle. According to the findings of Natural Marketing Research Institute, the Roper Organization's Green Gauge Study and the studies by Hartman Group, psychographic segmentation seems to be more appropriate given that these

studies have delivered results with a higher explanatory power. Consequently, it has been recommended by academics such as Straughan and Roberts (1999) that future research should preferably focus on extending results in the psychographic segmentation field. However, defining the green consumer in terms of psychographic segmentation also appears to be naïve and seems to deliver only part of the truth.

## CONCLUSIONS

Thus, it can be summarized that the above segmentation attempts have delivered very mixed and inconclusive results. Other insights into the green consumer nature must also be included, when analyzing and trying to find an appeal to the ecological conscious consumer. Green products and campaigns can be an effective marketing tool when attracting customers; however, different segments of green consumers may react differently to these products and messages. Untapped theories must be investigated when it comes to learning more about the ecological consumer.

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