

Green Marketing: Linking Competitive Strategies with Environment

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Abstract

Concept of green marketing roots in social environment. Green marketing is the link between environmental considerations and those related to economy and it takes accounts of environmental issues. Factors such as dynamics, great competition, and increase of concern about environment, governmental regulations, and improvement of consumers' awareness have led companies to more think about environmental issues and consumers' health. Green marketing is a new concept which lends new appearance to the social marketing and makes companies responsible for the issues related to the environment. In the present study, firstly, attempts have been made to describe the concept of social responsibility as the foundation of green marketing and to introduce its diverse aspects and dimensions. Then, through an analytic approach to green marketing, its logic, its levels, and evolutionary trend of its concept have been investigated. Finally, strategies and measures have been employed to implement marketing and also conclusions have been drawn.

Key Words: social marketing, green marketing, green consumption, environment.

1. Introduction: A look at the necessity of green marketing in the present era

Green marketing is undoubtedly a very important trend in nowadays competitive vocational matters (Lu et al, 2013). What results from the employment of green marketing provides a new key opportunity for competing with few competitors. In greening, a company can get a number of privileges such as improvement of usable resources, reducing structural expenses of the company, and promoting the competitive situation. Green marketing can increase the efficiency of resources and therefore reduces the expenses in the company besides improving its competitive status with regard to those of other competitors. Greening enables the company to make itself more salient than other companies through offering new products to new markets or presenting extra advantages for the products. This leads to a condition in which the consumers value the company more, stay more faithful to the

company, and finally the company would get more profit. Nowadays, according to social and environmental considerations, marketing has become one of the most significant activities in the companies. (Jansson et al, 2010). Since early 80s, marketing has gained a lot of popularity according to social and environmental considerations and the concept of green marketing has been introduced in these years (Chan, 2013). It seems that all the consumers, whether individuals or industrials, have become more interested in environment (Rahbar& Abdul Wahid, 2011; Chen & Chang, 2013). Green marketing points to planning, expanding, and promoting those products or facilities that satisfy consumers' needs of quality, efficacy, price, and availability without imposing any negative effect on the environment regarding the use of raw materials, energy consumption, etc. (Papadopoulos et al., 2010).

In a study conducted in 16 countries, more than 50% of consumers in each country maintained that they were interested in and worried about the environment. Furthermore, in a study carried out in Australia in 1994, findings indicated that 84% of people believed they were responsible for the environment. These people pointed out they had modified their purchasing behavior for the benefit of environmental issues (Polonsky, 1995).

Green marketing (also called constant marketing) is an interesting trend which has also been employed by retailers in developing countries. Green marketing is the comprehensive process of marketing activities in a company whose aim is reducing negative effects of products, facilities, and their production processes in a way that it is beneficial for the company (Kirchoff et al., 2011). Kotab and Helse maintain that green marketing improves plans the company follows (2004). Bovee and Thill believe that social values would change over time like other elements of marketing environment (1992). Therefore, in order to become sure about success, marketers and their products need to change in accordance and in agreement with the society (Bovee & Thill, 1992).

In 1989, a study conducted in USA concluded that 49% of the respondents had changed their purchasing behaviors because of environmental issues (Bovee & Thill, 1992). In addition, studies conducted by statistics organization of Australia on 16000 individuals shows that 75% of people are concerned about environmental issues (Baker, 1996). The notion of environment preservation has led consumers to rethink what they buy. Today, many consumers have the preparation to pay more for those products that follow environmental standards in order to help the environment (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012).

Above-mentioned statistics and numbers express that environmental issues and environment

preservation are among the most important criteria to be taken into consideration by consumers when buying products. As a result, such things have caused the inclusion of environmental issues into marketing and the appearance of an approach with the title of green marketing. Because green marketing is a subcategory of social responsibility, firstly, those issues related to the social responsibility will be stated and then the concept of green marketing and issues related to it would be investigated.

2. Social responsibility: the foundation of green marketing

Once it was conceived that organizations and producers were responsible merely for the stakeholders and staff or that they were required to deliver the best product to the consumers with the best quality and lowest price regardless of what bad effect that product might have had. Hard competition, increase of population, lack of resources, and environment pollution led to novel approaches of management and organizing and social responsibility and commitment was a result of those changes (Chen & Chang, 2013). In fact, it can be proposed that mentioning this responsibility was a response to the environmental needs and challenges. As consumers paid more attention to social and environmental issues, companies and organizations tended to increase their environment-friendly products while attempting to maintain maximum profit (Lu et al, 2013).

Cateora and Granham believe that supporting external environment is optional but is counted as an important part of every vocational activity (2002). Social environment, social responsibility part of the company look at the consumer comprehensively and even takes accounts of their long-term environmental problems and welfare. Solomon and Stuart (1997) define social responsibility as follows: a way of management

according to which organizations perform activities that have some positive effect on society and improvement of general products.

In fact, Solomon and Stuart's approach was based on the notion that they pledged the eradication of negative effects of organization on society and that they attempted to change consumers' attitudes and behaviors. Some scholars have gone further and announced organizations responsible for the promotion of social welfare. Kent Hathen and Mary Hathen believe that agencies overlooking external beneficiaries would cause problems for the consumer of that agency's product (Amini, 2000)

However, moral principles involved in vocations state that companies need to be aware of how their activities influences people's benefits (Zikmund & Damico, 2001). Saying that social responsibility involves only environmental issues is simplistic since this commitment has a special effect on marketing and makes it less serious. Bovee and Thill propose the required measures to be used in social responsibility as classifying, advertisement, personal selling, and facilities and the marketer needs to define the benefit and welfare of the society according to potential factors (1992).

Social responsibility is a method through which companies supply products in accordance with customers' needs and set prices that would be reasonable for the customers and that would benefit producer too. Social responsibility go more than a positive attitude toward the environment since it takes account of all aspects of product consumption by the customers. In this approach, not only environment and ecosystem are taken into consideration, but customers' mental and physical health and disasters such as population growth are accounted for too. Social responsibility of marketing directs customers'

choices appropriately and this requires long-term prediction.

Four categories of important factors are dealt with in social responsibility: customer's movement, relations of society, marketing, and variety (Pride & Ferrell, 1995). The present study aims to consider green marketing as one dimension of social responsibility.

3. Green marketing: conceptualization

Recently, environment is growingly believed to be a crucial issue for all ethnic groups whether being customer or producer. Traditional marketing overemphasizes customers' needs while overlooks social welfare and environmental issues. This has entered all dimensions of organizations, has influenced marketing, and has caused the formation a concept named green marketing. Unfortunately, most people believe that green marketing merely refers to promotion and advertisement of products with environmental characteristics. Words such as phosphate, recyclable, and compatible with ozone layer are often related to green marketing by customers. Although these words are some traits of green marketing, green marketing is a vaster concept which can be applied to industrial and consumption products or even services (Polonsky, 1995). Green marketing refers to the development and improvement of pricing, promotion and distribution of those products that do not harm the environment (Pride & Ferrell, 1995).

Solomon & Stuart define green marketing as a marketing strategy that supports the environment through creating specific environmental advantages according to customers' needs (1997). Marketing association of USA describes green marketing as the following: investigation of positive and negative aspects of marketing on pollution and decreasing energy resources and

other resources. Also, it should be noted that this definition is not comprehensive and a more comprehensive one is required.

Poolonsky(1995) defines green marketing as follows: green or environmental marketing includes all activities designed for creating and easing transactions in order to satisfy human needs and enquiries with the minimum destructive effects on the environment. One important thing that should be noted is the fact that green marketing does not expose any harmful effect but less harmful effect on the environment.

It can be expressed that, through green marketing, companies obtain a competitive advantage in comparison with other companies. Many companies try to be more responsible for the environment so that they could better satisfy customers' needs. For instance, Tuna producers modified fishing procedures since peoples' concern about fishing nets and dolphin death had increased. In green marketing, there exist other green concepts such as:

Green consumers: green consumers are those people who are concerned about nature to a great extent. They change their purchasing and consumption behaviors by purchasing nature-friendly products to support nature (Govina, 2004).

Green production: production using technologies that limit or omit pollution or that have beneficial environmental effects.

Green accounting: accounting methods that try to take account of currency to be used as ecologic investments and harms to be imposed on jungles (Witzel, 1999).

Generally speaking, it can be said that 'green' is a word that roots in ecologic and nature topics when talking about marketing and that is used

when organizations and people want to talk about ecologic or environmental forces.

4- Strategic logic of green marketing

Recently, environment is growingly believed to be a crucial issue for all ethnic groups whether being customer or producer. With increase of energy prices and concerns about climate changes, the importance of considering natural resources is more felt. Moreover, increase of public knowledge and concern about health and preservation of environment has led to the notion that customers take account of environmental issues when buying things. This has led many people to want to attend the process of producing green products to gain social acceptability and solve environmental problems. Producer and marketers take advantage this tendency in their customers and make use of greening factor besides prices and quality to make their products different from other products and attract pioneers' attention. In this way, using expressions such as environment-friendly, environment-compatible, 100% natural, recyclable, etc. has been expanding. Also, companies want to follow this trend through modifying their management and production processes. So, knowing that resources become more limited and fewer every day and customers have turned more aware and sensitive toward environmental issues and problem and pay attention to these things when purchasing, organizations must rethink about their marketing policies and strategies and attempt to improve their function. Findings of a number of studies have shown that environmental activities are rarely in line with evaluative criteria of organizations. In addition, many companies make use of traditional criteria such as benefit, outcome rate of investment, market share, etc. to evaluate themselves according to environmental matters. Few number of companies have found out that greening provides them with strategic advantages (Polonsky& Rosenberger, 2001). Only when what

a company supplies is in actual contrast with what other competitive companies supply, appropriate positioning begins through which customers are valued (Kotler& Armstrong, 2012).

In this sense, with the fact that today environmental and social matters are of great importance for the customers, environmental issues can create an advantage of competition in marketing and that is when the company reach a good basement in market. Further, main reason for greening roots in economy. Economy is the study of how people try to satisfy unlimited needs with a limited number of sources. When dealing with marketing literature, different reasons have been mentioned by many countries to increase green marketing activities, few of them are listed here.

Greening can occur as a result of external or internal forces (Polonsky& Rosenberger, 2001). Following external forces are those that can cause greening:

1- Satisfying customers' needs: today, companies and organizations have to consider points related to environment preservation in order to satisfy customers' needs, complying with social responsibility, and support consumers' rights. For example. McDonald is a salient instance which has changed its packaging methods so as to support its consumers' rights and satisfy their needs.

2- Reaction to competitors' activities: when a company takes account of environmental considerations, other companies need to modify their production strategies and take measures to greening because they might lose their market share otherwise.

3- Increasing interruption on the part of the government: in different countries, government make use of many ways to preserve environment. For example, in USA organization of

environment has set rules to preserve environment. (Kotler& Armstrong, 2012).

4- Increase of environmental pollution: due to increase of environmental pollution, companies need to follow green movement and green marketing. Environment pollution has led to social forces on the part of consumers which have changed governmental policies and policies designed by companies (Kotab&Helse, 2004). Among these companies, there is Axon (the biggest oil transfer company). This company made changes in its policies and established an organization and two local parks in order to preserve the environment.

There are many internal factors that coerce companies to take green measure some of which are:

The preliminary and most important factor is price factor. That is, greening can lead to better performance of resources and financial savings. In other words, less input is used and so less trash is produced, thus less pollution (Polonsky& Rosenberger, 2001).

The second internal factor is philosophy of the company. When companies pay attention to environmental goals like other goals and mention them in their philosophy, greening is mixed with strategies of the company and then intermingles with its strategic activities.

Third internal factor is creating a competitive status in the market. Those companies which take accounts of environmental issues in their marketing activities and production create a competitive position in relation to other competitors. So, it can be proposed that following greening principles lead consumers to have a better attitude toward the company (Kotler& Armstrong, 2012). Ken Peattie (1995) points out that environmental topics causes a new approach which he calls ecologic positioning. According to

this approach, companies need to focus on environmental topics to position their products.

5- Levels of green marketing

Five factors in marketing activity that lead to its failure in a cycle are the followings; green cycle: having a reacting attitude using public relationships in order to falsify, devalue, or criticize green activities of the company. Green sale: having an opportunistic attitude by adding green claims for the present product in order to sell more. Green product: having interest in the notion that greening leads to saving money (short-term profit is key goal for many companies and their marketing managers). Solving marketing: expanding innovations of green marketing without real conceptualization of customers' needs. Accepted marketing: using an accepted sample with potentiality or expectation of setting environmental rules rather than seeking opportunity to promote green certificates of a non-innovatory company. Managers might ask themselves how they can reach organizational or consumers' goals while remaining responsible for the environment too. In green marketing, environmental topics are among the paramount strategies of the company and require many strategic measures. Green marketing measures are performed in three levels in the company. These three level are: strategic level, semi-strategic level, and tactic level.

In strategic level, critical changes are formed in the philosophy of the company. Strategic greening often requires changes in company's mentality, behavior, and tactics (Polonsky& Rosenberger, 2001). Greening at the semi-strategic level causes changes in company's function. In tactic greening, changes occur in executional activities such as changes in promotion and advertisement.

These three levels can be used to identify the amount of change companies need to have and may show the amount of commitment to different environmental activities. Environmental strategic activities need long-term financial investments in the section in which the company functions.

In case of effective strategic greening, it is rarely possible to look at it superficially. In different levels of greening, it must be noted what activities need to be performed. Strategic greening might prove effective in an area while it might not in others. Therefore, although strategic greening does not need to be involves in all marketing activities strategically, in the production site it is a strategic topic.

6- A survey of green marketing evolution

Green economy is a new topic which is increasingly expanding. Also, green vocation can have different meanings like many other new concepts. In general, vocations that cater for at least following four responsibilities can be called green vocation:

- Preserve environment or improve environmental situation;
- Having privileges that support families and create safe job conditions;
- Provide the possibility of education and create an obvious job prospects;
- Have gender, ethnic, geographic, and age variety.

Vocation can be related to environmental motives and social equality like decrease of greenhouse gases and other environmental pollutants, use of recyclable energy resources and taking measures for optimal effectiveness of energy, preserving energy and natural resources, minimizing waste and creating job opportunities in poor societies. Green vocations can be either big or small and be

adopted by both men and women with whatever age, ethnicity, and social-economic status. Green vocations are usually local, i.e. they supply products and services in local areas. This characteristic allows them to be able to reduce carbonic polluters, create local jobs, and support the society. From inauguration up to now, green marketing has gone through different steps each of which has had its own features, changed according to environmental needs and conditions, and entered into a new era. Green marketing has so far gone through three eras, namely:

First era: ecologic green marketing: historically, this era contains 60s and early 70s. Characteristics and this era include focusing on external environmental problems such as air pollution, etc. (Peattie, 2001). Also, industries like automobile, oil, agriculture, and chemicals were more discussed. In this era, social and environmental values entered vocation. Solving approach was usually a final solution though the solution itself might have led to an increase of expense. For instance, fuel optimization in automobiles was introduced a necessity by the law and as a result automobiles' prices raised.

Second era: environmental green marketing: this era began from early 80s through which novel concepts such as clean innovation, constancy, green consumer, and competitive advantage were introduced. As an example, clean innovation included creative designing of products and production system in a way that waste and pollution be omitted in the design level. In this era, green consumers were those who were not interested in using products which would:

- 1- Jeopardize consumers' or others' health;
- 2- harm environment when being produced, used, or analyzed;
- 3- introduce unnecessary waste through packaging;

4- be harmful for animals;

5- have negative effects on other countries.

Via competitive advantage, the company could function in a better position. If many consumers were worried about environment, companies could make themselves distinguished from other companies through making their products compatible with the environment. Therefore, this approach was a win-win relationship that leads to both consumer's welfare and decrease in Company's waste and expenses through appropriate activities.

Salient difference between the first and second eras was that the first usually focused on industries that had direct influence on environment. While, the second contained all production and service methods such as tourism, etc. (Peattie, 2001). On the basis of environmental marketing, vocations are not merely a chain of values that changes data to market needs but systems with non-market needs like waste and pollution. That is, this era improves a holistic and systemic attitude which has led to global attitudes toward the environment like consideration of ozone layer and global warming.

To third era: constant green marketing: due to abundant needs and increase in their expectations and nations' stringency, the second era was not responsive anymore. Topics such as constant development in economy had an influential effect on marketing science and moved third era to constant green marketing.

Salient challenges in this era include: prudence, equality and justice, and focus on needs. Prudence believes that marketing attempts to cause customers' satisfaction and investors' benefits. Also, two previous eras merely focused on current needs of consumers while, according to constant green marketing approach, needs of

following generations must be taken care of. Therefore, if today's system of production and consumption remains inconstant, next generation's choice will be eradicated. Moreover, justice and equality maintains that expenses and benefits are not the same in developed countries (Peattie, 2001).

For instance, income in developed countries is seven times more than that in less developed countries. Developed countries contained less than 20% of the earth's population but consume more than half the electricity in the globe and produce 50% of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Another important element is focusing on needs. Although, aim of marketing is to cater for needs and enquiries, current marketing mostly attempts to focus on people's enquiries and not merely satisfying their needs. Researches show that 80% of the population on the globe do not have good incomes and much of their consumption expenses involve satisfying their first needs. So, constant marketing must focus on needs and not on enquiries.

7- Green marketing strategies

When employing green marketing many people tend to pay attention to specific individual activities such as improving features of green products or designing products that are less harmful ecologically. Only few companies have correctly defined the mentality of ecology in their programs. This had led to a difficulty in the evaluation of overall success of environmental programs in financial aspects because green activities are limited to one or two sections of responsibility and cannot be adopted by all parts of the company or by its philosophy. Recently, green marketing involved vase topics such as pricing, designing, positioning, waste marketing, promotion and green federals (Polonsky& Rosenberger, 2001). In this section, measures related to above-mentioned factors will be

specified according to the concept of green marketing.

1- Green designing or improving new products: in 1993, Ashley stated that 70% of designed products and production process are harmful to the environment. So, companies need to take environmental consideration into account in their initial levels of product development. Then, they will be able to make use of the analysis of life cycle to evaluate ecologic effects of products. These analyses will help them to identify substitutive methods of designing or producing products and finally create new industries and markets with reducing expenses (Polonsky& Rosenberger, 2001).

Green designing starts with planning and contains finishing products, selecting products, production structure, function of production process, packaging, transporting method, and how to use the product (Ahary, 1374). In green designing, following principles need to be taken into account:

- New designing on the basis of providence;
- Designing on the basis of health and safety;
- Designing on the basis of easy separation;
- Designing on the basis of ease of recycling, lack of pollution, and using minimum energy;
- Designing on the basis of using minimum materials and components of products;
- Designing on the basis of simple application.

2- Green positioning: green positioning needs to be take into account in the inauguration of the organization. In fact, green marketers have proved strategic greening when they proved that all their activities and behaviors have completely

followed environmental notions in their decision making.

Polonsky & Rosenberger expressed that environmental criteria need to be taken into account like financial criteria in the process of positioning (2001).

3- Green pricing: in green marketing, prices should be indicative or at least approximate of their real values. In other words, not only direct production expenses but also environmental expenses are required to be taken into account (Pride & Ferrell, 1995). Often, money paid for green products is more but in long-term periods they become less. So, consumers must have the understanding to consider all peripheral expenses such as environmental pollution when choosing between different products.

4- Green equipment: Of the crucial goals of equipment are environmental expenses. Complicated improvements have been formed in the equipment section. This innovation first appeared in 1990 in Germany. Disciplined reversing equipment requires vast commitments of companies based on strategic focus such as human and financial resources (Polonsky & Rosenberger, 2001). So, it can be concluded that green equipment is a disciplined strategic and complicated activity and offers exclusive opportunities for companies. In case companies do not have the capability or motivation of green equipment, they may tend to start waste marketing.

5- Waste marketing: although waste marketing is intertwined with reversing equipment, they are different concepts. Companies might produce products that would not be able to process them again. Polonsky & Rosenberger believe that this attitude must be changed since waste are the result of company's activities and can cause added value like other products. Since waste

marketing presupposes that waste exist and should be treated more effectively, it is not necessary for strategic greening. So, it can be said that waste marketing is a final solution.

6- Green promotion: publicizing critical environmental information is an appropriate approach that needs to be focused in promotion activities but requires real changes in those activities. Polonsky asserts that company needs to know what information are important to customers before advertisement (Polonsky & Rosenberger, 2001). Environment preservation agency (EPA) suggests that such information must be trained to consumers and the ability to make effective decisions about using green washing (using less detergents).

7- Green federals: one other factor that helps improve the concept of green marketing is green groups. Findings of researches show that environmental groups can be a valuable resource in helping the company conceptualize suitable solutions and employ proper tactics and strategies. Green union can help the execution of its activities in a short while. Nevertheless, union cannot overcome potential problems like diverse purposes.

8- Conclusion

It can be said, with increase of public knowledge and governmental rules, organization have no other choice but move toward green marketing. Organizations must review processes involved in their production and use raw materials that are not harmful to environment and that even take accounts of it. Organizations can reduce their expenses via green marketing and use their resources more effectively. Also, they can make use of green marketing and respect environment to exert positive effects on their consumers and make them faithful to themselves. In fact, according to the above mentioned, it can be

presumed that those companies that use markets with environmental features have the privilege of competition other than those that do not use such marketing. However, as mentioned previously such competitive advantage, expense reducing, and profiting can be obtained in long term. In fact, it can be expressed that there is no reverse way to producing destructive products for the environment and step by step governmental, competitive forces and customers' attitudes would lead companies to follow and apply green marketing approach. Reconsidering their production processes and designing products and services, companies can strengthen their position in competitive conditions, otherwise they would get off the green train. Green marketing approach does not focus on satisfying customers' needs. However, according to green marketing approach consumers' needs need to be satisfied in a way that it would benefit society as a whole. Additionally, there are different principles for creating a competitive advantage and moving toward greening which involved following opportunities. Firstly, greening of production process often leads to improvement in resource effectiveness. Secondly, greening of marketing activities will enable the company to distinguish itself from other companies by introducing new products to new markets or by presenting added advantages to current products. This would lead customers to value the company more and remain faithful to the company as a result of which the company would gain more profit. Companies are after short-term benefits and might be less committed to the necessity of structural processes for crucial changes. Therefore, they might be less willing to follow the strategic approach of green marketing. Finally, it can be concluded that before reaching significant results, one needs to spend time, be committed, and have resources.

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