

Consumer Social Responsibility: A Paradigm Shift

Sunny Dawar

Faculty of Management & Commerce, Manipal University Jaipur, India

ABSTRACT

Consumer social responsibility is a recent concept influencing the consumer behavior. Socially responsible buying is the emerging desire of consumers to respond for the social and environmental issues. The main purpose of this study is to identify the different dimensions involved in the area of consumer social responsibility. A qualitative study was conducted using a structured questionnaire among 225 customers. The statistical technique exploratory factor analysis was used to detect the validity of the considered scale which helped to find out the different dimensions of consumers' social responsibility. The factors emerged through analysis were environmental, ethical, health, legal and cultural. These factors can be used to examine for predicting consumer behavior towards social responsibility aspect and also be utilized by the managers to develop strategies to promote products.

Keywords: Consumer social responsibility, Consumer behavior, Socially responsible buying, Social and environmental issues

1. INTRODUCTION

Consumer responsibility (CNSR) can be defined as the deliberate and conscious choice to take certain consumption decisions on the basis of moral and personal beliefs. It mainly includes two elements (i) an 'ethical' element relating to the fundamental importance of the modern and social elements of a company's products and business processes; and (ii) a 'consumerism' element which discusses the desires responsible for the increasing influence of social and ethical factors. Buying is an individual phenomenon which is influenced by various factors. There have always been a discussion on different dimensions which influence the consumer purchasing and promotion of the products. These dimensions are quality, price, availability, convenience, and sustainable production. Market has witnessed the increased concern about health, human rights and environment protection in the field of consumerism. So that research may increased in the area of consumers' social responsibility. In present scenario, it has become a need of the organizations to promote consumer social responsibility to fulfill the need of corporate social responsibility [1].

People's social responsibility for consumption is related to their values, goals and activities which can reflect environmental, legal, cultural, legal and ethical fundamentals. The consumers are more aware towards health and environmental issues which are considered by in production by the companies. Being an ethical consumer means "buying those products that are not harmful to the environment and society" [2]. The products which are produced and distributed considering sustainability, human rights, labor and environmental conditions are known as ethically acceptable [3].

The organizations are applying for corporate social responsibility (CSR) so that consumers would emotionally connect with a responsibility to use their 'purchase votes' to influence the positive social outcomes [4]. Many researchers have been limited on the fact that responsibility is a subjectively recognized trait of dominant consumers and consumers are having high level of responsibility which they can express as their preferences for the products that are manufactured for social benefits or having features of CSR, thus drawing new products and services through the 'market for virtue' to develop patterns of socially responsible production and consumption. Focus of consumer social responsibility is on those people who are concerned about the effects of their purchasing choices not only on themselves but also on external world around them [5].

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer behavior is the study of individuals, groups, organizations and process which may be oriented towards selecting, using and disposing of products or services to satisfy their needs [6]. Fundamental individual behavior is the presence of an

obvious or non-obvious attitude in each area. So that desire to act, which is an important element in people's attitude can be discussed to explain and forecast the individual behaviors. An individual intention for a particular behavior is an evidence of person's inclination for that behavior.

Social responsibility is a function of a system to interpret the reality which controls the individual's relationships with the physical and social environment, and regulates their behaviors and practices [7]. Socially conscious consumer is the consumer who thinks about impact of his personal consumption on other people and tries to bring social change [8]. Roberts [9] defined socially responsible consumer as the one who buys only those products and services which have a positive (or very less negative) effect on the environment or who supports business which can cause positive social change. The definition considers both social and environmental concerns in responsible purchasing.

Mohr, Webb and Harris [10] defined behavior of a socially responsible consumer as a person's acquisition, usage, and dispositions of products on a desire to minimize or remove any harmful effects and maximize the long run beneficial impact on society. Robert [11] developed a scale of 40 items to measure behavior of socially responsible consumers on the basis of two dimensions namely social and environmental. Consumers value specific social attributes of different products [12].

Consumers get information about the expansion of market of global products through the global media. As a result, consumers have an opportunity to get better information about products and services. This forces the organization to change the quality, range and innovativeness of the products and services which they offer and consider the social and environmental aspects while producing and marketing [13].

Webb, Mohr and Harris [14] developed a multi-dimensional socially responsible purchase and disposal scale which was based on people conceptualization for socially responsible buying behavior. The study took the dimensions like customer purchasing based on firms' CSR performance, recycling and consumption of environment friendly products. The socially responsible purchasing can be studied through eight types of behavior of consumers towards citizenship, protection of environment, recycling, composting, local consumption, animal protection, de-consumption and sustainable transportation [15].

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study has been conducted using an empirical research design to find out the factors responsible for consumer social responsible behavior. The survey was done using structured questionnaire through online mode and personal interactions in Rajasthan. The factor analysis was performed. The measures for the study were developed using the measurement scales taken from the previous studies. The measures were developed using a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The questionnaire was first used in the pilot group. The reliability of the questionnaire calculated using Cronbach's alpha was 0.858. Then, the questionnaire was circulated among 335 respondents and 225 responses were finally selected for the study. The data was analyzed using SPSS 22. At the end the scale was accepted as 35 items of questionnaire after interpretation of data collected from consumers in relation to their social responsibilities which they impart.

4. DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

The sample profile is summarized in the table 1. As shown in the table, among the 225 respondents 64.44 % were males and 35.56 % females. There were 46.67% respondents from the age group of 18-30 years, 31.11% from the age group of 31-40 years, followed by 13.33% of the age group 41-50 years and 8.89% of more than above 50 years.

Table 1: Sampling profile of respondents

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
• Male	145	64.44%
• Female	80	35.56%
Age Group		
• 18-30	105	46.67%
• 31-40	70	31.11%
• 41-50	30	13.33%
• More than 50	20	8.89%

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Exploratory factor analysis was performed on all research variables to find out the effect of variables in the research. The principal component analysis with a varimax rotation was applied to get the best fit of the data. Factor analysis was performed to find out the whether factors in study are identical to each other or not. This analysis has been used to check the possibility of grouping of different items into smaller groups. Both Kaiser- Meyer –Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test were performed. The calculated value of Bartlett's test and KMO were measured .000 and .845 respectively which show that collated data set is suitable for the factor analysis.

Table 2: Exploratory Factor Analysis

Items	Environment	Cultural	Ethical	Health	Legal
Like to buy those products which can be recycled easily	0.582				
Like to buy organic goods	0.644				
Don't buy products which are harmful for the natural resources	0.720				
Don not buy goods with unrecyclable packing	0.512				
Tries to get information about buying and consuming of products which are having harmful effects on environment	0.545				
Don't buy those products which increase environmental contaminations	0.566				
Avoid to buy goods in plastic bags	0.658				
Like to buy national products.		0.689			
Don't purchase products having animals' body parts.		0.518			
Don't buy products just because others have bought.		0.573			
Always like to buy products in the quantity which is required.		0.530			
Prefer to buy goods from small and local stores.		0.615			
Consider the effect of our buying on others countries.		0.623			
Buy goods from stores closer to home or workplace.		0.634			
Don't buy goods only due to low price which are not required		0.545			
Always prefer to make a list of goods before buying		0.564			
Like to buy goods of those companies which provide enough information.		0.512			
Buy products of those companies which provide good working conditions to their employees			0.623		
Buy products of those firms which consider effects of their working on environment and society			0.587		

Purchase goods of those companies which are involved in charity work			0.523		
Buy products of those companies which employ people with special inabilities.			0.653		
Like to buy goods from industries which are in danger of survival			0.670		
Don't buy counterfeit products				0.655	
Do not like to buy goods which are having negative health consequences				0.756	
Don't like to buy goods produced with artificial and additives colors				0.720	
Don't buy goods whose health issues have not been observed in their production				0.560	
Buy products which carry standard signs				0.532	
Submit complaints about the performance of companies to concerned authorities.				0.725	
Provide information about harmful effects of products to others.				0.657	
Focus to buy products formed by constructive combinations of each product				0.755	
Avoid to buy goods which may create harmful effects on others				0.780	
Maintains relation with stores to inform them about harmful effects of products				0.675	
Don't buy goods which are illegal					0.780
Don't buy goods which are smuggled.					0.725
Keep in mind the damages caused due to counterfeit goods.					0.685

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Adoption of a positive attitude can motivate consumers to move towards for the fulfillment of consumer social responsibilities. On the basis of exploratory factor analysis, it can be said that consumer social responsibility is made of five dimensions which include:

1. Environmental Dimension: It includes 7 items which is a combination of different environmental factors. Consumers give attention to the environmental aspects while they make purchase decisions. Consumers prefer those items which can be recycled and do not have harmful effects on environment.
2. Cultural Dimension: This dimension includes 10 factors which gets oriented through social, economic and cultural development towards consumer's social responsibility. The consumers like to buy those items which are considered good as per the cultural dimensions.
3. Ethical Dimension: This includes 5 factors which focus on charity issue, employment of people with special inabilities and dealing with work environment in industry.
4. Health Dimension: This dimension includes 10 factors which have direct or indirect relations with respect to impact of industrial activities on community and consumer's health.
5. Legal Dimension: This dimension consists of 3 factors that are related to work as per the legal framework prevailing in the society. Involvement of firms in legal framework helps them to attract consumers for the purchase of their products.

The results of research indicated that consumers consider environmental, cultural, ethical, health and legal factors during their buying. Hence managers should develop those strategies at all level of production and promotion in consideration of these factors so as to gain consumer's trust.

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