

Revisiting the Antecedents of Green Marketing Communication: A Pathway towards Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

Introduction

Companies these days, are recognizing the relevance of pro-environmental marketing strategies in their business practices. But prevailing malpractices of greenwashing have increased consumers' scepticism about companies' green endeavours. Need of the hour is to effectively communicate genuine sustainable practices to eradicate brand mistrust and promote ecological behaviour among consumers.

Literature Review

Though some efforts have been made in strengthening the literature on GMC by Chang et al. (2021), Koo et al. (2006), Dinh et al. (2023), Mao & Zhang (2013). But the integrated framework on the same is still unavailable.

Purpose of the Study

The present study aims to propose a theoretical framework conceptualizing the antecedents of Green Marketing Communication that shape the consumers' attitude towards GMC.

Research Methodology

Based on the exploratory qualitative design, the study proposes and corroborates various antecedents of GMC drawn from previous literature.

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Findings of the Study

The study asserts that strategically oriented green marketing communication, consumers' characteristics, cognitive and affective factors act as antecedents to shape the consumers' attitude towards GMC.

Implications

The findings offer useful insights for marketers to conceptualize and design innovative green marketing communication according to the consumers' disposition. The study would facilitate in comprehending the vital influence of various factors on GMC which further assists the marketers in upgrading their image among consumers. Hence, marketers will also be in a better position to achieve their philanthropic and sustainable goals.

Limitation/ Future Scope

Academician may tread towards exploring the behavioural and personality related factors of consumers determining their attitude towards GMC. The perspective of various stakeholders including employees, investors, managers etc. may also be examined by employing qualitative research design for an extensive comprehension of GMC.

Introduction

In the recent past, world has witnessed tremendous changes due to globalization. Increased industrialization, rapid growth of population and human consumption have depleted the natural resources more than their replenishing capacity. World economic growth is far behind environmental degradation. The catastrophic effect of human activities originated several worldwide issues like global warming, ozone layer depletion, air pollution, waste disposal, urban sprawl, water pollution and acid rain. WHO reports that due to triggered air pollution, 4.2 to 7 million people die from respiratory issues. Melting Greenland ice sheet at a pace of one million tons per minute throughout the year, is increasing the sea level. Due to global warming, Antarctic Continent alone is contributing to increase the sea level by 1 millimeter per year. Meanwhile, ocean acidification is also demonstrating the cascading effect on deteriorating climate conditions. Deforestation is responsible for about 15 % of total global warming on the earth (WWF, 2023). Annual plastic

pollution has increased from 2 million tons in 1950 to 419 million tons per year in 2015 (Robinson, 2023). Since 1880, global warming has raised by an average of 0.08° Celsius per decade with an increasing rate of 0.18° Celsius (NOAA, 2023). Despite the Paris Agreement Target to limit global warming to below 2°C, it expects to increase by 3.2°C by 2100 (World Economic Forum, 2023).

Increased awareness about environmental degradation is transforming the modern marketing practices (Liu et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2015; Bailey et al., 2018). Survey conducted by BCG Group reveals that 87% of respondents expect that companies should integrate environmental concerns in their marketing functions (Kachaner et al., 2020). In response to the growing demand for green endeavors and environmental regulation & legislation, companies are incorporating ecological concerns in their strategies, goals and practices (Lin et al., 2017). But merely adoption of sustainable approach cannot help companies to create positive environmental, social, and economic impacts but communicating the green endeavors to the consumers is also imperative. Organization identity and reputation are modelled by effective green marketing communication (Jamal et al., 2022). But high environmental conscious yet skeptical consumers shape a challenge for marketers to effectively communicate the green message (Grebmer & Diefenbach, 2020). Ambiguous information may lead to arise litigation of greenwashing. Need of the hour is to design clear, authentic, relevant and accurate green marketing communication (Testa, 2011) to form a positive attitude of consumers towards the brand.

Literature Review

Transforming ideological pattern of contemporary marketing, compel the organization to design and commercialize strategic perspective in a "greener" way (Liu et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2015; Bailey et al., 2018). GMC must not be comprehended as a mean to attract consumers with the beautification of green messages (Stoica, 2021). Green communication should always be grounded on the true claims represented by the product attributes or its benefits towards environment. Genuine disclosures of green endeavors not only

enhance the corporate values but satisfy the perceived expectations of consumers (Thakur et al., 2023). This stimulates companies to improve their green marketing communication (Testa, 2011).

Green marketing communication may be defined as a marketing strategy to communicate relevant environmental information, educate consumers about sustainable activities of company and to change their behavior towards green products (Dinh et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2021; Stoica, 2021; Šikić, 2021). GMC covers a wide range of communication tools such as; green advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, green publicity, direct marketing, and interactive marketing (Jamal et al., 2022). Incorporating multiple resources and processes facilitate innovative solutions by recombining the existing information and ideas (Yang & Zheng, 2022). Recognizing the fact that environmental consciousness has instigated cynicism about green marketing information (Valenzuela et al., 2023; Taufique, 2022; Shamsi, 2022; Yoon et al., 2020; Gupta & Singh, 2018) integrating appropriate factor for effective GMC is prerequisite to tackle this additional green marketing challenge.

Ariadi et al. (2021) investigated demographic attributes as antecedent of purchase intention and willingness to pay for organic vegetables. Study found education and income as essential indicators. Study conducted by Sun et al. (2018) identifies that generation, gender and region influence the consumer attitude and intention to buy green products. Chekima et al. (2015) found that education and gender moderate the green purchase intention. Green message communicated via nonverbal/pictorial channel are more prone to generate skepticism among high environmental conscious consumers than consumers with low value. Based on stakeholders' discussion, Fernando et al. (2014) introduced two prominent themes pertaining to greenwashed environmental claims: Credibility of marketing communication and influence of companies' practices on natural environment advocating the fulfilment of environmental commitments by companies.

Grimmer & Woolley (2014) examined the impact of three types of GMCs and environmental involvement measured across cognitive, affective, and behavioral attitude on consumers' purchase intention. Product oriented, environment oriented and personal benefit-oriented

message exhibit no significant difference on their purchase intention by environmental involvement measured with affective factor moderate the relationship to a large extent. Nguyen & Vu (2022) revealed significant positive impact of exposure to sponsored events, involvement with sponsored events, and sponsor-event congruence on attitudes toward sponsored event. for effective GMC, Taufique (2021) integrates both affective factor (e.g., emotion) and cognitive factor (e.g., knowledge) as antecedents of green consumer behavior and found that consumers' emotional affinity towards nature and environmental values have positive effect on GCB. In order to examine the psychological process employed to process GMC, Santa & Drews (2023) analyze the effect of green ads on cognitive and affective responses of consumers. Five main heuristics have been proposed which drive consumer responses to green advertising. Recent literature on GMC focuses on integrating emotions with communication appeal (Aagerup et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2017), other studies concentrate on exploring the relationship among affective factors and sustainable behavior (Chwialkowska, 2018) as well as consumers' environmental attitude (Taufique, 2022). However, impact of affective factors on the consumers' attitude towards GMC has not been explored. Šikić (2021) aims to explore how Instagram can be used as a communication channel in green marketing digital mix through content analysis of posts published on the official Instagram account of the first Croatian organic food store 'Bio & Bio'. Author reveals the fact that company prominently relies on product orientation claims, followed by image, integrated, process and environmental oriented claims. Positive consumer attitude towards environment generate favorable response to product oriented green message (Rifon et al., 2012).

Previous studies have postulated the role of consumers' positive attitude towards GMC to build green brand equity and to induce sustainable purchase intention among consumers (Chang et al., 2021; Koo et al., 2006; Dinh et al., 2023; Mao & Zhang, 2013). Different factors influencing the consumers attitude towards green communication are fragmented in different studies (Shamsi et al., 2022; Chan, 2014; Bickart & Ruth, 2012; Finisterra & Reis, 2012; Pittman et al., 2021; Grimmer & Woolley, 2014; Kim et al., 2018) but there is no integrated framework postulating the antecedents of

green marketing communication affecting consumers attitude towards GMC. In current scenario of increasing consumers skepticism and greenwashing litigation, it is imperative to explore the factors that can shape consumers' positive attitude towards green communication. The current study serves this need of modern marketing effectively.

Discussion

SOMCG

Product Oriented
Process Oriented
Image Oriented
Environmental
Oriented

Affective Factors

Income
Age
Gender
Education

Cognitive Factors

Consumer

Characteristics

Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework on Green Marketing Communication

Antecedents of GMC Attitude towards GMC

To drive Green Purchase Intention, investigation of antecedents of Green marketing communications to induce positive attitude towards green message is critical (Taufique, 2022). Based on the previous literature, following antecedents influencing the consumers' attitude towards GMC (Figure 1) are being proposed:

Strategically Oriented Marketing Communication Goal (SOMCG) and GMC To identify the latent demand of consumers, adoption of strategic marketing orientation is pre requisite (Yang & Zheng, 2022). In some cases, green advertisement reflects a very strong commitment towards environment; in other cases, it aims to improve the company's image

(Kollman & Prakash, 2001; Mogele & Tropp, 2010; Menon & Menon, 1997; Porter & Linde, 1995; Shrivastava, 1995; Banerjee et al., 1995). In the latter case, green advertising may prove ineffective when it is not supported by a real commitment in improving the environmental performance of products and production processes (Kirkpatrick, 1990; Smith et al., 1990). Some of the green communication have an educational content (e.g. helping stakeholders understand the nature of environmental issues), others are purely commercial in nature (e.g. inducing people to buy the company's products and become regular customers). Corporations desire to support their domestic and international environmental marketing strategies widely use green advertising, regardless of its content (Belz & Peattie, 2009). In the context of green communication, magnitude of greenness of an advertisement determine the orientation of environmental claims which comprise of product, processes, image, and environment orientated facts (Leonidou et al., 2014). Different companies adopt varied orientation to communicate their ecological practices. For example, Croatian organic food store 'Bio & Bio' prominently rely on product orientation claims, followed by image, mixed, process and environmental oriented claims (Šikić, 2021). However, it cannot be overlooked that message claims revolving around environmental benefits of products and image of the organization are vulnerable to be considered as misleading (Carlson et al., 1993) thus influence the attitude towards green marketing communication.

Cognitive Factors and GMC

Interpretation of green message and ecological claims are affected by consumers' cognition (Hwang et al., 2016; Hidalgo et al., 2016; Leonidou et al., 2011). Green communication positively influences the attitudes of consumers with either analytic or intuitive cognitive styles (Kim et al., 2018). Various cognitive styles of consumers lead to positive reaction towards concrete message rather than abstract advertisements. Green purchase intention is highly influenced by individual's knowledge about the environment (Khare, 2019; Brodahl & Carpenter 2010). Environmental knowledge denotes the consumers' awareness about the environmental issues (Arcury, 1990), symbols (Kumar et al., 2021) and how production process aggravates such issues (Shimul

et al., 2022; Brosdahl & Carpenter, 2010; Meinhold & Malkus, 2005). Previous studies are concentrated on establishing association between cognitive factor and green consumption behavior (Taufique 2022; Taufique et al., 2017; Polonsky et al. 2012). Relationship between knowledge and attitude is also well documented in the literature. Taufique (2022) found that via attitude, cognitive factor indirectly impacts the green consumer behavior. To communicate appropriate green message, it is imperative to determine the

influence of cognitive factor on the attitude towards GMC. Cognitive perception is a important determinant of attitude towards advertising (Putrevu & Lord, 1994; Ruiz & Sicilia, 2004; Yang et al., 2013). Audience attitude towards GMC and decision-making process are facilitated by informational utility presented in ads (Yoon et al., 2020). Lack of Environmental knowledge provokes cynicism among consumer about green message (Akturan, 2018; Connor et al., 1999) leading to negative attitude towards GMC.

Affective Factors and GMC

Intensity of emotional connection with the environment determines individual's inclination towards sustainable behavior (Taufique, 2022). ELM model postulates that people evaluate and interpret the marketing communication either cognitively or emotionally. But to process the message cognitively, ability, motivation and opportunity must be present there (Aagerup et al., 2019). Absence of any of these conditions results in incorporation of emotional factors to process the information (Kazakova et al., 2016). Lee (2009) is of view that contrasting results in green marketing may be found because of exclusion of other variables. Synthesizing emotional factor may produce synergic effect to promote sustainable behavior than any other factor (Kautish et al., 2019; Matthes et al. 2014). Hinds & Sparks (2008) suggested to integrate emotional factor in attitude behavior model. Taufique (2022) highlighted the fact that inclusion of affective factor in attitude-behavior predictive model may predict the green consumer behavior effectively. Pooley & Connor (2000) and Hinds & Sparks (2008) assert that environmental attitude and intention to perform sustainable behavior are considerably driven by emotional factors than any other factors.

Consumer Characteristics and GMC

Consumers' characteristics play a substantial role in shaping their perspective towards green marketing efforts (Shamsi et al., 2022; Chan, 2014). Yoon & Kim (2016) reveal that demographic factors (age) determine positive attitude toward green advertising. Consumers with high environmental concern response more favorably towards the green message as compared to consumers with low environmental concerns (Bickart & Ruth, 2012; Finisterra & Reis, 2012; Pittman et al., 2021). Level of environmental consciousness also determines the consumers' skepticism towards green communication (Grebmer & Diefenbach, 2020). Wilkie et al. (2016) interlink gender stereotyping and green orientation. Researchers argue that green behavior is largely associated with femininity.

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

With the proliferated environmental issues and consumer scepticism about companies' green practices, transparent and sustainable green marketing communication is imperative. Marketers may adopt the proposed theoretical framework of green marketing communication to effectively position the genuineness of ecological endeavours in the consumers' mind. Unveiled antecedents of green marketing communication may assist the marketers to design the promotion mix aligning with perceived expectations of consumers. Integrate the sentiments as well as consumers' concern towards environment may induce positive consumers' attitude towards GMC. Consumers' knowledge about environment is crucial factor in shaping their attitude towards GMC. To meet the expectations of highly environmental conscious consumers, marketer should also create social awareness about authenticity of their claim by disclosing the environmental certification. Increased consumer scepticism and green washing litigations may be handled by adopting appropriate strategic orientation while designing the green marketing communication. Focusing on environment and product-oriented communication may facilitate elimination of consumer scepticism about truthfulness of claims.

Further, marketers should disseminate genuine and authentic green information to build the green brand equity. This may help to differential the green attributes of brand from that of the competitor. Manager must upgrade the quality, design, energy saving quality, reusability of green products to align the features with the communication claim. Vital role of consumers' attitude towards GMC demands dissemination of clear, authentic, relevance and accurate information. Promoting sustainable practices among consumers through pertinent information will not only facilitate the marketers to discharging their fundamental marketing goals but also contribute to achieve their philanthropic and sustainable targets at world level.

Conclusion

Designing appropriate green communication have become challenging task for the marketers. The present study redefines the core strategic value by proposing holistic framework of green marketing communication. Proposed antecedents of GMC will contribute to ensure the positive consumers' attitude, avoid green buzzwords leading to greenwashing and design innovative marketing communication.

Academician may tread towards exploring the behavioural and personality related factors of consumers determining their attitude towards GMC. Perspective of various stakeholders including employees, investors, managers etc. may also be examined by employing qualitative research design for extensive comprehension of GMC.

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