

Green Marketing: An Ethical and Anti-Environmental Resilient Approach for Sustainable Business

Zielony marketing: etyczne i ekologiczne podejście do zrównoważonego biznesu

Sachin Chauhan*, Naznin**

* *COER University, Roorkee, College of Business Studies, India*

E-mail:sachinchauhan.mba@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0002-0073-9134

***Quantum University, Roorkee Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, India*

E-mail:nazninism@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0001-9686-1099

Abstract

Green Marketing is not a novel concept in the field of marketing. The American Marketing Association designates green marketing as an essential tool of marketing that promotes environmentally friendly products. In line with this thought, the present study attempts to show that green marketing practices entail the core elements of sustainability i.e., social responsibility, environmental concern and economic growth that reinforce in promoting sustainable development. Besides, it also argues that though there are many overarching implications and challenges in green marketing practices yet it substantially contributes in attaining sustainable development goals by incorporating ethical standards in all of its operational antecedents. This study therefore incorporates the notion of transgenerational ethics of Kant's Categorical Imperative in green marketing approach. In doing so, it would serve as a guiding forum to the contemporary marketers primarily to prevent the absolute anthropocentrism and pragmatically engage the interests of society, economy and environment equitably by inculcating ethical practices in daily phenomena. At the corollary, the argument shows that the imperative of ethics in green marketing would be an ethical and anti-environmental resilient approach for ensuring sustainable business.

Key words: American Marketing Association, anthropocentrism, Green Marketing, Kant's Categorical Imperative, sustainable development, transgenerational ethics

Streszczenie

Zielony Marketing nie jest nową koncepcją w dziedzinie marketingu. Amerykańskie Stowarzyszenie Marketingu określa zielony marketing jako podstawowe narzędzie marketingu promującego produkty przyjazne dla środowiska. Zgodnie z tą myślą niniejsze badanie próbuje pokazać, że praktyki zielonego marketingu obejmują podstawowe elementy zrównoważonego rozwoju, tj. odpowiedzialność społeczną, troskę o środowisko i wzrost gospodarczy, które wzmacniają promowanie zrównoważonego rozwoju. Poza tym argumentuje również, że chociaż istnieje wiele nadrzędnych implikacji i wyzwań związanych z zielonymi praktykami marketingowymi, to jednak znacząco przyczyniają się one do osiągnięcia Celów zrównoważonego rozwoju poprzez włączenie standardów etycznych do wszystkich swoich poprzedników operacyjnych. Niniejsze opracowanie uwzględnia zatem pojęcie etyki międzypokoleniowej imperatywu kategorycznego Kanta w podejściu do zielonego marketingu. W ten sposób służy jako przewodnik dla współczesnych marketerów przede wszystkim po to, by zapobiegać absolutnemu antropocentryzmowi i pragmatycznie sprawiedliwie angażować interesy społeczeństwa, gospodarki i środowiska poprzez wpajanie etycznych praktyk w codzienne zjawiska. W następstwie imperatyw etyki w zielonym marketingu może być zarazem etycznym i ekologicznym podejściem do zapewnienia zrównoważonego biznesu.

Słowa kluczowe: Amerykańskie Stowarzyszenie Marketingu, antropocentryzm, Zielony Marketing, Imperatyw kategoryczny Kanta, zrównoważony rozwój, etyka międzypokoleniowa

1. Introduction

Marketing is one of the most prominent fields in business; it must address deep and intertwined shifts in the environment (Kashani, Jeannet, Horovitz, Meehan, 2005). This view of marketing advances the thought that sustainability must not be compromised at the cost of profit making for business development instead it has to be reflected in each and every practice and process of marketing. Pertaining to this, the analysis endeavors to accentuate the fact that at contemporary time the maximization of profit in business puts extra burden on natural resources. Such anthropogenic impact on the environment directly leads to the deterioration of the natural environment. To prevent the natural environment from destruction, green marketing came into prominence as an exemplar of an environmental management in the domain of marketing. In support of this argument, the present study attempts to show that green marketing emerged in defense of a sustainable environment. Besides, it also shows that the practices of green marketing conscientiously engage the core elements of sustainability to promote sustainable development without any impediments. Furthermore, the argument shows that green marketing would ensure in attaining sustainable development goals more effectively if ethical standards are applied in all of its operational antecedents. In order to implement this pragmatically, the transgenerational ethics of Kant's Categorical Imperative are incorporated in the practices of green marketing so that contemporary marketers could contemplate beyond profit making attitude and develop a pro-environmental attitude towards the environment. To this end, it is argued that the imperative of ethical standards in green marketing would serve as an ethical and anti-environmental resilient approach for ensuring sustainable development. The study thus, successfully concretized a belief into the fact that the resources that cannot be substituted or created must be judiciously used and conserved for the future reference.

2. The Genesis of Green Marketing

The term *green marketing* is alternatively called *environmental marketing* and *ecological marketing* (Polonsky, 1994), that came into prominence probably in the late 1980s and early 1990s. At contemporary time, it extensively embarked on promoting eco-friendly marketing approaches by scrutinizing and accommodating all such activities that would cause the least detrimental effect on the environment and fulfill the necessary wants of consumers (Polonsky, 1994b) and industry too (Bhalerao, 2014). This view of green marketing shows that it takes an active participation in promoting sustainability.

Green marketing as a novel concept emerged in the 70s in one of the workshops. This workshop proceeded with a view to disseminate research related to sustainable environment (Mansvelt, Robbins, 2010) and environmentally oriented business behavior. It also facilitates business professionals to develop proactive behavior towards the environment (Mishra, Sharma, 2010) and understand systems of environmental management while performing business activities. Factually, in 1975, The American Marketing Association (AMA) initiated one of the first historic workshops on *Ecological Marketing*. The proceedings of that workshop resulted in the publication of the most significant book in 1976 on the concept of Green Marketing titled *Ecological Marketing* by Karl E Henion and Kinneer in 1976 (Henion, Kinneer, 1976). Gradually, the publication of the aforementioned book followed with many other publications that greatly dealt with the issues of profitable marketing in business and rational concerns for the environment. Such publications therefore promoted heightened awareness about the marketing activities and its impact on nature and its resources. It conspicuously began to receive significant attention and start disseminating between 1960s and 1970s because of the increasing concerns towards the detrimental effect of consumption and production patterns on the environmental conditions (Konar, Cohen, 2001). As a result, it triggered the attention of people from different fields to show a great deal of interest in examining the marketing activities and its probable adverse effect on the natural environment and developing eco-friendly marketing attitudes. Thus, the growing awareness of eco-friendly marketing behavior gave an impetus to green marketing to evolve gradually.

At initial level green marketing has evidently undergone four different stages of evolution. For instance, the first stage of green marketing began to sprout in the early of 1970 till 1974 termed as the *embryonic stage*. The second stage is termed as *ecological marketing* commenced in the year 1975 to 1989, the third stage is labeled as *green marketing* started in the year 1990 up to 2000 and the fourth stage substantially evolved as *sustainable marketing* in and onwards 2000 (Katrandjiev, 2016). However, keeping in view the chronological development of green marketing, the present research attempts to suggest ethics as an indispensable avenue for the best marketing operations namely *ethical green marketing*. This is to say that ethics based green marketing would promote ethical practices in marketing that comprises producing, promoting and providing products to consumers in a morally acceptable fashion. Ethical green marketing is distinguished from others because *it refers to practices that emphasize transparent, trustworthy, and responsible personal and/or organizational marketing policies and actions that exhibit integrity as well as fairness to consumers and other stakeholders* (Murphy, Laczniak, Bowie, Klein, 2005). This view of green marketing therefore needs an explicit analysis of the conceptual overview of green marketing in order to understand its significance in sustainable development.

3. The Conceptual Overview of Green Marketing

The concept of green marketing fundamentally stems from the real concern for the environment and refers to the production and promotion of eco-friendly products. It genuinely affirms the commitment to sustainability and engages a few indispensable principles such as the conservation of nature, initiation of eco-friendly initiatives, sustainable management of wastes and transparency towards green practices. It is a social marketing practice that not only identifies and satisfies the needs of consumers but also creates new techniques of marketing that aim for maximum social benefits with less commercial concern (Kotler, Zaltman, 1971) and equitably promotes the production and usage of eco-friendly products without negotiating the profitable aspect. This is to say that green marketing is the cautious integration of social expectations, environmental concerns and economical predilections of the company. However, the traditional approach of marketing according to The Chartered Institute of Marketing is that *Marketing is the management process that identifies, anticipates, and satisfies consumer requirements profitably* (Brennan, Baines, Garneau, 2007). This view of marketing however falls short in addressing the environmental concerns to which green marketing became *as a holistic process that anticipates, identifies and satisfies the requirements of customers and society in an ecologically sustainable manner* (Eagle, Dahl, Pelsmacker, Taylor, 2020). In support of this argument, green marketing is the successful strategy that actively listens to, interacts with, and acts on the expectations of its customers who possess a strong sense of environmental and social conscience (Ottoman, 2011). It optimizes the judicious utilization of natural resources and encourages the promotion of those products that cause less harm to nature, fulfill social needs and maintain the obligations related to the economy. Green marketing thus initially emerged at the backdrop of societal, economical and environmental concerns that predominantly advocate sustainable development.

4. Green Marketing Emerged in Defense of Sustainable Environment

There are a number of anthropogenic activities that have instigated the emergence of green marketing for instance, rampant business activities, reckless repercussions on the environment by profit making organizations, deteriorating human health, sustain corporate social responsibilities by renowned companies, maintain goodwill of the company, create new business opportunities, conserve natural resources, develop competitive insights and take advantage out of it, responsive consumers environment, uncontrolled population and so on. Moreover, the emergence of green marketing also underscores the reduction or elimination of wastefulness; educating consumers about the benefits of green products, creating awareness about eco-friendly behavior and putting an impetus for the sustainable business practices in emerging markets. In line with this thought, the economic point of view advocates that human wants and needs have no limits whereas natural resources are limited to a certain extent. To satisfy such unlimited wants and needs human beings unknowingly make injudicious use of available resources. Due to such imprudent use of natural resources, there is a drastic change in climate and a massive deterioration of environmental resources. As a result, it became a matter of grave concern across the globe which consequently led to the imminent beginning of green marketing. Henceforth, green marketing engages, *actions carried out by organizations that are apprehensive about the ecology or green problems by providing environmentally friendly goods or services to bring satisfaction among customers and the community* (Soonthonsmai, 2007). Gradually, green marketing turned out with a course of action that promotes the production of ethically conscious products (Papadas, Avlonitis, Carrigan, 2017) where environmental consciousness, consumers and industry needs and/or interests can co-exist (Chamorro, Banegil, 2006, Bhalariao, 2014, Katrandjiev, 2016). Green marketing thus promotes sustainable practices in its strategies (Sukhu, Scharff, 2018) where the needs of the consumers, industry and environment are collectively acknowledged. Henceforth, green marketing robustly emerged as a novel marketing concept that adheres to the basic pillars of sustainability i.e., social, economic and environmental concerns. A number of companies have realized the importance of green marketing and translated their behavior as a key mediating between commercial and environmental behavior. Moreover, these companies attempted to incorporate environmental concerns into corporate culture with a view to achieve both environmental and profit oriented objectives. For example, Snickers, a company that began in India, rarely engaged green in its approach but within a span of six months they transformed all of their business activities to green approach (Green Technology, 1992). This is to say that the adoption of green marketing in business promotes the sustainable management of the resources as such that it facilitates the judicious use of available material resources; brings shrinkage to waste by deploying environment friendly items and merchandises. Apart from this, the green marketing approach adopted by business organizations also includes a competitive business environment, environmentalists' views, and different policies and legal procedures laid down by the government. All these factors therefore facilitate green practices in maintaining momentum to green marketing by encouraging consumers to buy the products from the companies which show a great deal of concern for the environment. This outlook of green marketing therefore provides an impetus to the business stakeholders and managers to accommodate the ecological vector to their administrative strategies (Kotler, Keller, 2011). At this point of discussion, it is argued that in order to understand the operational antecedents of the success

of green marketing it is equally important for the marketers to discern the sustainable practices of green marketing that are constantly evolving.

5. Sustainable Development is the Pre-Condition for Green Marketing

Green marketing is not just the one or the other approach to marketing, rather it acts as a grave intervener between environmental and social impact that indispensably promotes sustainability in its operational antecedents. It is argued that though green marketing engages a broad range of sustainable activities yet it has some implications that sometimes impede in achieving sustainable development. For instance, to sustain the environment the products of green marketing have to be renewable and recyclable. However, the process of renewing and recycling of products is quite difficult as it puts extra burden on finance. This juxtaposes two critical situations in green marketing: first sustainability requires the sustainable management of the wastes; second financial burden obstructs profits and demands time and efforts which is always an unfavorable condition in the domain of business. To prevent such contradictions and/or to maintain balance between sustainable development and sustainable business it is argued that the systematic way of doing things as proposed by one of the Sustainable Development Goals must be implemented. Goal 9 promotes inclusive, innovative and sustainable industry practice by involving new technologies, facilitating efficient infrastructure and enabling judicious use of resources. In view of this goal, sometimes it is imperative to dissolve the existing system and create a complete new system. To bring this radical change, the creation of a new system requires extensive research into the larger environment in which its products respond so that people from the marketing field can learn the cross functional ability of the product. In doing so, they can gather information about the complete life cycle phases of products so as to build new ideas. Therefore, system thinking is needed where both companies and consumers share a common belief that something has to be contributed from each part. The benefits of recycling can be evident in one of the most exciting materials that are bioplastics. Bioplastics are the byproducts obtained from renewable resources like corn and sugarcane that have zero toxins and are completely compostable in municipal facilities and oftentimes backyard composters. The application of bioplastics is Coca-Cola's *Plant Bottle* prepared by combining traditional petroleum-based plastic and up to thirty percent of plant-based material like sugarcane and molasses, a by-product of sugar production (Ottoman, 2011).

Another challenge for green marketing in ensuring sustainable development is that though it is entering into the mainstream of marketing yet people from diverse demographics are partially aware of the benefits of green products and its significant role in sustainable development. Argumentatively, green products are commonly popular among urban populations, people living in remote areas are rarely aware of the green products and the other benefits related to sustainability. Herewith, it is very challenging and an onerous task for the marketers to educate the consumers about the advantages of green products and its significance in sustainability. With respect to this problem, it is argued that green marketing in view of sustainable development genuinely endorses green products by maintaining complete transparency from production to promotion so that a large number of people either from rural or urban areas would come to know about the health benefits and its impact on the environment. Besides, green marketing also encourages consumers to become ecologically conscious and purchase green products, thus, realizing the significance of healthy life and healthy environment. In doing so, green marketing significantly contributes in attaining one of the Sustainable Goals, i.e., goal 3 that strives to ensure human health and promotes well-being of the people of all ages.

Again, the production process of green products involves expensive cultivation methods and the products are comparatively very costly due to which consumers sometimes resist buying or are not willing to pay. Since, green products are ecologically sound and physically healthy for humans. The resistance to buy the green products for being expensive not only puts questions on its market acceptability but also somewhere affects sustainable development. At this juncture it is argued that green marketing requires innovative and advanced technology, big investment in research and development to curb the production expense (Shitole, Nair, Mathews, Narayanan, 2011) implement sustainable agriculture and simplify the marketing operations so that sustainable goals could be achieved.

Furthermore, dealing with greenwashing is also a big challenge in sustainable development because it involves unethical practices and tends to mislead consumers by rendering false information about the product. This is to say that with the growing preference for green products, few marketers attempt to capitalize and promote the products by simply applying a green marketing approach by using the green color in the packaging, or communicating a symbol or text in their messages even if the product is not environmentally friendly or not containing any green element. This practice of greenwashing however loses the trust of customers and spoils the company's image in the long run. To this end, the present study proposes that ethical standards are an imperative condition that would facilitate in developing environmentally friendly behavior, judicious attitude towards profit making activities so that the goals of sustainable development could be achieved while maintaining sustainable business.

6. Green Marketing is an Ethically Nonpareil Niche for Sustainable Business

One's behavior reflects one's 'values' and 'sustainability' behavior-caring for nature and the planet and the people who live here now and in the future is now a core value of every living generation (Ottoman, 2011). With respect to green marketing in attaining sustainable goals, the above thought philosophically addresses that due to the emergence of environmental problems there is a consistent need for extending and positioning ethical values as a core value of both present and future generations. Moreover, the inculcation and expansion of ethical values in the daily phenomena would facilitate people to meet the emerging needs of the present generation without making any compromise to meet the needs of future generations. It is thus, the prime responsibility of present generations to consider and maintain distributive justice so as to seek benefits of the available resources not only for themselves but also for the future posterity.

Moreover, present generations are obligated to maintain ethical values that are highly transgenerational in nature in which the emergence of environmental problems pursues the moral community to extend concerns for both present and future generations (Borowy, 2014). In support of this argument; the paper suggests the application of transgenerational responsibility on the pragmatic term specifically in the field of marketing. It is argued that in view of sustainability, green marketing literally encourages contemporary marketers to engage operational activities in marketing as such that it must meet the needs of present generation, conserve for the future and promote the sustenance of natural resources. Moreover, the ethical aspect of such belief signifies that the individual values and sustainable attitude towards nature is the prime responsibility of every human being to protect the environment by judicious utilization of natural resources. It is thus argued that the moral responsibility of every individual of the present generation irrespective of their field should maintain equity and justice and must not derive benefits for themselves at the cost of those who will be living in the future. Furthermore, it is argued that marketing activities must maintain justice between generations intergenerational justice and intragenerational. Intergenerational justice are: first, whether present generations can be duty-bound because of considerations of justice to past and future people; second, whether other moral considerations should guide those currently alive in relating to both past and future people; and third, how to interpret the significance of past injustices in terms of what is owed to the descendants of the direct victims of the injustices (Parfit, 1997; Raz, 1986) and justice within generations. Intragenerational justice emphasizes that currently living people may stand under a duty of justice positively to save for future people so that they will achieve a sufficient level of well-being. In view of this argument, it is argued that the incorporation of transgenerational ethics in green marketing would substantially espouse sustainable values and environmentally considerate behavior to curb the inimical effects on the environment.

Furthermore, the above mentioned transgenerational ethics can be clearly viewed in the Kantian philosophy of Categorical Imperative: a deontological theory that affirms a person should act in such a way that their maxim for action could be a universal law (Sullivan, 1989). According to Kantian philosophy it is the duty of every human being to maintain dignity and value that is beyond any price. This envisions that human beings should not use individual/resources as a means of gain for his/her own interests. Every human being is morally responsible to value and respect others' rights, hence counting to their own species. It is therefore the rational duty of human beings to promote the wellbeing of every human not for their contemporaries but also for the future generations (Wood, 1998). Moreover, human beings are the supreme creature of nature as they have the specific ability to think and act. So, human beings should act in an ethical manner that can be universally accepted. Thus, the natural environment must not be treated as a means but as an end in itself because there is no substitute for the available resources (Mulia, Behura, Kar, 2016). The application of Kantian views in the green approach would not only facilitate avoiding the absolute engagement of anthropocentric views in marketing operations but also mandates that all actions are to be judged on the basis of inherent wrongness and rightness. In doing so, it would strictly oppose the absolute use of natural resources by humans and advocate the idea that one must always treat others not as a means, but as ends-in-themselves. In other words, green marketing should not simply appreciate the instrumental value but also respect the intrinsic value that lies in the environment. Hence, the incorporation of Kantian ethics in green marketing predominantly encourages ethical production, ethical marketing, ethical consumption and ethical disposal in all the aspects of green approach. For instance, it advocates *ethical production* in which the environmental characteristics, products and processes are clearly stated. *Ethical marketing* consists of explaining the details obtained from the product. *Ethical consumption* consists of providing the description of the real benefits of the products and *ethical disposal* of products involves the environment friendly process of disposing waste at the time of production. The ethical reflection in the practice of green marketing is therefore an indispensable criterion in the field of marketing for sustainable development and sustainable business (Kotler, 1991).

A careful integration of environmental ethics in the domain of marketing can be viewed in two major perspectives, firstly the normative approach in which ethical standards are engaged to facilitate guidance for fair marketing practices. Secondly, the positive approach, where ethical practices are well defined through empirical work. Moreover, traditional ethics dominantly attributes humans as morally superior to other creatures or the absolute focus on anthropocentrism. Due to such anthropocentric belief, human beings constantly keep focusing on the *principle of total use* which implies that the available natural resources are used for human ends. Environmental ethics

opposes anthropocentric activities and inquires to develop a certain type of consciousness in behavior (Singer, 1975). At this juncture, it would be relevant to delineate the significance of ethics that offers some significant beliefs that are directly related to behavior which would further extend to the green and sustainable behavior:

- i) A belief that a behavior must be reasonably legal and ethical.
- ii) A belief that a behavior must be in the best interests of the individuals of the present and future, the organization and the society.
- iii) A belief that a behavior must not harm oneself or the other.
- iv) A belief that the behavior that facilitates the organization to flourish, the organization in turn will protect the individual who engages in the behavior (Chonko, 1995).

To this end, it is argued that all business practices are plausible and depend on circumstances and personal behavior. Hence, the internalization of ethical values in the professional behavior of individuals would facilitate sustainability-conscious and profitability oriented business (Polonsky, Rosenberger, 2001).

Considering the above discussions, it is therefore argued that the ethical rules and principles can be extended to consumers so that they would learn green behavior as a daily phenomenon. Albeit, most conveniently sustainable behavior can be initiated and inculcated at home only by developing environmentally justified behavior. For instance, some of the significant environmental friendly daily habits are as follows: casting empties in recycle bins, replacing an incandescent bulb with a Compact Fluorescent Lamp (CFL) or light-emitting diode (LED), switching off the electric appliances when not in use, turning off the taps while brushing teeth. Besides, there are also some significant daily activities that can be displaced with eco-friendly behavior for instance, by incorporating car pooling or rideshare, using cotton bags instead of plastic bags and so on.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

Investigating the functional applicability of green marketing in sustainable development it is observed that green marketing substantially engages the sustainable practices in its operations with reference to ethical standards. Notwithstanding, the progressive outlook of this research has shown that the integration of ethical standards in green marketing practices facilitates marketers to spur a proactive environmental approach to deal with the corollary of anthropogenic interruptions to nature. The argument has further shown that the implementation of ethics based green marketing provides substantial opportunities to the marketers to develop ethically sustainable outlook into their premeditated and operational activities of marketing. Moreover, the analysis argued that by encouraging and prompting ethically acceptable attitudes in the behavior of both consumers and marketers not only facilitates green practices in the daily life practices of individuals but also prevents environmental pollution. With an ethically right green marketing approach business firms contribute immensely to social, environmental and economic sustainability. This study progressively necessitates further research that should integrate specific dimensions of the business sectors; especially marketing must ensure ethical labor practices that must gravitate the management of environmental issues in compliance with a dedicated proactive approach. Ethics based green marketing is thus an indispensable marketing concept that not only focuses on producing and promoting green products but it also largely attempts to concretize a belief into the fact that the resources that cannot be substituted or created must be saved and conserved for future reference.

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