Key Strategies for Green Marketing Success

استراتيجيات أساسية لنجاح التسويق الأخضر

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الملخص

يهدف التسويق الأخضر أو البيئي إلى تقديم المنتجات التي تلبي رغبات واحتياجات الزبائن مع الحد من التأثير الضار على البيئة الطبيعية. وقد برز هذا المفهوم في أواخر الثمانينيات وأوائل التسعينيات، ليعرف انتشارا متسارعا في أنحاء العالم، حيث تزايد وعي الشركات بالقضايا البيئية وتركز اهتمامها على المنتجات الخضراء.

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تقديم بعض الاستراتيجيات للتأثير على المستهلكين لتبني سلوك أخضر والتحول نحو المنتجات الصديقة للبيئة أو المنتجات الخضراء.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التسويق الأخضر، البيئة، المنتجات الخضراء، المستهلك الأخضر، الاستراتيجيات

Abstract

Green or environmental marketing refers to selling products that satisfy customers' wants and needs with minimal detrimental impact on the natural environment. It came into prominence in the late 1980s and early 1990s, then it has been expanding rapidly in the world, as companies are increasingly aware about the environment and focusing on green products.

The aim of this paper is to present strategies to influence consumers to adopt a green behaviour and shift toward environmental friendly or green products.

Key words

Green Marketing, Environment, Green products, Green Consumer, strategies.





Introduction

The green movement is growing rapidly, and consumers are becoming more enlightened on environmental issues, and increasingly concerned about the environmental impacts of the products they buy as well. Many companies understood their responsibility to be environmental friendly and have started using green marketing as a tool to achieve their objective of profitability notably through the development of more environmentally friendly or green products.

However, in spite of the consumers awareness about the products, many studies showed that they are not are willing to pay a lot for buying eco-friendly or green products. Thus, companies must implement marketing strategies to change consumers' behaviour and encourage green purchase.

This paper examined how can companies influence consumers to adopt green behaviour and shift toward environmentally friendly or green products?

To answer the previous question, the remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 1. Presents a brief description of the concept of green marketing. Section 2. Defines the green consumer and describes the most relevant characteristics of green consumers in terms of their environmental behaviour. Section 3. Discusses the strategies for green marketing and the last section presents some conclusions.

1. Green Marketing:

1.1. The concept of Green Marketing:

Much of the research into environmental responsibility was in fact undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s, when few consumers made a serious assessment of the impact of products on the environment. There were few green products available during this period, and many studies on environmental responsibility focused on other issues, such as energy conservation and political activitism. Studies on consumer behaviour have also appeared with greater frequency in recent years ¹.

The 1990s have been identified as the "decade of the environment", or as the "Earth decade". During this decade, social and environmental concerns took a greater importance for consumer purchasing decisions. It can therefore be said that environmental concerns and the consumer demand for green products were driving forces behind the resurgence of green marketing. The aim of which is to achieve a balance between the objectives of sales and profit, on the one hand, and a concern for society and the environment, on the other hand. At the same time, firms seeking to remain competitive and to survive in the market began to incorporate these newly emerging concerns in their management and marketing decision making ².

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In fact, many companies understood their responsibility to be environmental friendly in order to achieve their objective of profitability through achieving environmental objectives. They have started using green marketing as a tool to tackle the issue. Under the concept of green marketing, the companies produce commodities to meet the health issues, neighborhood amenity and climate change. Moreover, government framed legalizations and initiatives requiring the companies to adopt green marketing. The nature of innovative technologies and approaches of dealing with pollution, improved resource and energy efficiency and need to retain existing customers, the companies are urged to adopt green marketing³.

Green marketing refers to the process of selling products and/or services based on their environmental benefits. Such a product or service may be environmentally friendly in it or produced and/or packaged in an environmentally friendly way. The obvious assumption of green marketing is that potential consumers will view a product or service's "greenness" as a benefit and base their buying decision accordingly⁴.

According to Polonsky, green or environmental marketing consists of all activities designed to generate and facilitate any exchanges intended to satisfy human needs or wants, such that the satisfaction of these needs and wants occurs, with minimal detrimental impact on the natural environment⁵. Thus, green marketing can be defined as the holistic management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying the needs of customers and society in a profitable and sustainable way⁶.

1.2. Importance of Green Marketing:

Companies who adopt green marketing strategies enjoy several advantages, including7:

New markets: There are a group of socially conscious consumers who prefer green products. They are even willing to pay more for sustainable products to protect their environment. Paying attention to those customers and tapping into the new market can increase your revenue.

Brand loyalty: Companies that show commitment to environmental conservation receive a lot of credit from the consumers. Loyalty increases the business market share and income significantly.

Promoting the image of the company: Environmental sustainability is becoming crucial in many aspects of our lives. Therefore, a company that promotes eco-friendly practices gains trust from the public. It shows the companies commitment to taking care of the environment.

Reduced expenses: Implementing green marketing is expensive in the short-term. However, after the initial investment, green marketing can lower the costs of the company. The reduction of waste and the use of resources conservatively save the organisation a lot of money.

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2. Understanding Green Consumers:

2.1. Who are green consumers?

Green consumers are those who are increasingly aware and concerned about the environmental issues⁸. They can be described as consumers who response to green marketing and have eco-friendly lifestyle⁹. Generally a green consumer is a person who adopts environmentally-friendly behaviours and/or who purchases green products over the standard alternatives¹⁰. As defined by Peattie (2001), a green consumer is someone who voluntarily engages in consumer practices that are regarded as environmentally friendly by marketing academics and practitioners¹¹.

Laroche et al. However, define green consumers as the group of people who demand to purchase products, which have a higher potential of improving not only their individual health, but also has little or no risk of harming the environment. Accordingly, their demand for products is based on four principles namely: (1) Environmental thrift; (2) Regionality; (3) Joint Utilisation; and (4) Durability¹².

In regard to environmental thrift, the green consumers shop for products that use nature sparingly. Regionality on the other hand refers to products made locally, thus meaning that the consumers consider the distance covered by the distribution channels. This is intended to reduce the use of fuels used in product distribution. The consumers also use this principle in order to reduce their own length of travel. The joint utilisation feature seeks to reduce the impact that human activities have on the environment, while durability means that the consumer seeks to purchase products that won't wear off easily thus preventing repurchase of the same kind of product and hence increased production of the same by the manufacturers¹³.

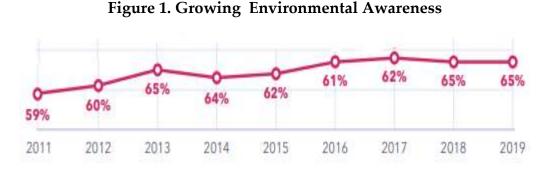
Common attitudes and beliefs of green consumers as described by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)¹⁴ are as follows¹⁵:

- Commitment to green lifestyles
- Critical of their own environmental practices and impact _
- Looking for companies that incorporate green practices -
- Overstate their green behavior
- Want environmental protection to be easy
- Tend to distrust companies environmental claims
- Lack knowledge about environmental issues, but eager to learn





According to GlobalWebIndex's online research (carried out among 575,000 internet users aged 16-64), the number of consumers who would pay more for sustainable and ecofriendly products has risen from 59% in 2011 to 65% in 2019¹⁶.



Source: Adapted from: Globalwebindex, Corporate Social Responsibility, Examining the role of CSR in today's conscious consumerist landscape, Insight Report 2019, p. 6.

Researchers have used geographic, demographic, psychological and behavioural variables to classify and identify different profiles of green consumers. The IISD offers some broad generalizations regarding the demographic characteristics of green consumers¹⁷:

- Many are young adults, influenced by their young children.
- Women are a key target market. They often make purchases on behalf of men.

The best green customers are those with money to spend (good prospects for businesses at the high end of the market).

Consumers born before 1950 are the least green.

Consumers want to act green, but they expect businesses to lead the way¹⁸. Today's population is increasingly becoming aware of the damage consumer footprints are having on the environment and society as a whole. From ethical shopping and healthier eating habits, to supporting charities and giving back to the community, conscious consumerism is now mainstream. Consumers are increasingly changing their lifestyles to minimize their personal impact, but they're demanding this from brands in return as well¹⁹.

GlobalWebIndex's survey conducted in 2018 showed that the consumers in the UK and U.S. admitted they felt most responsible for the future of the planet, but 52% believed responsibility lies with manufacturers or production bodies²⁰.

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Figure 2. Where does the responsibility lie?

% who say the following people/bodies are most responsible for the future of the environment

Individuals/consumers	70%
Manufacturers/production bodies	52%
National government	50%
Local government	41%
Local communities	37%
International regulatory bodies	34%
Brands/advertising insititutions	33%
Influencers/celebrities	19%

Source: https://blog.globalwebindex.com/chart-of-the-week/green-consumerism/

2.2. Types of Green Consumers:

It is important for companies to understand these types of consumers in order to brand their products accordingly²¹.

Behavorial Green Consumers: These are green to the core consumers who buy only products which have a neutral or positive impact on the planet, and will go far as to spread the word about products - both positively are negatively. A great consumer to have on your side, not so good if they are against you.

Think Green Consumers: Consumers in this group try to act green when they can, but if it is not convenient or doesn't' fit some other personal criteria, such as budget, they will buy a non-green product.

Potential Green Consumers: Basically on the fence about whether they care enough about green issues, these consumers can be encouraged to buy green products, as long as it is easy and fills there need.

True Brown Consumers: These consumers generally ignore environmental issues, and may go as far as to avoid companies who market their product with a heavy green focus.

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3. Strategies to build consumer trust and encourage green purchase:

Companies must help consumers change their behaviors, and that requires removing the hurdles between green thoughts and green acts. Reseachers have identified a number of actions for companies to consider to encourage green consumption;

3.1. Educate Consumers and Shape Good Habits:

Humans are creatures of habit. Many behaviors, such as how we commute to work, what we buy, what we eat, and how we dispose of products and packaging, are part of our regular routines. Often the key to spreading sustainable consumer behaviors is to first break bad habits and then encourage good ones²².

Because consumers are largely unaware of green alternatives, businesses first need to think of themselves as educators, not salespeople. And they must expand their lesson plans beyond their own products to the larger issues of pollution, climate change, overfishing, and other environmental problems. And nonprofits and government agencies also need to take up the cause of green education²³.

Consumers want to line up their shopping choices with their green values, and they applaud marketers' efforts to provide the information they need to make informed purchasing decisions as well as to use and dispose of the products responsibly. Especially effective are emotion-laden messages that help consumers aquire a sense of control over their lives and their world. For adavertisers that make the effort to teach, educational messages represent social opportunites to boost purchase intent, enhance imagery and bolster credibility. So demonstrate how environmentally superior products and services can help consumers safeguard their health, preserve the environment for their grandkids, or protect the outdoors for recreation and wildlife. Make environmental benefits tangible through compelling illustrations and statistics and make consumers feel as if their choices make a difference²⁴.

Companies can use design features to eliminate negative habits and substitute positive ones. The simplest and probably most effective approach is to make sustainable behavior the default option. For example, researchers in Germany discovered that when green electricity was set as the default option in residential buildings, 94% of individuals stuck with it²⁵.

Procter & Gamble Co.'s (P&G) "Future Friendly" campaign teaches consumers how they can have a positive impact on the environment by making their homes more energy efficient, using less water, and reducing the amount of household waste. Specific tips include washing clothes in cold water and drying them in the air rather than in a dryer. P&G benefits because it refreshes its brand, enhances its reputation, and protects its market share from new environmentally friendly competitors²⁶.

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3.2. Be Honest:

Environmental marketing claims are often vague and confusing. Many companies tend to exaggerate the environmental benefits of using their products. Some companies may also mislead consumers about the biodegradability and recyclability of their products²⁷. Greenwashing occurs when products are promoted as being more environmentally friendly than they really are. As green products gain in popularity, companies are increasingly selling products that they claim to be "green" 28.

To rebuild public trust, companies must inform the public about their true environmental impact, as well as about their attempts to reduce that impact. Many will need to identify and address specific historical concerns about their products or operations. Only then will consumers believe the company's Earth-sparing claims²⁹. In fact, companies should provide access to the details of products and corporate practices and actively report on progress, as well as avoid hiding bad news. Consumers get angry when they suspect that companies have hidden information³⁰.

Telling consumers they should act green when the company itself is making little effort to improve its own operations is asking for a backlash. The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), a U.K. watchdog, received a fourfold increase in complaints about environmental claims in advertisements in 2007.³ One offender, according to ASA, was the low-price airline Ryanair Ltd., which promoted itself as the industry leader in environmental efficiency. In 2007, however, the airline received significant negative press when CEO Michael O'Leary confessed that his claim that the airline had cut emissions of carbon dioxide by half over the past five years was an "error" ³¹.

3.3. Avoid the Green Hype:

People are more likely to engage in a behavior when they derive positive feelings from doing so. This core precept is often overlooked when it comes to sustainability, for which ad campaigns are likely to emphasize disturbing warnings³². Too many companies plaster 'green' all over their marketing campaigns only to find that they turn consumers off. Not every company can be green, and consumers know that. However, you can do what you can to reduce your impact on the environment, such as carbon offsetting, reducing paper waste, or promote green charities through your website. That's something worth noting to the public³³.

With environmental issues a threat to health above all else, the number one reason why consumers buy greener products is not to "save the planet" (wich isn't in danger of going away anytime soon) but to protect their own health. So it is important to make sure that superior delivery of primary benefits are underscored in design and marketing. Focus too heavily on environmental benefits at the expense of primary benefits like saving money or getting the clothes green, and expect your brand to wind up in the green graveyard, buried in good intentions.

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Underscoring the primary reasons why consumers purchase your brand sometimes referred to as "quiet green" – can broaden the appeal of your greener products and services way beyond te niche of deepest green consumers and help overcome a premium price hurdle. Demonstrate how consumers can protect their health, save money, or keep their home and community safe and green. Show buzy consumers how some environmentally inclined behaviors can save time and effort ³⁴.

3.4. Bring Products to the People:

Low availability is considered as a barrier to marketing green products³⁵. Companies cannot sell their products if consumers cannot find them. It sounds obvious, but many of today's green products are not widely available. Even finding out how to get them is difficult. Wal-Mart and GE have helped make CFLs a successful consumer product by making it easy for consumers to buy them. Wal-Mart put the bulbs in the most coveted place at eye level on the top two or three shelves. An educational display from GE complements the attractive shelf placement³⁶.

There has seemingly never been a better time to launch a sustainable offering. Consumers "particularly Millennials" increasingly say they want brands that embrace purpose and sustainability. Indeed, one recent report revealed that certain categories of products with sustainability claims showed twice the growth of their traditional counterparts. Yet a frustrating paradox remains at the heart of green business: Few consumers who report positive attitudes toward eco-friendly products and services follow through with their wallets. In one recent survey 65% said they want to buy purpose-driven brands that advocate sustainability, yet only about 26% actually do so³⁷.

3.5. Build Better Products:

Consumers often have negative associations with sustainable product options, viewing them as being of lower quality, less aesthetically pleasing, and more expensive³⁸. Moreover, it has been observed that when consumers are forced to cut back on spending, green products are the first to go³⁹. To improve consumers opinions of green products, companies must create ones that are equal to, or better than, conventional alternatives. Consumers still value performance, reliability, and durability much more than a product's ecological soundness. Indeed, to overcome their image problem, green products must often outperform their traditional counterparts⁴⁰. Furthermore, to increase sales of green products, companies must make sure that consumers understand the returns - both financial and environmental - on their investment. When consumers find it easy to track their savings from using a product, they are more willing to try new green products especially those that cost more. They also feel more confident about their eco-friendly purchases when they understand how the products help the environment⁴¹.

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GE managed to do this with the CFLs. The first CFLs cost a lot more, and were harder to find than conventional bulbs. Now, they pay for themselves in five months, and are readily available. Wal-Mart has committed to sell 100 million CFLs in 2008 and displays them prominently on its shelves. CFLs piggybacked on Energy Star's success with the "Change a Light, Change the World" campaign. This effort increased awareness of CFLs and resulted in 500,000 pledges to replace a traditional light bulb with an Energy Star CFL. Toyota likewise had to tackle early perceptions that the Prius had less power than non-hybrid cars. Toyota did this by redesigning the Prius to meet performance and style preferences of consumers. The carmaker increased the horsepower and conducted a campaign promoting the vehicle as "quick, roomy, and economical" 42.

Furthermore, people's tendency to prefer avoiding losses over making equivalent gains can help marketers frame choices by communicating what's at stake. Messages that communicate the concrete effects of sustainable consumer behavior change in other ways can also be effective. For example, 4ocean lets consumers know that for every upcycled bracelet they buy from the company, one pound of trash will be removed from the ocean⁴³.

3.6. Use Social Influence:

Harnessing the power of social influence is one of the most effective ways to elicit pro-environmental behaviors in consumption as well. Telling online shoppers that other people were buying eco-friendly products led to a 65% increase in making at least one sustainable purchase. Telling buffet diners that the norm was to not take too much at once (and that it was OK to return for seconds) decreased food waste by 20.5%. A major predictor of whether people will install solar panels is whether their close-by neighbors have done so. And, in perhaps the most dramatic finding, telling university students that other commuters were ditching their cars in favor of more sustainable modes of transportation (such as cycling) led them to use sustainable transport five times as often as did those who were simply given information about alternatives⁴⁴.

Social influence can be turbocharged in three ways⁴⁵.

The first is by simply making sustainable behaviors more evident to others. The city of Halifax, Nova Scotia, found that when residents were required to put their household waste in clear bags, thus making the contents of their trash (which often included items that should have been recycled or composted) visible to the neighbors, the amount of garbage that went to the landfill decreased by 31%.

A second way to increase the impact of social influence is to make people's commitments to eco-friendly behavior public. For example, a study aimed at reducing vehicle idle time when children were being picked up at school asked some parents to display a window sticker reading "For Our Air: I Turn My Engine Off When Parked." The intervention resulted in a 73% decrease in idling time.

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A third approach is to use healthy competition between social groups. In one example, communicating that another group of students was behaving in a positively viewed way made business students more than twice as likely to compost their biodegradable coffee cups.

We point out that companies must listen to their customers. In other words, using social media not only to promote products, but to get feedback from new and regular consumers on how they improve products to give them a more "green" approach⁴⁶.

It should be noted that businesses alone cannot lead consumers from intention to action. In many instances, the government and the civil sector need to be heavily involved to achieve long-lasting changes in consumer behavior. Nevertheless, businesses should play a leading role in the green movement in order to shape their market opportunities and manage potential regulation of their industries⁴⁷.

Conclusion:

The rising environmental challenges have led companies to adopt green marketing in order to retain customers, remain competitive and to survive in the market, as consumers today are becoming more aware of environmental impact of the products they buy. However, it has been observed that there is a difference between consumers intention toward buying green products and action, therefore, companies must implement marketing strategies to help consumers change their behaviors and encourage green consumption.

First of all, Companies should strive to eliminate negative habits and encourage positive ones, and focus on primary benefits from purchasing green products, such as: protecting conumers health and saving money instead of focusing too heavily on environmental benefits.

Furthermore, to rebuild public trust, companies must inform the public about their true environmental impact, and their attempts to reduce that impact, and avoid greenwashing and misleading consumers about the biodegradability and recyclability of their products, as well as providing access to the details of products and corporate practices.

Companies need to make it easier to people to find green products, as low availability is considered as a barrier to marketing green products.

Finally, companies should Harness the power of social influence, and must use social media not only to promote products, but to get feedback from consumers on how they improve products to give them a more "green" approach.

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