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Measuring Consumer Brand Perception for Green Apparel Brands

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ABSTRACT

This research article examines how green consumers form perceptions about green brands by creating a frame of reference for such consumers in the apparel category. A research instrument was developed to measure consumer brand perception towards green apparel brands and a survey was conducted on 317 fashion students at undergraduate and post-graduate levels. These students were consumers of green apparels. Factor analysis was used to identify factors that contribute towards green consumer perception and these factors were further grouped into cognitive, affective and behavioral components. This study will enable managers to make a more informed decision in policy formulation in order to improve consumer brand perception towards green apparel brands.

KEYWORDS

Apparel, Brands, Consumer Behavior, Consumer Perception, Green Consumers

1. INTRODUCTION

With the growing environment degradation, global warming, depletion of the ozone layer, air and water pollution, people around the world have become very concerned about the deteriorating situation. About 51% of people believe that their way of life will worsen within their lifetime, due to global warming (National Geographic & Globescan, 2014). This has resulted in increased concerns about preserving the environment and shifting towards consuming environmentally friendly products by consumers around the globe (Doyle, 1992; Vandermerwe & Oliff, 1990).

The global market for the environmentally friendly apparel is only one percent (approximately) of the over-all apparel market (Lipson, 2008). However, with greater knowledge of environmental issues, an increasing number of environment friendly apparel brands are sprouting in the retail market. Due to increased media attention and growing consumer awareness towards societal issues, particularly to the apparel and textile industry, this market is expected to grow manifold (Lipson, 2008).

This ushers in dual opportunities for marketing-(i) sensitizing a large population to the benefits of adopting green brands and (ii) creating a significant brand value for the green brands.

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The customer-based brand equity pyramid (Keller, 2001) clearly states that the challenge for marketers is in building strong brand equity. Organizations can achieve strong brand equity by shaping appropriate consumer experiences towards products and services, so that the required thoughts, beliefs, feelings and perceptions are generated in the consumer minds and marketers can elicit the right brand responses.

This manuscript focuses on identifying specific characteristics of green apparel brands and significant characteristics of green consumers and attempts to measure Consumer Brand perception for Green apparel brands. This research paper focuses on formulating a research instrument which can be used by green apparel brands for analyzing consumer perception towards their brands. The subsequent outcomes of this analysis can serve as a basis for policy makers to create strategies to improve consumer brand perception towards green apparel brands.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Green Brands

Green as a term in apparels mostly refers to the environmentally friendly methods of processing and consumption of textile (Phau & Ong, 2007). Based on the research contributions of Bhatia & Jain (2013) and Cervellon, Hjerth and Ricard (2010) we can list generally accepted common attributes of green apparel. An apparel brand can be termed as green if it is / has been:

1. Manufactured using environmentally friendly processes such as:
   a. Water efficient (both in manufacturing and in use);
   b. Energy efficient (both in manufacturing and in use);
2. Recyclable and /or with recycled content including vintage clothing (can also be termed as reused);
3. Locally produced;
4. Consists of organic fabrics, sustainable materials (e.g. bamboo, hemp) and non-textiles (e.g. recycled plastic bottles), etc.;
5. Durable (long-lasting).

This creates an interesting opportunity for us to research the domain of green apparel brands and study issues pertaining to consumer adoption of these brands. Consumers' environmental concerns and the green apparel brands' functional attributes (Joshi & Rahman, 2015) have emerged as the main causes of green consumer purchase behavior. It will be interesting to study how brands can shape consumer perceptions in the domain of apparel brands.

We proceed to evaluate the characteristics of a 'green' consumer and explore the factors that shape consumer perception for this category of consumers. It will further be interesting to study how organizations can shape the perceptions of the 'green' consumers.

A green consumer is one, (i) who spends money on purchase of green products; (ii) avoids any products which may cause environmental harm (at the time of manufacture or usage); (iii) consume huge amounts of non-renewable energy; (iv) cause harm to any living organism or involve questionable testing on humans or animals (Elkington, 1994). Green consumerism indicates a type of consumer behavior with social consciousness and prime focus on environmental protection (Antil, 1984). It is also referred to as "pro-social" consumer behavior (Weiner & Doescher, 1991).Some of the factors that significantly influence consumers into purchasing green products are, (i) large amounts of information available due to extensive research and consumer awareness; (ii) increased concern about the environment; (iii) green advertising by organizations; and (iv) increase in popularity by environmental and social charities.

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