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The Effects of Environmental Marketing: The Consumer Perspective

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The Effects of Environmental Marketing: The Consumer Perspective

A Research Thesis by:

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Abstract

Green business practices, defined as those business practices that positively effect the environment, are the current trend. Many companies are reevaluating old practices and seeking out innovative ways to make either make a positive impact on the environment or to lessen their regular negative impact. The social cost of not fully considering the environmental impact business practices have on our resources is finally becoming real enough to companies that they are beginning to respond in positive ways. In addition, environmental practices fit neatly into lean efficiency strategies many companies are pursuing as well. However, one must wonder if this is a permanent change in the business atmosphere or if it is merely a current trend in vogue now and soon to be only a memory.

Regardless of the transience of business interest in environmental impact, there is some value in looking into the sustainable aspects of these practices. Businesses are financial institutions. Large public companies are owned by stockholders who are too far removed from the everyday running of companies to have much concern for environmental practices, that is, unless they see the effect that that green practices have on the bottom line. How can green practices become attractive to investors? This can be done by attempting to appeal to their social values as people, but it seems more likely to appeal to their business sense as investors.

How do green practices affect the bottom line? Can companies increase the effect on the bottom line? I am going to specifically narrow my research to the consumer perspective and response to different methods of communicating environmentally responsible business practices. This is one way that research might be able to demonstrate to businesses how to better communicate green methods to grow profits.

Two desired outcomes from this research would be to educate companies who already use environmental practices to communicate them with greater impact on their consumers and to motivate companies who don't use these practices to begin to do so because of the effect on their bottom line. Methods of communicating green practices to the consumer could become more effective so as to add to the value of the methods and therefore adding to the value of the company that practices them or to induce companies who don't practice them to begin to use these methods because of their value.

Research Questions

- What separates, in the customer's mind, genuine care for the common good versus leveraging green practices for corporate gain? Or does it? Is there a separation here? Does it affect perception of the company?
- Are there certain methods of communication that communicate environmental practices better than others to customers?
- Do environmentally responsible practices effect a consumer's purchasing decision, all things being equal? If so, to what degree?

Literature Review

The market for Green practices

Articles in this subtopic are concerned with the market. These are articles such as "Ecologically concerned Consumers: Who are they?" (Kinnear, 1974) and "ECOSCALE: A Scale for the Measurement of Environmentally Responsible Consumers" (Stone, 1995). Some of research has sought out segments of the market that care more or less about green practices (Davis, 1994; Kinnear, 1974; Minton, 1997; Peattie, 2001; Shrum, 1995; Straughan, 1999). Other research has sought out better ways to measure and categorize consumers based on their concern for the environment (Stone, 1995). Some deal specifically with packaging detailing environmental claims with titles to include, "Communicating Environmental Information: Are Marketing Claims on Packaging Misleading?" (Polonsky, 1998) and "Psychological Determinants of Paying Attention to Eco-Labels in Purchase Decisions: Model Development and Multinational Validation" (Thogerson, 2000). Some articles (i.e., Lee, 1999; Olander, 1995) are more general and will help by providing a background to foster my understanding.

Companies in reaction to consumers

There are a few articles concerning occasions when company's green practices were initiated by the consumer, and not by the company (LBS-Center for Marketing, 2000). Another article examined the links between environmental concerns and how it translates to ecological consumption decisions (Roberts, 1997).

Strategies for effective communication

These articles are concerned with how to go about marketing a company's green practices. Some are more general (i.e., Menon, 1997; Miles, 2000; Polonsky, 2001; Shrum, 1995). Some are more specific to include using social responsibility and ethics in marketing (Robin, 1997) and areas where the philosophies of green business are impractical (Peattie, 1999). A few final articles in this category deal with alliances between businesses and non-for-profits (Stafford, 1998; Mendleson, 1995).

Various perspectives on the issue

Articles in this area deal with various perspectives on the issue other than my own. I thought reviewing these might help in addition to my exploratory interviews to help better understand issues. One article gives a marketing perspective (Zeithaml, 1984) and one gives a strategic perspective (Polonsky, 2001).

Examples of environmentally responsible business practices in specific industries

I think there is a definite tendency in research to become theoretical and lose touch with real life application. Therefore, I sought out a few articles about concrete examples of this. I found articles concerning the wood industry (Vlosky, 1999), the consumer products industry (Wong, 2000), and household appliances (Stafford, 1998).

Methods

Conduct Exploratory Interviews

Even after reviewing this research, there is still much to be learned. One solution to this is to conduct exploratory interviews. I met with consumers and did in-depth interviews about ecological consumerism and green marketing. I will ask the eighteen separate questions. Most of the questions will be quantitative, but I will follow each up seeking qualitative reasons and explanations. See appendix A for my interview guide.

Sample

The best sample I have in Knoxville is the wide network I have through my church of over 700 people. This isn't exactly an ideal sample, but it is the best I have available given my lack of funds to support a broader sampling procedure. The people, however, will be very willing to accommodate me and speak freely about these issues.

I used two different groups for these interviews. One group was made up of individuals all under the age of 30. The other group was people over the age of 30. Both groups contained 20 individuals. I asked both groups the same questions. See Appendix C for interview guide.

Procedure

I either met with participants or arranged to talk with them over the phone. I recorded all interviews as I followed the interview guide and probed for results. I then coded all answers and looked at results by age group, by total group, and comparing age groups. I also included people's explanations or comments that went with each question underneath that question in the results.

Analysis

I did a simple comparative analysis. I looked at both the numbers and percentages to determine whether any results stood out.

Results

Question 1 - Do you notice any environmental or green marketing by companies?

Young

(20) 100% yes

Examples given: Automotive (4), Gas companies (2), Apple (2), Bottles (2), UT (2), Shopping Bags (2), La Costa, Regions Bank, carpet, Boxes, Greenworks, Starbucks, Recycled material, NBC

Old

(20) 100% yes

Examples given: Automotive (5), Reusable bags (4), Cleaning Products (3), Recycled Materials (2), Light bulbs (2), utilities (2), LEED building design, furniture, carpet,

Consolidated

(40) 100% yes

Examples given: Automotive (9), Reusable bags (6), Cleaning Products (4), Recycled Materials (3), Gas companies (2), Boxes, Apple (2), Bottles (2), UT (2), Light bulbs (2), carpet (2), utilities (2), La Costa, Starbucks, NBC, Regions Bank, LEED building design, furniture

Differences

The younger group named more specific companies. Everyone in both groups responded "yes," and gave at least one example.

Question 2 - Are you more likely to notice claims made by advertisements or claims made on the packaging of a product? Which are you more likely to respond to?

Young

Notice: Packaging: (8) 40% Advertising: (12) 60%

People who notice and respond to the same thing: (16) 80%

Respond to: Packaging: (12) 60% Advertising: (8) 40%

Old

Notice: Packaging: (5) 25% Advertising: (14) 70%

People who notice and respond to the same thing: (18) 90%

Respond to: Packaging: (4) 20% Advertising: (15) 75%

*One respondent answered "neither" to both questions

Consolidated

Notice: Packaging: (13) 32.5% Advertising: (26) 65%

People who notice and respond to the same thing: (36) 90%

Respond to: Packaging: (16) 40% Advertising: (23) 57.5%

*One respondent answered "neither" to both questions

Differences

The Younger group noticed less (2 people, 10%) and responded much less (7 people, 35%) to advertisements than the older group did.

Question 3 - How affected are you by green business practices when you make purchasing decisions?

Young

Significantly (3) 15%
Moderately (2) 10%
Little (10) 50%
None (5) 25%

Comments:

One person commented that convenience determines if they will even consider green practices.

Two people commented about how price is first in their priorities.

One person commented that they compare price against energy saving benefits (total cost), and they compare environmental benefits vs. money costs before making a decision.

Old

Significantly	(4) 20%
Moderately	(5) 25%
Little	(7) 35%
None	(4) 20%

Comments:

One person commented that they are only concerned about it so far as it involves purchasing local.

One person commented that they are only concerned about it so far as it involves natural products that are chemical-free.

One person said that it was hard given the great extent of “green-washing” and misinformation out there.

Consolidated

Significantly	(7) 17.5%
Moderately	(7) 17.5%
Little	(17) 42.5%
None	(9) 22.5%

Comments:

One person commented that convenience determines if they will even consider green practices.

Two people commented about how price is first in their priorities.

One person commented that they compare price against energy saving benefits (total cost), and they compare environmental benefits vs. money costs before making a decision.

One person commented that they are only concerned about it so far as it involves purchasing local.

One person commented that they are only concerned about it so far as it involves natural products that are chemical-free.

One person said that it was hard given the great extent of “green-washing” and misinformation out there.

Differences

The younger group responded with less affected “significantly” (1 person, 5%) or “moderately” (3 people, 15%). The younger group had more responses in the “little” (3 people, 15%) and “none” categories (1 person, 5%).

The older group was more affected by green practices.

Question 4 - What role does that play?

Young

Significant	(1) 5%
Moderate	(8) 40%
No role	(11) 55%

Comments:

Two people mentioned price as primary and this as secondary.

One person mentioned convenience as primary and this as secondary.

Old

Significant	(4) 20%
Moderate	(9) 45%
No role	(7) 35%

Comments:

One person was concerned about health implications.

One person said that they have to really desire a product to buy something non-green.

Three people said that they are aware.

Three people mentioned price as primary and this as secondary.

Consolidated

Significant	(5) 12.5%
Moderate	(17) 42.5%
No role	(18) 45%

Comments:

One person was concerned about health implications.

One person said that they have to really desire a product to buy something non-green.

Five people mentioned price as primary and this as secondary.

One person mentioned convenience as primary and this as secondary.

Three people said that they are aware.

Differences

The older group acknowledged green practices playing a more significant role in their decisions. Three more people (15%) responded "significant" while one more person (5%) responded "moderate" in the older group. The younger group, conversely, had four more (20%) respond "no role."

Question 5 - How often does a company's practices affect your purchasing decisions?

Young

Often/Everyday	(2) 10%
Occasionally	(2) 10%
Rarely	(13) 65%
Never	(3) 15%

Comments:

One person was only concerned if company has major environmental problems.
One person felt the need to research but was not willing to spend time doing it.
One person described how social pressure from coworkers causes green practices to affect this individual toward being more environmentally conscious.
One person explained how it is too hard to recognize the legitimacy of campaigns so they just ignore all green advertising.

Old

Often/Everyday	(4) 20%
Occasionally	(2) 10%
Rarely	(11) 55%
Never	(3) 15%

Comments:

One person was only if company has major environmental problems.
One person felt the need to research but was not willing to spend time doing it.
One person was only affected by green practices in a few product categories.

Consolidated

Often/Everyday	(6) 15%
Occasionally	(4) 10%
Rarely	(24) 60%
Never	(6) 15%

Comments:

Two people were often affected only if company has major environmental problems.
Two people felt the need to research but not willing to spend time doing it.
One person described how social pressure from coworkers causes green practices to affect this individual toward being more environmentally conscious.
One person explained how it is too hard to recognize the legitimacy of campaigns so they just ignore all green advertising.
One person was only affected by green practices in a few product categories.

Differences

Both groups seemed very similar in how often they are affected by a company's practices. The older group was slightly more often affected with two more people (10%) claiming "often/everyday" and two less people (10%) claiming "rarely."

Question 6 - Would you like to learn about the environmental impact of products you typically buy?

Young

Yes	(13) 65%
Depends/Possibly	(3) 15%
No	(4) 20%

Comments:

One person said they only wanted to know if convenient.

One person claimed they would not like to know about products that they like because it might make them feel badly about buying it.

Old

Yes	(7) 35%
Depends/Possibly	(1) 5%
No	(12) 60%

Comments:

Two people said that they already knew.

One person said they only wanted to know if convenient.

One person wanted company specific rather than product specific.

Consolidated

Yes	(20) 50%
Depends/Possibly	(4) 10%
No	(16) 40%

Comments:

Two people said they only wanted to know if convenient.

Two people said that they already knew.

One person claimed they would not like to know about products that they like because it might make them feel badly about buying it.

One person wanted company specific rather than product specific.

Differences

The younger group was more willing to learn about environmental impacts. Six more people (30%) responded "yes" and three more (15%) responded "depends/possibly." Individuals in both groups had concerns about the convenience of how the message would be told.

Question 7 - How would you like to learn about products' environmental impacts?

Young

From who:

*Percentages out of 20

Offered wanted to hear from company	(4) 20%
Offered wanted to hear from 3rd party	(8) 40%

What form of media:

*Percentages out of 20

Commercials, Packaging, Magazines	(6) 30%
Internet	(4) 20%
Personal Contact	(3) 15%
Social Media	(1) 5%

**Note some respondents didn't respond to this question.

Old

From who:

*Percentages out of 20

Offered wanted to hear from company	(4) 20%
Offered wanted to hear from 3rd party	(6) 30%

What form of media:

*Percentages out of 20

Commercials, Packaging, Magazines	(4) 20%
Internet	(3) 15%
Personal Contact	(2) 10%

**Note some respondents didn't respond to this question.

Consolidated

From who:

*Percentages out of 40

Offered wanted to hear from company	(8) 20%
Offered wanted to hear from 3rd party	(14) 35%

What form of media:

*Percentages out of 40

Commercials, Packaging, Magazines	(10) 25%
Internet	(7) 17.5%
Personal Contact	(5) 12.5%
Social Media	(1) 2.5%

**Note some respondents didn't respond to this question.

Differences

The groups were very similar in their responses to this question. Because of the differing numbers of responses, quantitative comparison would be inappropriate.

Question 8 - How much do you trust claims made by companies about environmental practices?

Young

Yes	(10) 50%
Moderate	(3) 15%
No	(7) 35%

Comments:

One person trusts claims because there are a large number of fact checkers out there.
One person trusts claims based on how cool of design the company uses.
One person only trusts claims if they are specific claims rather than general ones.
One person trusts claims from companies but not their motives.
One person trusts claims but wants proof before applying much momentum.
One person moderately trusts claims depending on the company [perception].
One person does not trust claims because they believe that companies have different motives than consumers do.
One person does not trust claims, and states that you have to look deeper for yourself.
Two people do not trust claims, but state that it depends on the company [perception].

Old

Yes	(8) 40%
Moderate	(5) 25%
No	(7) 35%

Comments:

One person trusts claims because there are a large number of watchdogs out there.
One person trusts claims because they believe companies would be scared to lie.
One person moderately trusts claims depending on how many companies are making similar claims.
One person does not trust claims unless they are large corporations that are giving extraordinary efforts.

Consolidated

Yes	(18) 45%
Moderate	(8) 20%
No	(14) 35%

Comments:

Two people trust claims because there are a large number of fact-checkers out there.
One person trusts claims based on how cool of design the company uses.
One person only trusts claims if they are specific claims rather than general ones.
One person trusts claims from companies but not their motives.
One person trusts claims but wants proof before applying much momentum.
One person trusts claims because they believe companies would be scared to lie.
One person moderately trusts claims depending on the company [perception].

One person moderately trusts claims depending on how many companies are making similar claims.

One person does not trust claims because they believe that companies have different motives than consumers do.

One person does not trust claims, and states that you have to look deeper for yourself.

Two people do not trust claims, but state that it depends on the company [perception].

One person does not trust claims unless they are large corporations that are giving extraordinary efforts.

Differences

Both groups were similar, but the younger group had two more people (10%) claiming “yes,” and the older group had two more people (10%) being “moderate.”

Question 9 - Would you consider yourself the average consumer? Why not?

Young

Yes (17) 85%

No (3) 15%

Comments:

One person checks companies’ practices more because roommate is more environmentally inclined.

One person doesn’t buy luxury items.

One person considers himself less green than the average consumer.

Old

Yes (16) 80%

No (3) 15%

Unsure (1) 5%

Comments:

One person consumes less packaged goods than the average customer.

One person doesn’t trust anything mainstream and considers self more educated.

One person is more price-conscious than the average person.

Consolidated

Yes (33) 82.5%

No (6) 15%

Unsure (1) 2.5%

Comments:

Reasons for no:

One person checks companies’ practices more because roommate is more environmentally inclined.

One person doesn’t buy luxury items.

One person considers himself less green than the average consumer.

One person consumes less packaged goods than the average customer.

One person doesn't trust anything mainstream and considers self more educated.
 One person is more price-conscious than the average person.

Differences

Both groups were very similar in their responses, but the younger group had one more person (5%) responding "yes," whereas the older group had one more person (5%) responding "unsure."

Question 10 – Part 1 - Relatively, are price or green practices more important to you?
Part 2 - Which do you consider more carefully?

Young

Part 1	Price	(20) 100%			
Part 2	Price	(19) 95%	Green practices	(1) 5%	

Old

Part 1	Price	(16) 80%	Green practices	(3) 15%	Equal	(1) 5%
Part 2	Price	(17) 85%	Green practices	(3) 15%		

Comments:

One person brought up immediacy, that price effects are more tangible, and that his valuations might change for larger purchases.
 One person brought up how price is more measureable.

Consolidated

Part 1	Price	(36) 90%	Green practices	(3) 7.5%	Equal	(1) 2.5%
Part 2	Price	(36) 90%	Green practices	(4) 10%		

Comments:

One person brought up immediacy, that price effects are more tangible, and that his valuations might change for larger purchases. One person brought up how price is more measureable.

Differences

The older group was slightly more concerned for green practices. No one in the younger group considered green practices more important than price. The older group had three individuals (15%) in this category and one person (5%) considering them both equal. The younger group had one person (5%) who considered green practices more carefully. The older group had four people (20%) who did.

Question 11 - Are some claims more effective than others?

Young

Yes	(13) 65%
No	(6) 30%
Unsure or no response	(1) 5%

Comments:

One person views some claims as more effective if they are clear and simple.

One person views some claims as more effective if they are more tangible or relate to a place that this consumer might visit where the practice might directly effect.

One person views some claims as more effective if they are from a company with a good or trustable company image.

One person does not view some claims as more effective since they feel they are ignorant of enough details to feel concerned.

One person noted that some companies do a better job of it

Old

Yes	(15) 75%
No	(4) 20%
Unsure or no response	(1) 5%

Comments:

One person views some claims as more effective if they are well communicated.

One person does not view some claims as more effective since they are not a detailed buyer.

One person does not view some claims as more effective since they look at ingredients.

One person is unsure because for them it really depends on the claim.

Consolidated

Yes	(28) 70%
No	(10) 25%
Unsure or no response	(2) 5%

Comments:

One person views some claims as more effective if they are clear and simple.

One person views some claims as more effective if they are more tangible or relate to a place that this consumer might visit where the practice might directly effect.

One person views some claims as more effective if they are from a company with a good or trustable company image.

One person views some claims as more effective if they are well communicated.

One person does not view some claims as more effective since they feel they are ignorant of enough details to feel concerned.

One person does not view some claims as more effective since they are not a detailed buyer.

One person does not view some claims as more effective since they look at ingredients.

One person is unsure because for them it really depends on the claim.

One person noted that some companies do a better job of it

Differences

The older group considered some claims more effective than others a bit more (2 people, 10%) than the younger group.

Question 12 - Are there any claims that you respond to more often than others?

Young

Yes	(8) 40%
No	(10) 50%
Unsure or no response	(2) 10%

Comments:

One person responds more often to claims concerning resource conservation.

One person responds more often to claims that have direct effects on the consumer who is buying the product.

One person responds more often to claims that are convenient to respond to.

One person responds more often to very specific claims.

One person responds more often to claims featuring animals.

One person responds more often to claims that are creative in how they are presented and not seen as part of an agenda.

Old

Yes	(9) 45%
No	(10) 50%
Unsure or no response	(1) 5%

Comments:

One person responds more often to claims having direct effects on people.

One person responds more often to claims made with recycled material (because results are already seen).

One person responds more often to claims with more immediate effects.

One person responds more often to claims having health implications.

One person responds more often to claims made by companies whose green practices have been around for a while.

One person responds more often to claims that are certified by third party.

One person responds more often to claims in only in certain product categories.

One person does not respond more often claims because they don't trust statistics.

One person does not respond more often claims because they only look at ingredients.

Consolidated

Yes	(17) 42.5%
No	(20) 50%
Unsure or no response	(3) 7.5%

Comments:

One person responds more often to claims concerning resource conservation.
One person responds more often to claims that are convenient to respond to.
One person responds more often to very specific claims.
One person responds more often to claims featuring animals.
One person responds more often to claims that are creative in how they are presented and not seen as part of an agenda.
Two people respond more often to claims having direct effects on people.
One person responds more often to claims made with recycled material (because results are already seen).
One person responds more often to claims with more immediate effects.
One person responds more often to claims having health implications.
One person responds more often to claims made by companies whose green practices have been around for a while.
One person responds more often to claims that are certified by third party.
One person responds more often to claims in only in certain product categories.
One person does not respond more often claims because they don't trust statistics.
One person does not respond more often claims because they only look at ingredients.

Differences

Both groups responded very similarly. The older group had one person (5%) more to respond "yes" instead of "unsure."

Question 13 – Do (Have) you work(ed) for a company?

Young

Yes – (20) 100%

Old

Yes – (16) 80%

No – (4) 20%

Consolidated

Yes – (36) 90%

No – (4) 10%

Differences

The older group had some individuals (4 people, 20%) who were not employed.

Question 14 – Does your (former) company currently employ any green practices?

Young

Yes	(13) 65%
No	(6) 30%
Unsure	(1) 5%

Comments:

Four people mentioned that their company only uses minimal practices, such as recycling or turning off lights.

Old

*Percentages out of 20

Yes	(9) 45%
No	(7) 35%

**Note some respondents didn't respond to this question because of negatively answering question 14.

Comments:

One person mentioned that their company only uses minimal practices, such as recycling or turning off lights.

Consolidated

*Percentages out of 40

Yes	(19) 47.5%
No	(7) 17.5%
Unsure	(4) 10%

**Note some respondents didn't respond to this question because of negatively answering question 14.

Comments:

Five people mentioned that their company only uses minimal practices, such as recycling or turning off lights.

Differences

The younger group's companies practiced green practices more often (4 people, 20%), though more of them mentioned that the practices were only minimal (3 people, 15%).

Question 15 - What effect do these practices have financially?

Young

*Percentages out of 20

Positive	(9)	45%
None	(3)	15%
Negative	(1)	5%

**Note some respondents didn't respond to this question because of negatively answering question 14.

Comments:

One person commented that green practices have an indirect financial impact through attracting customers.

One person commented that green practices also have good public relations along with financial benefits.

One person commented that green practices are good for the company in the long run but are costing the company now.

Old

*Percentages out of 20

Positive	(5)	25%
None	(1)	5%
Negative	(3)	15%

**Note some respondents didn't respond to this question because of negatively answering question 14.

Comments:

One person commented that green practices are good for the company in the long run but are costing the company now.

Consolidated

*Percentages out of 40

Positive	(14)	35%
None	(4)	10%
Negative	(4)	10%

**Note some respondents didn't respond to this question because of negatively answering question 14.

Comments:

One person commented that green practices have an indirect financial impact through attracting customers.

One person commented that green practices also have good public relations along with financial benefits.

Two people commented that green practices are good for their companies in the long run but are costing the company now.

Differences

Green practices had more positive financial impacts to the companies of the younger group (4 people, 20%). The older group had two more people (10%) who said that the practices had negative financial impacts. The younger group also had three more people (15%) who said the practices had no financial impact.

Question 16 - Does your company communicate these practices to customers?

Young

*Percentages out of 20

Yes (8) 40%

No (5) 25%

**Note some respondents didn't respond to this question because of negatively answering question 14.

How communicated:

Three companies use signage.

Two companies use their email signature.

One company bases its competitive advantage on green practices, so it uses almost every form of communication.

One company uses its Facebook page.

Old

*Percentages out of 20

Yes (7) 35%

No (4) 20%

*Note some respondents didn't respond to this question because of negatively answering question 14.

How communicated:

Two companies use their newsletters.

One company uses its website.

One company uses traditional advertising.

One company uses its email.

Consolidated

*Percentages out of 40

Yes (15) 37.5%

No (9) 22.5%

**Note some respondents didn't respond to this question because of negatively answering question 14.

How communicated:

Three companies use signage.

Three companies use their email.

Two companies use their newsletters.

One company bases its competitive advantage on green practices, so it uses almost every form of communication.

One company uses its Facebook page.

One company uses its website.

One company uses traditional advertising.

Differences

The two groups were very similar. The older group had one less response to both answers (1 person, 5%).

Question 17 - Do you think your company is willing to consider green practices?

Young

Yes (10) 50%

No (8) 40%

Unsure (2) 10%

Comments:

Three people commented that their company is very price dependent and bottom-line driven.

One person commented that their company's market structure and type of business make their company unwilling beyond recycling.

Old

*Percentages out of 20

Yes (3) 15%

No (3) 15%

**Note some respondents didn't respond to this question because of positively answering question 14.

Comments:

One person commented that their company is very price dependent.

Consolidated

*Percentages out of 40

Yes (13) 32.5%

No (11) 27.5%

Unsure (2) 5%

**Note some respondents didn't respond to this question because of negatively answering question 14.

Comments:

Four people commented that their company is very price dependent and bottom-line driven.

One person commented that their company's market structure and type of business make their company unwilling beyond recycling.

Differences

The older group had much fewer responses to this question (14 people, 70%), but those responses were evenly divided. The younger group had two more people (10%) respond “yes” than “no,” but also two people (10%) respond “unsure.”

Question 18 - Would they be more willing if they saw research on effectiveness and benefits?

Young

Yes – 100% from 12 respondents

*Note some respondents didn’t respond to this question.

Comments:

One person commented that it would be very conditional for their company, that they would only consider it if their company saw research for a specific practice not general practices.

Old

*Percentages out of 20

Yes (4) 20%

No (2) 10%

**Note some respondents didn’t respond to this question.

Comments:

One person commented that it would be only based on financial benefits, giving consideration as well to cost to produce.

One person commented that it must be for a specific practice.

Consolidated

*Percentages out of 40

Yes (16) 40%

No (2) 5%

**Note some respondents didn’t respond to this question.

Comments:

Two people commented that it would be very conditional for their company, that they would only consider it if their company saw research for a specific practice not general practices.

One person commented that it would be only based on financial benefits, giving consideration as well to cost to produce.

Differences

The younger group had only positive responses (12 people, 60%). The older group had a few negative responses (2 people, 10%), and only six responses to this question(30%).

Discussion

Question 1

The younger group was more likely to name specific organizations, whereas the older group named more product categories. Companies that are associated with bad environmental effects came up in both groups. Every respondent notices environmental marketing.

Question 2

The younger group had no clear favorite. They were slightly more likely to notice advertising, but also slightly more likely to respond to packaging. The older group favored advertising more heavily. Many (36 people, 90%) respondents noticed and responded with the same response to both questions.

Question 3

The younger group favored the “Little” or “None” categories, with (15) 75% in these categories. The older group was more balanced with only (11) 55% in the same categories. Or, to put it positively, the older group claimed to be more affected by green practices. A few people in the older group only considered specific aspects of green products, such as buying local and chemical-free products.

Question 4

The results to this question were similar to question 3, but some respondents gave more detail. They said that environmental effects took a secondary role in their decision, with price as primary (for 5 people across both groups) or with convenience as primary (for 1 person in the younger group).

Question 5

The majority across both groups felt that companies’ practices rarely affect their purchasing decisions. However, the comments made might be helpful places to look in to further in later research. Two people were only concerned if the company has major environmental problems. Two people felt that they should research more but didn’t want to spend the time it takes to do it. One person described the effects of social pressure on their environmental efforts.

One person described the difficulty of discerning between true and false environmental marketing.

Question 6

The younger group was more open (13 people, 65%, responding yes) to learning about the environmental impacts of products they typically buy. The older group was less interested (12 people, 60%, responding no).

One person noted that they have too much of an affinity for certain products that they would rather not know about its environmental impacts.

One person said they wanted to learn about companies rather than products.

Question 7

This question was only answered by some respondents and in slightly different proportions between the two groups. Therefore, direct comparisons between groups would be inappropriate, but we can still look at the opinions offered.

Some (10 people, 25%) of the opinions on forms of media favored traditional venues such as commercials, packaging, and magazines. A relatively high percentage (7 people, 17.5%) favored learning about products through the use of the Internet. Five people (12.5%) favored learning about products through personal contacts. These people might be in agreement with the one person favoring social media.

Question 8

Both groups were relatively similar in response to how they much the trusted claims made by companies about their own environmental practices. The younger group was slightly more trustful of companies. There were many causes; people offered twelve different reasons for why or why they didn't trust companies. This question spawned the most and longest responses from respondents. Some of the responses centered on things that were within the company's control; such as their marketing design, the specificity of their claims, and the extent of their efforts. Other responses were more about the market or industry (the number of third party fact-checkers or similar claims from other companies).

Question 9

Most consumers (33 people, 82.5%) felt that they were the average consumer. Six people (15%) felt that they were not the average consumer, and this for six different reasons.

Question 10

Price was clearly the more important part of consumer choices and was considered more carefully (36 people, 90% for both questions). This was found especially in the younger group who entirely (20 people, 100%) viewed price as more important than green practices. Only one of the twenty (5%) considered green practices more carefully. The older group favored green practices slightly more with three people (15%) viewing green practices as more important and considering them carefully. This question might seem very predictable, but important points were brought up. Some people brought up that price is more important because of its immediacy and tangible effects to the consumer. One person brought up that price is more measurable.

Question 11

The majority of respondents did view some claims as more effective than others (28 people, 70%). Results from the two groups were very similar. The reasons given for respondents' views were perhaps the most applicable and worthwhile part of this research. For both this question and the next, none of the views were held by significant numbers, so further research would have to be done, but companies could potentially benefit largely from learning which if any of these views were held by large consumer groups. Or perhaps the trick would be just learning what mattered to your own company's target markets, as my limited research shows that there are a variety of concerns.

Some of those brought up in this question were: clarity and simplicity of the claim, tangibility of the claim, company image making the claim, how well communicated the claim is, and how direct the effect is. Two people do not view claims as more effective because one is personally not a detailed buyer and because the other one is too detailed of a buyer.

Question 12

This question was very similar to question eleven and might be used in the same way by companies or other groups for further research. The question was designed to help respondents to give more description and detail to what green practices mattered to them, if any did.

Some of the concerns brought up in this question were: resource conservation, convenience, specificity, if animal related, creativity in how presented, the directness of effects on people, the length of time between purchase and results, health implications, certification, product categories (such as only being concerned for green practices in food producing companies), and company reputation.

Question 13

The majority (36 people, 90%) either is employed currently or has been recently. Of those who don't, all four (10%) belonged to the older group. This could be an interesting generational difference, or merely the result of my small sample.

Question 14

Almost half the respondents (19 people, 47.5%) responded that their company employs green practices. Though five of these mentioned that these are only minimal practices.

Question 15

The practices were on the whole positive (14 people, 35%), but respondents mentioned other benefits for the company alongside the financial benefits. Some of the other benefits include attracting customers, public relations, and long-run financial benefits.

Question 16

Somewhat surprising to this study is the fact that almost a quarter of the respondents' (9 people, 22.5%) companies do not communicate these practices to customers. The companies that do communicate their practices use a variety of methods, including: signage, email, newsletters, Facebook, their website, and traditional advertising.

Question 17

Also surprising was that many (11 people, 27.5%) of the respondents said their companies would not consider environmental practices. One person commented that this was because of their company's market type and structure.

Question 18

Finally, most (16 people, 40%) of the respondents said that their companies would be more willing if they saw further research on financial benefits and effectiveness. Two respondents (15%) said that their company would not be more willing even if they saw this research.

Conclusion

My research did have some limitations. My sample size was relatively small. It was made up of people all from the same social group. There might have been some group culture effects that could have implications on the results. I only asked consumers about themselves, I did not actually view or check any of their responses.

However, this research could still be useful for companies looking to understand how to market their environmental efforts. It shows that everyone notices green marketing. While only a percentage of those who notice actually respond, everyone sees it. This combined with the fact that it does play a role in many consumers' purchasing decisions, albeit a secondary one, might lead companies to pursue these initiatives. It might also inform how they market them, as well as to whom.

If the same interviews were done on a larger scale, they might show how open the market is to green advertising, and how receptive consumers are to companies' efforts and attempts to market the environmental efforts. It does show that there are a variety of concerns for even such a small consumer sample. Companies should therefore do research and take careful consideration of which projects they become involved in.

Companies might look into how they can make their environmental efforts more immediately, tangibly, and directly related to their consumers. Those consumers who did not consider green practices claimed that this was their biggest reason for not considering them.

Although only briefly considered during the interview, my limited research does show that green practices can have a profitable impact on companies' financials. Many employees required specific information about bottom-line results before they believed their company would consider further practices. This would definitely be an area requiring further research for companies, but it is very useful information for environmental business-to-business companies looking to market their products or services.

These results might also be useful for third-party or government groups related to environmental concerns. They could look for ways for consumers to better see and understand the impact of the products they buy. Consumers offered a variety of methods and preferences related to this, so there is no clear answer as to which way is the most effective, but companies might pursue consumers through multiple channels. This research might also give those same groups some insight as to what consumers' current concerns are.

Finally, this research might bring to light further areas of research for academics. One could look further into what effects branding strategies have on company and product perception as related to environmental concerns. Some respondents weren't concerned for individual products but only for companies. Further research might look into how common this is.

Further research might also look into what factors play into consumer trust, and how companies might be able to either create trust or reduce mistrust. I received some concerns for individuals, but it would be interesting if someone could take these various concerns and develop some type of a framework from them to help one understand how trust affects consumers and how companies can grow it most effectively.

Related to my research is the question of the difference between consumers' self-perception and their actual buying patterns. This could really make these results much more meaningful. Unfortunately it was outside of the scope of my available resources. I had originally wanted to include in this research a short experiment testing

consumer responses to the questions about packaging and advertising. I asked consumers whether claims made on advertising or claims made on the packaging of the product are more effective. The younger group showed no preference, but the older group favored advertisements over packaging.

I would have liked to include an experiment to test this in a tangible way. I would have had a sample of people sit and watch a series of advertisements. Many of them would be simple distracters to attempt to keep the individual from knowing what I was testing for. Mixed in the group of advertisements would be one making environmental claims for a certain product. After watching this group of advertisements, I would show the person a sample of products. Only one out of the variety would make clean claims on the packaging. I would attempt to get a commercial and packaging for the same product but with different environmental claims if possible. I would then ask the person to select one that they would like to purchase if they needed some of the item. Following their decision, I would ask them why they made that decision. This would give me information both on how many consumers would pick a product based on environmental claims as well as what influenced their choice. This could give a better perspective for the consumer. It would be limited because it would only be a certain product or product category, but it would make the research much more informed for that category.

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Appendices

A. Interview Guide

1. Do you notice any environmental or green marketing by companies? Are there any specific examples that come to mind?
2. Are you more likely to notice claims made by advertisements or claims made on the packaging of a product? Which are you more likely to respond to?
3. How affected are you by green business practices when you make purchasing decisions?
4. What role does that play?
5. How often do a company's practices affect your purchasing decisions?
6. Would you like to learn about the environmental impact of products you typically buy?
7. How would you like to learn about products' environmental impacts?
8. How much do you trust claims made by companies about environmental practices?
9. Would you consider yourself the average consumer? If no, why not?
10. Relatively, are price or green practices more important to you? Which do you consider more carefully?
11. Are some claims more effective than others?
12. Are there any claims that you respond to more often than others?
13. Do you work for a company?
14. Does your company currently employ any green practices?
15. What effect do these practices have financially?
16. Does your company communicate these practices to customers? How so?

17. If not in use, how willing is your company to consider green practices?

18. If not in use, would they be more willing if they saw research on effectiveness and financial benefits?