Imperative for Green Marketing in India: 
A Conceptual Research of Beliefs and Attitudes of Business Students

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Abstract

Environmental concern has increased over the last decades among marketers, who take a green approach from strategic compulsions. There is a gap in the literature on the greening of marketing in India. Moreover, research is largely silent on environmental concern of future business and marketing managers, namely business students. This conceptual research aims at filling the gap, and focusing on the green imperative for marketing in India. A review of current literature is presented, and a proposal to conduct a survey among business students is developed, and research propositions are presented. In addition, research design, limitations, directions for future research, and the usefulness of this research are highlighted.

Key words: Consumer Behavior, Attitudes, Environment, India, Cultural Studies, Marketing Education, Business Education.

I. Introduction

In recent decades, there have been increasing concerns relating to the environment (Bhuian, Joonas and Ruiz 2007; Egri and Herman 2000; Polonsky 2011). As a result, consumers, marketers, not-for profits, as well as governments approach the environment as a strategic consideration (e.g. Miles and Colvin 2000). Further, concern for the environment is reflected in regional trade organizations (e.g. Sanchez 2002), whose growth is matched with greater influence of business and marketing managers, and lower involvement of green non-governmental organizations. Because of this, doubts have been expressed about the efficacy of regional environmental agreements curtailing environmental degradation. However, literature pertaining to environmental concern among business and industry in India is sparse. There is a pressing need to establish a baseline in India, and to raise consciousness, and promote green marketing.

In this context, India is a signatory to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) protocols on environmental protection, climate change, and natural disasters. In addition, India shares common ground relating to the Kyoto Protocol of BASIS countries, along with Brazil, South Africa and China. Unlike SAARC and similar regional associations, BASIS members face related but highly disparate issues due to wide socio-demographic differences amongst them. For instance, in 2010, with estimated gross domestic product- purchasing power parity (GDP) at US $4.06 trillion, and real growth rate in GDP of 10.4%, India ranked fifth in the world on both these economic indices. Since several years, its industrial growth rate continues to grow (10.6% in 2010), owing largely to sectors like textiles, chemicals, food processing, steel, transportation equipment, cement, mining, petroleum, machinery, and pharmaceuticals. This coupled with fact that India has a 2011 population of 1.21 billion, spread over area about a third that of the US, with average density per square mile of 954 persons (compared with US of 83 persons), India faces significant issues relating to pollution of
physical and natural resources. The revered rivers and pristine coastlines that defined India’s civilization status from earliest times have in recent decades, virtually transformed into sewers that spew poison across the length and breadth of her lands.

Moreover, over 31% of India’s population is urban, with density being exponentially higher in megacities, urban agglomerations and urban mega-slums. A case in point is Greater Bombay (population estimated over 20 million within 233 square miles) where elite commercial and residential high-rise co-exists with urban shanties lacking basic utilities. There are virtually no zoning laws, often manifest in overlap of manufacturing, marketing, and housing, jostling for adjacent, and sometimes the same, space. This combination poses acute health as well as moral hazards, and diminishes the quality of life. The three salient aspects, namely significant overpopulation, environmental degradation, and the nature of industries feeding rapid economic growth (United States CIA Factbook 2011), taken along with a growing consumer culture, point to the critical need for Indian business and marketing, to strategically minimize their environmental footprint.

This issue is all the more relevant as regional and environmental protocols drive business school accreditation institutions to prescribe standards on global and green matters, in preparing future business and marketing managers. In addition, there is a growth in partnerships between primarily Western business schools, and similar institutions around the world. For instance, Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSBB) Communications (2001: 17) lays down the standards relating to global and environmental issues for business school accreditation:

“C.1. CURRICULUM CONTENT

C.1.1: Both undergraduate and graduate curricula should provide an understanding of perspectives that form the context for business. Coverage should include … ethical and global issues; … the influence of political, social, legal and regulatory, environmental and technological issues …

INTERPRETATION: The perspectives indicated above might be addressed via individual courses with titles that explicitly identify the perspective being treated. However, it is not the intent of this standard to require a separate course for any one or for any combination of these perspectives. Schools may approach any or all of these topics by interweaving them throughout other required curricular elements.”

Current research highlights green issues among environmental stakeholders (Bhuian, Joonas, and Ruiz 2007, Miles and Covin 2000). Despite this fact, little research focus has been given to the environmental concern of Indian business students. The purpose of this conceptual study is to investigate environmental beliefs and attitudes of business students in India.

This study is important because business students are future business and marketing decision-makers (Bhuian, Joonas, and Ruiz 2007; Varadarajan and Thirunarayana 1995). Further, business education shapes and forms business students’ attitudes toward green issues (Whitehead 1994, http://www.ucd.ie), which in turn affects the environmentally friendly behavior of business and marketing managers (Bhuian, Joonas, and Ruiz 2007; Varadarajan and Thirunarayana 1995). The current conceptual research attempts to shed light on this gap in the literature pertaining to India.
II. Environmental Beliefs and Attitudes

ECBA finds roots in the means-ends theory (Rokeach 1973), which states that motives are explained by underlying consequences, as well as personal values. In the context of environmentally concerned behavior, the salient personal values (Rokeach 1973) cover, as an example, clean physical and natural resources like air, water, and land. Negative underlying consequence would include polluted environment experienced in the short as well as long term. Personal values represented by ECBA would promote production and consumption that have the least environmental impact.

Another source of ECBA lies in the expectancy value model (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975) and the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Attitude toward a behavior is determined by salient beliefs about the behavior, and the person’s evaluation (expectancy) of the outcome of that behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). Thus, attitude is related to the causal determinants of volitional behavior. The theory of reasoned action assumes that human beings tend to behave in a rational way—they process available information, and weigh the consequences of actions. It may therefore be expected that people behave in line with intentions. Intentions are formed by personal and social factors. Attitude toward the behavior comprises the personal factor, or the individual’s positive or negative evaluation of engaging in a specific behavior. A person’s beliefs reflect information they have about themselves and their world, hence behavior can ultimately be traced to information. Based on the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975), ECBA reflect an individual’s positive evaluation of behaviors, like protecting physical and natural resources, making good for environmental damage (for instance through taxation), or negative evaluations of behaviors such as environmental degradation. In addition, ECBA comprise the information individuals have about environmental issues in their immediate vicinity, and in the world.

The theory of planned behavior constituted an extension of the theory of reasoned action. It explicated that individuals and groups attempt to order their beliefs in a consistent framework (Ajzen 1985, 1988) conscious of a particular conduct or end state that is personally or socially preferable (Rokeach 1973:5). Based on an interpretation of the theory of planned behavior, ECBA would relate to the cognizance of the personally and socially preferable end state of preserving the environment through conduct like creating, distributing, communicating, consuming, and disposing of products and services. Attitude towards such conducts is formed by beliefs about these conducts, and evaluation of the results of the conducts (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975), such as the preserving and protecting the environment for the benefits that can be gained.

In the environmental context, this relationship among attitudes, intentions and behavior, especially in creating scales to measure environmental concern, appears in early studies (e.g. Dunlap and Van Liere 1978; Gooch 1995; Hallin 1995; Heberlein 1981, 1989; Stern, Dietz and Guagnano 1995). Notably, ECBA were also measured through the New Environmental Paradigm (Dunlap and Van Liere 1978), general awareness of consequences of environmental conditions (Stern et al 1995), the ethnographic approach (Hallin 1995), support for science and technology, and perception of local environmental conditions (Gooch 1995).
ECBA, reflecting concern for the environment, include the cognitive, affective as well as behavioral dimensions of the traditional consumer behavior model; and numerous researchers have tried to define them as such. As an example, environmental concern is a strong positive attitude towards preserving the environment, and a global attitude with indirect effects on behaviors through behavioral intentions (Crosby, Gill and Taylor 1981). Some writers have referred to “ecological concern”, which refers to the degree of emotionality, the amount of specific factual knowledge, the level of willingness, as well as the extent of the outcomes of these (like behavioral intent, recycling behavior, and purchase intent) on pollution-environmental issues (Maloney and Ward 1973). Environmental concern attitude is a general concept that can refer to people’s feelings about many different green issues (Zimmer, Stafford and Stafford 1994).

Subsequent literature covered ECBA across different subjects (e.g., Diamantopoulos et al., 2003, Shean 1995, Joonas, Tandon and Ruiz 2006, Bhuian, Joonas and Ruiz 2007) in the context of a variety of product-related behaviors (e.g., Vlosky et al., 1999). ECBA were examined in many countries outside the West (Berndt and Gykonyo 2012, Bhuian, Joonas, and Ruiz 2007, Chan 1999, Muhmin and Kim 2001, Fraj and Martinez 2006, Joonas, Tandon and Ruiz 2006, Tanner and Kast 2003, Laroche, Tomiuk, and Bergeron 2002). Further, there is a considerable focus on the effects of ECBA on specific and general behaviors, with some studies pointing to the existence of such effects (Bang et al. 2000; Chan 1999, Fraj and Martinez 2006, Kalafatis et al 1999, Kaiser et al, Pickett-Baker and Ozaki, 2008; Polonsky, Garma, and Grau 2011, Schlegelmilch et al 1996, Tanner and Kast 2003, Thogersen, 2000, Laroche, Tomiuk, and Bergeron 2002). Other studies showed insignificant or weak effects of ECBA on ecological behaviors (Davies et al., 2002, Keesling and Kaynama 2003, Shean and Shei 1995), and the role of factors such as convenience (Shove 2003) and time on this relationship (Nisbet and Myers, 2007). Still other authors found inconsistencies in the attitude-behavior link (Kahn, 2007, Thogersen, 2004), while others challenged the application of the theory of planned behavior in the environmental context (Armitage and Conner, 1999). Despite this, many studies in ecological consumer behavior continue to draw on the theory of planned behavior (Kalafatis et al., 1999; Nigbur et al., 2010).

ECBA as a construct is of dual significance. Firstly, at the individual level, ECBA comprise a key psychological determinant of environmentally concerned consumer behavior. These include consumers’ search for information, conserving behavior, supporting intent, and purchase behavior (e.g. Minton and Rose 1997). Secondy, at the organizational level, ECBA are carried forward into the arena of managerial decision-making (e.g. Egri and Herman 2000). Thus, ECBA directly relate to environmental stakeholders. ECBA represents the aspirations of consumers individually and in groups; they are strategically and tactically crucial for business and marketing managers, and are at the heart of government’s public policy (Bhuian, Joonas, and Ruiz 2007).

Below, we cover the salience of ECBA in the context of India.
III. Cultural Moorings of Indian Business Students

Cultural values and their impact on beliefs and attitudes, especially collectivist orientation, have been discussed in the literature in terms of typology (Hofstede 1980, 1997, 2001), as well as empirically evidenced (e.g. Joonas 2004; Ling-yee 1997). Under Hofstede’s (1980, 1997, 2001) typology, India had an Individualism (IDV) rating of 48, compared to a world average of 40, and was described as a collectivist society. In at least one study, pertaining to the introduction of ATMs in India, Collectivist Orientation was ascertained to be high (De Angeli et al 2004).

Collectivist orientation is a socio-cultural value, manifest in cooperation, helpfulness, and consideration for group goals. In the context of the environment, it would signify a greater value on protecting community resources above individual motives and consumption needs. Collectivism typifies societies in which people from early life are bonded into strong, cohesive in-groups. Numerous environmental behaviors like sharing information about environmentally friendly products and services, community arrangements for conservation and recycling, and for institutional support, are carried out in groups that have bonds akin to family, among people that may not have blood ties.

Further, in a collectivist society, there is a high level of social interaction; therefore it is crucial to maintain group harmony. Thus, environmental protection would constitute a way to keeping harmonious social relations. In addition, collectivist societies are “shame” cultures, with loss of face for the individual and the family, following any damage to the environment. In contrast, environmental protection would raise the honor of the individual as well as the family (Hofstede 1997). Lifestyles in such societies are “other-dependent”, and bank on social networking as the basic information source, as we see in environmental organizations. Further, the social structure of a collectivist society (Hofstede 2001) is reflected in the social structure of a community that is friendly to the environment.

In light of the preceding, our research propositions are as follows:

Proposition 1: The level of ECBA among business students in India will be high.
Proposition 2: The level of Collectivist Orientation among business students in India will be high.
Proposition 3: The impact of Collectivist Orientation on ECBA among business students in India will be significant and positive.

IV. Methodology

An initial random survey will be conducted among over 200 business students in India, from schools accredited by regional bodies. A voluntary, anonymous, objective type, paper-and-pencil survey will be used, to include the constructs ECBA, Collectivist Orientation, and control variables comprising demographics. The researcher’s cover letter will be provided, outlining research objectives, and assuring that information received will be confidential, and used research purposes only. The survey will be pretested prior to administration, to ensure validation. Since by and large, English is the medium of higher education in India, the need for translation will be obviated. A 16-item ECBA
scale (Minton and Rose 1997, Antil and Bennett 1979), with a reported Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .95 \), will be used to measure environmental concern. Collective Orientation will be measured through a four-item scale modified from Ling-yee (1997), with a reported Cronbach’s \( \alpha = .76 \). Both these will be seven-point scales. Structural equation modeling will be used to study relationships among these constructs and control variables.

V. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Based on exploratory research results, a follow-up study among a larger sample size would improve generalizability. Further, demographics like the source of school funding, size, extent of curricular coverage of environmental issues, and type of accreditation status might be fruitful. Moreover, long-term changes in business students’ ECBA need to be tracked. Further, institutional theory might help shed light on this finding. Norms evolving out of public opinion, educational institutions, professions, belief systems, accreditation bodies are perceived as rules of appropriate and desirable social behavior for all within society (Scott, 1987). A replication study of the impact of educational institutions on environmental beliefs exists both in theory, as well as empirical research (e.g. Bhuian, Joonas and Ruiz 2007; Varadarajan and Thirunarayana 1995; Whitehead 1994; http://www.ucd.ie) might be conducted. Further, research could extend beyond business students, to cover other environmental stakeholders as well, both individual and organizational. Moreover, the study described above is restricted to business students in India. Conducting a regional cross-cultural study, including countries that share India’s environmental protocols, would result in a higher-level understanding of SAARC and BASIS countries’ green agenda. Finally, there is need for a cross-cultural study that includes countries with a low IDV rating, such as the U.S. or Canada, to extend our knowledge of the determinants of environmental attitudes of business students that are likely to impact other regional trade and environmental protocols.

VI. Conclusions

As stated earlier, business students are potential business and marketing managers, whose green attitude will impact their long-term behavior. This conceptual research will be useful to developing a consistent and strategic enhancement of business students’ ECBA, through sharing of environmental ideas, through schools and colleges. Knowledge-sharing on the green platform, incorporating ethical and legal considerations, and managerial dimensions of green systems and structures, products and services, disposal, distribution, and promotion, could be explicated through the marketing curriculum. Stress would be laid on integrating related local and global organizations, including media, with business schools. Any resultant increase in ECBA would constitute a fitting response to the green marketing imperative, not of India alone, but also of regional and global affiliates such as SAARC and BASIS.
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