Adoption and consumption patterns of green products: An exploratory study amongst green consumers in Durban

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ABSTRACT

Green marketing has evolved, although the market share of green products remains considerably low. Green products are part of comprehensive green marketing, and this sort of marketing has progressed to the point that practically every consumer is aware of it. The study focuses on the factors that influence the adoption and consumption patterns of green goods in the greater Durban area. The study used a quantitative, non-probability, and random sampling strategy to discover consumers' sentiments toward the purchase of green products. The data was collected through the use of questionnaires and analyzed using the SPSS. The sample size was 384 customers from retail malls in selected Durban suburbs, representing a wide demographic and cultural background. The study's findings revealed that customers in the greater Durban area are aware of green products. Green products, on the other hand, are regarded as affluent due to their high pricing. This means that companies developing green products will have to look for ways to cut their pricing. The survey also reveals that when customers must pick between green and non-green items, pricing is a crucial factor. The study's findings are limited to the confines of the wider Durban area and cannot be extrapolated.

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Introduction

Green marketing has captivated the interest of practitioners and academics alike in recent decades. Marketing professionals witnessed the evolution of green marketing, particularly in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This was when they used to lump all green consumers into one category until they realised that it is not just the educated consumer who buys green products, but also the ignorant, who are becoming environmentally conscious (Ottman, 2009). Though such improvement has been demonstrated, the causes determining such purchases remain hazy even now. Green marketing has also progressed to the point where practically every consumer is aware of it and supports purchasing green products (Shah, 2013). One reason for this progression was the belief that green marketing could be the solution to the difficulties generated by the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCGs) sector. As a result, people are prepared to pay a premium price for products that provide health and comfort (Essoussi and Linton, 2010). Consumers may embrace green marketing at this time in the marketing environment, but this does not represent their actual purchases (Schuitema and de Groot, 2015).

The concept of green marketing is to safeguard the planet for this generation and future generations, as well as to teach humanity the value of resource management. Green marketing, according to Garg (2014), promotes the manufacturing and consumption of environmentally friendly products. This notion also supports the product in terms of being ecologically friendly and associated with green legislation, as well as its overall green features. It is predicted that by 2050, the world's population would consume roughly 70% more food than it does today (Sarmadi, 2015). This will necessitate more fertile lands than people currently have or will have as long as they continue to use non-green products irresponsibly. The Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCGs) business is still one

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of the greatest polluters in the world; thus, Garg (2014) stresses that green marketing promotes the manufacturing and consumption of environmentally friendly products. This concept also helps the product's environmental friendliness and alignment with green policies.

The study aims at examining the factors that influence the adoption and consumption patterns of green goods in the greater Durban area. The study used a quantitative, non-probability, and random sampling strategy to discover consumers' sentiments toward the purchase of green products. The data was collected through the use of questionnaires and analyzed using the SPSS. The sample size was 384 customers from retail malls in selected Durban suburbs, representing a wide demographic and cultural background.

Literature Review

Green Consumers and their Behaviour

Green consumers are those who are concerned about the environment in their purchasing habits, marketplace activities, and consuming patterns, and who consider the impact of their actions on the natural world around them (Chitra, 2007). Green consumers are becoming more concerned about product attributes such as recyclability and chemical content, and they value organic, energy-efficient, or biodegradable packaging (Luzio and Lemke, 2013). Green consumers are more educated, have a higher income and occupation status, and are from a higher social class. They have a strong sense of self and consider themselves to be ecologically conscious clients. They are more aware of green consumption and consume environmental news more frequently (Chan and Scholar, 1999).

Green consumers, according to Ryan (2006), lack awareness about environmental issues but are eager to learn. The author agrees that green customers are not all the same, but they have common beliefs and behaviors such as commitment to their green lifestyle, researching organisations with green goods, and exaggerating their green behaviour. This contradicts Shah's (2013) statement that a green consumer is someone aware of environmental issues and companies' obligations imposed by policymakers, and someone who supports environmental causes to the point of switching from one product (traditional) or supplier to another because they offer green products, even if it entails higher costs. The author goes on to say that today's consumers are becoming "green-conscious" rather than "brand conscious," and many businesses have realised that it is no longer enough to satisfy consumers' appetites by simply delivering tangible products, but rather to focus on the attributes that come with green products, which are extremely important. Understanding green consumers is the first step in developing the best marketing strategy to meet their demands, regardless of their attitude, knowledge, or beliefs.

According to Schuitema and De Groot (2015), green buyers are more likely to focus on products with egoistic features before they focus on green product attributes. They contend that if product attributes such as low prices and well-known brands can satisfy typical egoistic motives, green product attributes, such as those with no connection to cruelty or with a low environmental impact, can influence consumption behaviour more than when egoistic motivations are not satisfied. Meyer (2014) illustrates green consumers and their purchasing habits using a table. Meyer also suggested that this may be leveraged to create a green customer niche. The table is shown as follows:

Table 1: The spectrum of green consumers

Green Consumer Types	Attitude towards environmentally friendly apparel
Dark green	These consumers are very likely to seek green products and they would be extremely bothered and complain if they do not find what they want.
Green	Very likely to seek green products.
Light green	Somewhat or moderately likely to buy green products.
Pale green	These consumers do not seek green products at all.
Non-green	These consumers do not seek and they would not be bothered about buying green products.

Source: Meyer (2014)

Green Products

Green products have a distinctive design, require fewer physical resources during their lifespan, and range from dark green to light green (Janssen and Jager, 2002). Dark green products are regarded to be environmentally friendly or pro-environment and do not harm the environment at any stage of their life cycle, whereas light green products may be environmentally friendly but damage the environment at some point throughout their life cycle (Spors, 2011). For a product to move beyond a dark green segment, it is common for that product to need advantages on its conventional attributes as compared to the competitors' products for the reimbursement of the disadvantages that it might have. This is confirmed by Olson (2013) who agreed that as for greener products, the reimbursement advantage is the lower operational cost owing to the reduction of energy consumption. This reduces greenhouse gas emissions and the depletion of natural resources because most of the energy used around the globe for home appliances and utensils is from carbon-based fuels. A greenhouse gas is any gaseous compound in the atmosphere that can absorb infrared radiation,

thus trapping heat in the atmosphere (Lallanilla, 2015). Small energy consumption is likely to be considered a green attribute and/ or operating cost attribute when product attributes are evaluated or purchased. This resonates with Zink and Geyer (2016) who consider a green product as one that has a less environmental impact or has less detrimental effects to human health than the level of the traditional product. The words 'green' and 'sustainable' are used to indicate that these products are pro-conserving the planet for future generations. This disagrees with Kampfe et al (2017) who suggested that it is not necessarily true that products made from natural materials or resources are more sustainable compared to conventional alternatives. Some products can be made from natural materials or resources but still be in the same level of sustainability with the conventional attributes.

According to Peattie (2001), over time, humanity's perceptions about what defines green marketing have changed; this evolution has improved the quality of green products and has also progressed in three stages. These stages are described below:

- i. *Ecological marketing* – a narrowly focused initiative to reduce humans' reliance on particularly harmful products;
- ii. *Environmental marketing* – a broader-based initiative to reduce environmental damage by tapping into green consumer demand and opportunities for competitive advantage; and;
- iii. *Sustainable marketing* – a foundational initiative.

Green marketing is still in its early stages. According to Shah (2013), customers are growing more environmentally conscious, whether consciously or unconsciously. This is demonstrated by their readiness to participate in green activities such as taking public transportation and using energy-saving light bulbs to save electricity, yet this appears to be a ruse as it does not convert to a radical shift in green marketing. The graphic below depicts the important events in the global market's growth of green products since the 1980s. This is depicted in figure 1 as follows:

Figure 1: Timeline of key events in green product consumerism from 1980 to 2010; Source: Air Quality Sciences (2010)

Consumption and Adoption of green products

The evolution of green marketing has also progressed to the point where practically every consumer is aware of green marketing and supports the purchase of green products (Shah, 2013). One of the reasons for this progression was the belief that green marketing could be the solution to the difficulties generated by the FMCG sector. As a result, people are willing to pay a premium price for products that provide them with health and comfort (Essoussi and Linton, 2010). However, at this point in the marketing environment, consumers may favor green products, but this does not represent their real purchases (Schuitema and de Groot, 2015).

According to Young and Dhanda (2012), while purchasing green products, ordinary consumers must make complex selections. There is always the possibility that such a decision will help to ensure the sustainability of the environment. When customers engage in sustainable consumption habits, they are engaging in one of the most difficult purchasing behaviors because each purchase has implications for ethics, resources, and waste. For example, a product that is tested on animals is considered not ethical, a product that uses scarce natural resources, harmful chemicals and has big waste implications after use is considered not sustainable. Such factors drive consumers to make a trade-off during product purchase because they believe they cannot meet all the necessary variables.

Bui (2005) presented a model that shows how inputs and intervening variables influence green customer purchasing intentions. This is depicted in figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Variables that drive consumer choice to purchase green products; *Source:* Bui (2005)

Environmental concern remains the most important element in green product purchasing because it raises consumer awareness of environmental issues, enabling customers to engage in sustainable consumption (Joshi and Rahman, 2015). Environmental concern is subsequently followed by certification labelling, which, like most marketing operations, aims to boost product use (Dahlstrom, 2011). Certification and labelling have the potential to impact green product consumption, emphasising the necessity of integrity and legitimacy while developing eco-labels (Chkanikova and Lehner, 2015). This is supported by Datta (2011), who reported on an empirical study conducted in India, revealed that a higher number of respondents (78%) noted that the labelling of the products as eco-friendly products had a significant impact on their purchase intentions.

In conclusion, Mintz (2011) stated that marketers should stop relying on eco-labels because the market share of green products will not expand dramatically. Mintz contends that to attain a better and greener society through green consumption habits, marketers must reach out to a larger spectrum of consumers rather than focusing solely on those who already exist.

Research and Methodology

This study is quantitative, non-probability, and descriptive in nature, as it illuminates and aids in the analysis of the factors impacting the adoption and consumption patterns of green products (FMCGs) in the greater Durban area. According to Houser (2008), a descriptive study is a type of research that seeks to determine the where and what of the issue being examined.

This study's demographic consists of residents of the greater Durban area who are above the age of 18 and shop for themselves and their families at least once a month. According to Burmeister and Aitken (2012), Glenwood, Greyville, and Durban Central have an estimated population of 700 000 people, and the sample size of 384 respondents will be sufficient to support the research findings based on a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level. As there was no readily available database of green customers in the greater Durban area, a non-probability sampling approach utilising convenience sampling was used to identify the 384 respondents. To determine the suitability and relevance of the respondents to participate in the study, screening questions were used.

As the measuring instrument in this survey, a questionnaire produced from the literature review was used. The questions were closed-ended, and a five-point Likert scale was employed to represent 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree.' The researcher conducted a pilot test with 10 respondents before administering the questionnaire to record the time and make any necessary modifications to the questionnaire.

Results

Table 2: Residence Status

Residence	within	Frequency		Percent	
		Yes			
		No			
greater Durban	Yes	377		98.2	
	No	7		1.8	
	Total	384		100.0	

According to Table 2, the vast majority (98.2 %) of the respondents claim to reside in the greater Durban area, while only a small proportion (1.8%) appear to reside outside the greater Durban area.

Table 3: Gender distribution by age group

		Age group				
			18-19 years	20-35 years	36-50 years	Over 50 years
Gender	Male	Count	31	116	26	0
		% of Total	8.1%	30.2%	6.8%	0.0%
	Female	Count	46	141	20	4
		% of Total	12.0%	36.7%	5.2%	1.0%
	Total	Count	77	257	46	4
		% of Total	20.1%	66.9%	12.0%	1.0%

Fisher Exact test= 0.096

The gender distribution of respondents by age group is shown in Table 3. The Fisher Exact tests failed to reveal any significant variations in the gender distribution of the participants' ages ($p > 0.05$). Nonetheless, it may be concluded that females (54.9%) outnumbered males (45.1%) participants. More specifically, particularly in terms of age distribution, the proportion of females (12.1 %) within the age distribution of 18-19 years old was greater than the proportion of males (8.1%). Similarly, females were more prevalent in the 20-35 age range (36.7 %) and above 50 age range (1.0%), respectively. Male (6.8 %) participants, on the other hand, outnumber females (6.8 %) in the 36-50 age range. Overall, more (66.9%) of the participants are within the age distribution of 20-35 years old, followed by those within 18-19 years (20.1%) with the lowest representative within the age distribution of above 50 years (1.0%).

The gender distribution by age shows that the vast majority of respondents are under the age of 30. This was purely fortuitous, but it provides an opportunity to learn and impact this group of people while they still have a long life ahead of them. This means that their ongoing contribution to the use of environmentally friendly items will last for a long time.

Table 4: Cronbach's Alpha

	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Awareness of green products	9	0.792
Perceptions of green products	4	0.752
Assurance of green products	3	0.846

Table 4 displays the Cronbach's Alpha score for each item that comprised the survey questions. According to the table above, the participants' evaluations for awareness of green products ($\alpha = 0.792$) and perceptions of green products ($\alpha = 0.752$) have Cronbach's Alpha values greater than the required value of 0.700. Similarly, the assurance of green products ($\alpha = 0.846$) has a high Cronbach's Alpha. As a result, it is possible to conclude that the questionnaire has acceptable (i.e. high) reliability values. This means that each construct utilised in each part is relevant to green products and customer purchasing behaviour.

Table 5: Participants' awareness of green products

Awareness of green products	No	Likert scale					Mean	Std.	T-test value	P-value
		SA	A	N	D	SD				
I am familiar with green products.	384	25.8%	44.0%	22.9%	6.3%	1.0%	2.13	0.90	46.138	0.000
I am aware of the environmental impact of green products.	384	27.9%	32.3%	27.6%	8.6%	3.6%	2.28	1.07	41.604	0.000
Fear of losing our planet enables me to purchase green products.	384	20.1%	27.9%	35.7%	14.1%	2.3%	2.51	1.04	47.383	0.000
I always buy green products to conserve the planet.	384	15.1%	25.0%	37.8%	16.1%	6.0%	2.73	1.09	49.130	0.000
I compare green product attributes to those of conventional products before purchasing.	384	18.8%	32.6%	26.0%	17.4%	5.2%	2.58	1.13	44.590	0.000
Price influences my green purchasing intentions.	384	21.1%	37.2%	25.8%	13.0%	2.9%	2.39	1.05	44.804	0.000
Green products encompass higher value.	384	20.3%	39.6%	27.9%	9.6%	2.6%	2.35	0.99	46.347	0.000
I am influenced by the media to purchase green products.	384	13.5%	28.6%	26.6%	25.0%	6.3%	2.82	1.14	48.459	0.000
I think green products in the FMCG sector satisfy the market need.	384	17.2%	28.4%	35.4%	14.1%	4.9%	2.61	1.08	47.475	0.000

Likert scale= SD (Strongly Disagree), D (Disagree), N (Neutral), A (Agree), SA (Strongly Agree) P<0.001

In this section, only questions that constitute the awareness of green products were considered as depicted by Table 5 above. This section also revealed that a good number of the participants were aware of green products.

Table 6: Participants' assurance of green products

Assurance of green products	No	Likert scale					Mean	Std.	T-test value	P-value
		SA	A	N	D	SD				
I always read the labels of products before purchasing.	384	21.4%	21.6%	25.3%	20.3%	11.5%	2.79	1.30	42.021	0.000
I consider certification labeling an effective tool when purchasing green products.	384	15.6%	28.6%	31.5%	15.9%	8.3%	2.73	1.15	46.288	0.000
Certification labels influence me to purchase products.	384	15.9%	26.0%	30.7%	17.7%	9.6%	2.79	1.19	45.930	0.000

Likert scale= SD (Strongly Disagree), D (Disagree), N (Neutral), A (Agree), SA (Strongly Agree) P<0.001

This section suggests that on average more of the participants were neutral to the statement measuring the assurance of green products in terms of labeling and certification.

Table 7: Relationship between monthly income and adoption of green products

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		ANOVA P-value	Post hoc Bonferroni test
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
R0-R1 000	172	2.3081	.67665	.05159	2.2063	2.4100	0.016	1.0001,5
R1 001-R5 000	108	2.4329	.84666	.08147	2.2714	2.5944		0.0132,3
R5 001-R10 000	73	2.0925	.74711	.08744	1.9182	2.2668		1.000
R10 001-R20 000	27	2.0093	.98176	.18894	1.6209	2.3976		0.5931,4
R20 001 and above	4	2.3125	.42696	.21348	1.6331	2.9919		1.0005,1

Superscript numbers indicate significant differences between the sample groups (ANOVA, $p < 0.05$).

Table 7 displays the mean, standard deviation, and one-way ANOVA test results. The ANOVA results demonstrate statistically significant variations in the participants' monthly income and adoption of green items ($P < 0.05$). More specifically, more (2.09 ± 0.75) of participants earning between R10 001 and R20 000 had a positive opinion of green products as compared to (2.43 ± 0.85) those earning between R1 001 and R5 000 ($P < 0.05$). Regardless of the participants' monthly income, the majority of them tend to have favourable impressions of green items.

Table 8: Relationship between the level of education and purchase of green products

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		ANOVA P value	Post hoc Tukey HSD test
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Under matric	33	2.9697	1.21153	.21090	2.5401	3.3993	0.005	0.7061,3
Matriculate	118	3.0169	1.09375	.10069	2.8175	3.2164		1.0002,1
Diploma	139	2.6787	1.03124	.08747	2.5057	2.8516		0.1053,2
Bachelor's degree	74	2.5631	.97601	.11346	2.3369	2.7892		0.0434,2
Post-Graduate	17	2.2157	.81600	.19791	1.7961	2.6352		0.0395,2
Other	3	3.2222	.69389	.40062	1.4985	4.9459		0.9995,2

Superscript numbers indicate significant differences between the sample groups (ANOVA, $p < 0.05$).

The ANOVA test in Table 8 indicates that the purchase of green products was significantly different from the participant's level of education ($P < 0.05$). According to the Bonferroni test, it can be noted that participants with a Post-Graduate (2.22 ± 0.82) level of education were significantly more in agreement when compared against the Matriculates (3.01 ± 1.09) regarding the scoring of the statements that measured assurance of green products ($P < 0.05$). Similarly, Bachelor's degree level of education (2.56 ± 0.98) participants were significantly more in agreement when compared to the Matriculates ($P < 0.05$). No significant differences were measured for other categories of level of education ($P > 0.05$).

According to the data gathered, there is a significant level of awareness of green products. On average, 65% of respondents believe they are aware of green products and their relevance to the environment. This is in contrast to Ryan (2006), who discovered that green consumers are unaware of the health implications of green products. However, the study's findings align with Shah (2013), who noted that today's consumers are growing more environmentally conscious as their awareness of green products grows. Green product knowledge can be rated advanced because respondents revealed that they make comparisons between the attributes of green products and the attributes of conventional products. This is hardly surprising given that the data was gathered from a well-educated group of respondents.

As per data gathered, about 70% of respondents are familiar with green products, and nearly half of the participants (49.2%) believe their perceptions of green products are favourable. Almost 40% of those polled said they would recommend green items to their friends. It also became clear that practically everyone is aware of green products and their favourable environmental impact. Green consumers, on the other hand, are people who buy green products rather than merely learning about them. Green-conscious people are those who are aware of and concerned about environmental issues but do not buy green products.

The literature highlighted that certification labelling possesses the power to influence the consumption of green products. The literature also mentions that certification labelling/ eco-labels have the power to strengthen a brand. From the empirical study, it was learned that most of the participants were not sure as to whether certification labelling influences their consumption patterns. However, this was followed by approximately 45% of participants who agreed that certification labelling influences their buying behaviour as they read the labels of the products before buying.

Conclusions

Health, status, recognition, and followers have been recognised as key motivators for the adoption and consumption of green products. This implies that some consumers buy green products because of the health benefits they provide. Others buy because of the social standing that comes with being seen purchasing such products. Some buy because they want to be perceived as environmentally conscious people, while others buy because they want to emulate those they admire, such as celebrities who purchase green products. This means that businesses can capitalise on these opportunities by improving each incentive that drives revenue.

When marketing green products, it is therefore recommended that the degree of knowledge be taken into account. Companies may be able to target tertiary students because they are well educated about the environment, and the study found that the degree of education is one of the primary drivers of green product purchase patterns. Education is one of the reasons why some people check for certified labelling before purchasing green items. Furthermore, governments should interfere in the certification and labelling business to ensure that companies that label their products as green are truly green. This will go a long way toward reassuring even the most skeptical customer.

The study was quantitative and as a result, it is recommended that a qualitative study be conducted to reveal information that this study may have overlooked. This was discovered when some of the participants were eager to provide additional information beyond what was sought by the questionnaire. It is suggested that research be conducted in areas other than the greater Durban area.

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