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Research Article

CONSUMERS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION IN EASTERN U.P.: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF VARANASI AND ALLAHABAD DISTRICTS

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ABSTRACT

As we have witnessed a trend in the recent past years, the consumer is becoming more aware and serious to consume eco-friendly products. The success story of LED Bulb product shows a clear-cut evidence for this. Not only this product but many more technologies are being developed by the companies to maintain its customers. One thing is more important here to mention that the companies is not doing it willingly but it have been forced due to increasing awareness among consumers for Eco-Friendly / Sustainable products which creates a new segment of business. Due to growing importance of eco-friendly products it becomes crucial to study the perception of consumer with respect to sustainable products.

It is a comparative study based on primary data which have been collected through structured questionnaire circulated among the respondents of two districts of eastern U.P. i.e. Varanasi and Allahabad. Both the districts and respondents have been selected purposively. The present study analyzes the effect of gender, age, income, education and locality on consumer perception towards using sustainable products.

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INTRODUCTION

The World is facing serious problems like climate change, terrorism, and cyber security. The first is very much important to care. If this problem will not be handled properly, it will result in complete destruction of human civilization. The excessive use of natural resources and increasing pollutants in the environment are caused to ozone depletion, water pollution, Air Pollution, floods, Drought, and cloud bursting. The world leader identified its serious impact and come together to tackle this problem properly. The United Nation Climate Change Conference COP 21 (Conference of Parties 21) was held in Paris, France from 30 November to 12 December, 2015 to discuss over a common agreement which will be binding to all countries and simultaneously ensure economic growth of the participating countries (Shukla & Gupta, 2017). The required number of countries has recently ratified the agreement and shows its willingness to reduce the Green House Gas (GHG) emission. India also ratified it on 2nd October 2016 on the birth anniversary day of legend Mahatma Gandhi. Recently U.S.A. has criticized this (After elected new president Donald Trump) agreement and have said that it is against American interest. But this decision has been criticized by many countries as well as close ally of U.S.A.

To ensure such move, the role of society becomes very vital towards sustainable consumption. *Sustainable consumption* refers to avoid over-consumption and use eco-friendly product to save the limited resources for the consumption of future generation. Sustainable consumption is defined as an approach to minimizing the negative impacts on the environment. The Oslo Symposium define sustainable consumption as (1994) "*the use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardizes the needs of future generations.*", Axelrod & Lehman, 1993 describes that sustainable consumption behavior as actions which contribute to preservation and protection of the environment.

The protection and conservation of resources is everybody responsibility but if consumer become aware and change their perception others will also do because consumer creates demands. Perception is a vital factor which affect consumer actual behavior. Perception is the process by which we select, organize, and interpret information inputs to create a meaningful picture of the world. The recent growth in demand of green product has compelled the company's policy to

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rethink while exploiting natural resources. Recent developments in the green marketing program of companies is proving that the ensuing era will be era of sustainability and people will change their perception widely while demanding the product. The present study entitled "Consumer's Perception towards Sustainable Consumption in Eastern U.P.: A Comparative Study of Varanasi and Allahabad District". Analyzes and compare the perception of consumers towards sustainable consumption living in eastern U.P. The India is a developing country there are its own many challenges such as poverty. Now the question is, whether they would think about consuming sustainable product or not due to lack of income which is rarely enough to fulfill the basic necessities. How the consumer thinks about green product and many others?

Need of the study

As we are aware with the facts about the impact of carelessly handling the environmental issues. The nature is continuously hurting by humans; one day will come when the situation will become uncontrollable. That day will be the disastrous day and human will be punished for their inhuman work (Shukla & Gupta, 2017). It is rightly says "prevention is better than cure". To keep this in mind we think, as a responsible person of society we contribute some efforts to protect and conserve our environment. As we have mentioned over consumption leads to increased demands of the product and manufacturer produce in bulk quantities by exploiting our future generation endowments provided by nature and saved by our ancestors for us. This study analyses the perception of consumer towards sustainable consumption so that if the positive result is shown the manufacture can take help of this study and will change their product accordingly.

Importance of the study

As we have witnessed a trend in the recent past years, the consumer is becoming more aware and serious to consume eco-friendly products. The success story of green product shows a clear cut evidence for this. They are joining the row to maintain its customers due to change in fashion, taste and awareness about environment protection. One thing is more important here to mention that the companies is not doing it willingly but it is being forced due to increasing awareness among consumers for Eco-Friendly / Sustainable products which creates a new segment of business. Due to growing importance of eco-friendly products it becomes crucial to study the perceptions of consumers with respect to sustainable products.

The following are the importance of the study:

- The study will help in increasing awareness towards sustainable products in the society.
- The government can invest some money and frame the law related to environmental protection.
- Producers can innovate their product by keeping in the mind of consumer's perception shown in this study towards green product.
- The topic "Consumer's Perception towards Sustainable Consumption in Eastern U.P.: A Comparative Study of Varanasi and Allahabad District" taken for study is new

area of knowledge. The study will help in enriching education in this field and assist in further researches.

Statement of the problem

Consumer behavior is the branch of Marketing. Perception is being studied under consumer behavior. But this topic cover psychology and anthropology also because measuring the perception of consumer is psychological issues as well as related to anthropology also. Since the sustainability is a burning issue all over the world and it is very vital issue. To keep it mind we have directed our study towards knowing consumer perception towards sustainable product. The study was being conducted in eastern UP region two important districts i.e. Varanasi and Allahabad.

Literature Review

(William, Kumju, Seonaidh, & Caroline J., 2009) have found in his research paper that barriers of lack of time for research, high prices, lack of information, the cognitive effort needed for each purchase and strong non-green criteria. Green consumers found green labels, specialist information, and availability of green products in mainstream retails and guilt as facilitators of green criteria in their purchases and they have developed a tentative green consumer purchase model. It summarizes each micro purchase process for a green consumer of consumer technology product in the UK. It consists of five elements. The socio-economic, infrastructure and cultural context of the purchase is important the results show that each individual purchase was framed by situational factors such as moving house, and retailers with green product range within travelling distance which caused barrier.

(TAN & LAU., 2009) studied Environmental problems are largely caused by unsustainable practices fueled by wasteful runaway consumerism. By making small changes to the lifestyle and consumption habits, each individual can make a worthy contribution to conservation. Malaysian government had implemented various strategies to encourage sustainable consumption and development over the past decades. In this study sought to discover whether there is a pattern of sustainable consumption behavior among young consumers in Malaysia. The result shows that there were no significant differences between male and female consumers, business and non-business students in their overall sustainable consumption behavior. Furthermore, the level of sustainable consumption behavior among young consumers was moderate. Therefore, it was concluded that there was no cause for concern of over-consumption among young consumers in Malaysia. However, concerted effort needs to make to ensure that these young consumers continue to practice sustainable consumption.

(Anita, Ornela, & Pranvera, 2015) in their paper found that Albanian consumers are highly worried about environmental problems and have a positive attitude behavior towards sustainable consumption but this positive attitude is not always translated to purchasing behavior, only 35% of our respondents would pay an extra price for purchasing a sustainable product. Results shows that some socio-demographic are responsible for consumer purchasing behavior. Young educated female is more likely to consume sustainable products. These demographic variables can be used to profile the purchasing behavior of Albanian consumers. In addition, situational determinants of

perceived quality and price of sustainable products play an important role in the final decision-making process. The results shows that Albanian consumers purchasing behavior toward sustainable products is strongly and negatively correlated with the price of sustainable products and positively correlated with perceived quality of sustainable products.

Objectives of the study

1. To study whether consumption perception towards sustainable consumption varies due to gender differences.
2. To examine the impact of education on consumer perception towards green consumption/sustainable consumption.
3. To investigate the role of location/area on the consumer perception.
4. To do a comparative study of the perception of consumer towards sustainable consumption in Varanasi and Allahabad district.

Research Hypotheses

1. **H₀₁**: There is no significant difference in the consumer perception of male and female in Allahabad and Varanasi district towards sustainable consumption.
2. **H₀₂**: There is no difference in the consumer perception of graduate and post graduate respondent in Allahabad and Varanasi district towards sustainable consumption.
3. **H₀₃**: There is no significant difference in the consumer perception of rural and urban people in Allahabad and Varanasi district towards sustainable consumption.
4. **H₀₄**: There is no significant difference in perception of consumers in Allahabad and Varanasi district towards sustainable consumption.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Scope of the study: There are so many products in the market and consumer shows their perception towards it. Since sustainability becomes very crucial in every sphere so we have made an effort to analyze the perception of consumer towards sustainable consumption. The area selected for study is eastern U.P. Since we are intended to conduct a comparative study so we selected two major district of eastern U.P. In this way, our study was being limited to Varanasi and Allahabad district. The study is targeted to analyses the perception of consumer of Varanasi and Allahabad district as well as to present comparative results.

Population: Due to complexity in nature of the study it covers only educated people who had completed their Intermediate education. So all the people who had attained this level of education was part of the population for study.

Sampling Technique: The purposive sampling technique was being used because people were less willing to respond so one who was ready to respond have been covered.

Sample Size: The sample size for study is thirty from each district and it was ensured to get equal number of respondent representing male and female, urban and rural and graduate and post graduate.

Data Collection: The study is purely based on primary data. Data is collected through structured questionnaire. The questionnaire has 15 closed questions which was based on

Five-point type Likert Scale. Responses vary from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Responses have been collected personally from each candidate after giving proper knowledge about concept of sustainable consumption.

Statistical Tools and Technique: Likert Scale method had been used for data collection. The questions have divided into two parts i.e. positive and negative questions. The scores have been assigned on the basis of responses obtained. For positive question it varies 5 to 1, and for negative questions it has been assigned reverse i.e., 1 to 5 for S.A. to S.D. The further statistical tools are Averages, standard deviation and correlation has been used for analysis. To achieve the objective of the study mainly independent sample t-test has been used as statistical tool.

Software Used: SPSS (Statistical Package for The Social Science)

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

In this section, the hypotheses have been tested with the help of statistical tool using SPSS. A detail analysis has been done on data collected in Varanasi and Allahabad district. It has been checked if there is difference in the consumption perception of male and female, graduate and post graduate and rural and urban people. In end of the section a comparative analysis of consumption perception of the people of Varanasi and Allahabad district has been done using t-test statistics. For this purpose, total score of consumption of both the districts has been used.

Analysis of data

Gender

In this section, we have studied whether there is significant difference in consumption perception of sustainable product between male and female or not.

Varanasi

Equal number of respondents has been taken for both the group. In the Table 1.0 the group statistics shows that mean value of male is 51.60 and for female it is 56.27 which indicate that difference is high. For this purpose, independent sample test has been done. In the table 1.1 results indicates that their consumption perception is significantly different from each other. Thus, null hypothesis is rejected.

Table-1.0 Group Statistics

| | Gender | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|--------|----|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| Consumer Perception Score(CPS) statistics | Male | 15 | 51.60 | 6.759 | 1.745 |
| | Female | 15 | 56.27 | 4.399 | 1.136 |

Allahabad

Equal number of respondents has been taken for both the group. The group statistics in the table 2.0 shows that mean value of male is 51.80 and for female it is 55.67 which indicate that difference is high. For this purpose, independent sample test has been done. The result in table 2.1 indicates that their consumption perception is significantly different from each other. Thus, null hypothesis is rejected.

Table-1.1 Independent Samples t-Test

| | F Sig. | Consumer Perception Score(CPS) Statistics. | |
|---|--------------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| | | Equal variances assumed | Equal variances not assumed |
| Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | 3.073 | .091 |
| | t | -2.241 | -2.241 |
| | df | 28 | 24.056 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .033 | .035 |
| | Mean Difference | -4.667 | -4.667 |
| t-test for Equality of Means | Std. Error Difference | 2.082 | 2.082 |
| | 95% Confidence Interval- | -8.932 | -4.01 |
| | Lower | -8.964 | -3.70 |
| | Upper | | |

Table-2.0 Group Statistics

| | Gender | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|--------|----|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| Consumer Perception Score(CPS) statistics | Male | 15 | 51.80 | 5.631 | 1.384 |
| | Female | 15 | 55.67 | 4.835 | 1.248 |

Table-2.1 Independent Samples Test

| | F Sig. | Consumer Perception Score (CPS) statistics. | |
|---|--------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| | | Equal variances assumed | Equal variances not assumed |
| Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | .572 | .456 |
| | t | -2.074 | -2.074 |
| | df | 28 | 27.707 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .047 | .047 |
| t-test for Equality of Means | Mean Difference | -3.863 | -3.863 |
| | Std. Error Difference | 1.864 | 1.864 |
| | 95% Confidence Interval- | -7.685 | -7.687 |
| | Lower | -7.685 | -7.687 |
| | Upper | -0.048 | -0.046 |

As we have seen that there is significant difference between both the districts consumer sustainable score so we can conclude that gender is affecting the perception. It may due to conservatism approach running in families while bringing up the male child and female child.

Education level

To examine whether the consumption perception of graduate respondents is different from that of post graduate, we have used independent sample t-test.

Varanasi

In the table 3.0 shows Mean of graduate respondent is 54.47 and that of post graduate is 53.40 which indicate that the difference is not much. Assuming that there is no difference in the consumption perception of both the group, we found p value .639 showed in the table 3.1 which is quite high as compared to .05. Thus, the result proves that there is no significant difference in the consumption perception between graduate and post graduate respondent and we can say difference in mean is due to by chance.

Table-3.0 Group Statistics

| | Education | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|------------------|----|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| Consumer Perception Score(CPS) statistics | Graduation | 15 | 54.47 | 5.630 | 1.454 |
| | Post- Graduation | 15 | 53.40 | 6.663 | 1.720 |

Table-3.1 Independent Samples t-Test

| | F Sig. | Consumer Perception Score(CPS) Statistics | |
|---|--------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| | | Equal variances assumed | Equal variances not assumed |
| Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | .266 | .610 |
| | T | .474 | .474 |
| | df | 28 | 27.241 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .639 | .640 |
| t-test for Equality of Means | Mean Difference | 1.067 | 1.067 |
| | Std. Error Difference | 2.252 | 2.252 |
| | 95% Confidence Interval- | -3.547 | 5.680 |
| | Lower | -3.553 | 5.686 |
| | Upper | | |

Allahabad

In the table 4.0 Mean of graduate respondent is 53.87 and that of post graduate is 53.60 which indicate that the difference is not much. In the table 4.1 Assuming that there is no difference in the consumption perception of both the group, we found p value .639 which is quite high as compared to .05. Thus, the result proves that there is no significant difference in the consumption perception between graduate and post graduate respondent and we can say difference in mean is due to by chance.

Table-4.0 Group Statistics

| | Education | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|-----------------|----|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| Consumer Perception Score(CPS) Statistics | Graduation | 15 | 53.87 | 5.792 | 1.496 |
| | Post-Graduation | 15 | 53.60 | 5.152 | 1.330 |

Table-4.1 Independent Samples Test

| | F Sig. | Consumer Perception Score(CPS) Statistics | |
|---|--------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| | | Equal variances assumed | Equal variances not assumed |
| Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | .418 | .523 |
| | T | .133 | .133 |
| | df | 28 | 27.624 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .895 | .895 |
| t-test for Equality of Means | Mean Difference | .267 | .267 |
| | Std. Error Difference | 2.002 | 2.002 |
| | 95% Confidence Interval- | -3.833 | 3.836 |
| | Lower | -3.833 | 3.836 |
| | Upper | 4.367 | 4.369 |

As we have found there is no significant difference in sustainable score in both the district. So, we can conclude that graduate and post-graduate have same thinking in both the districts. It may be reason behind it that the graduate and post graduate come in university/college education so they are enough mature to think rationally.

Area

To study the difference in the consumption perception of rural and urban people, we have assumed that there is no difference.

Varanasi

If we look in the table 5.0 and 5.1 we found that the mean difference between the two group is too high i.e. -8.667 which is proved in the result of t-test that the consumption perception

of rural people is significantly different from that of urban people as p value is .000. Thus, null hypothesis regarding this is rejected by this result.

Table-5.0 Group Statistics

| | Area | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|-------|----|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| Consumer Perception Score(CPS) Statistics | Rural | 15 | 49.60 | 4.793 | 1.238 |
| | Urban | 15 | 58.27 | 3.674 | .949 |

Table-5.1 Independent Samples t-Test

| | F | Consumer Perception Score(CPS) Statistics | |
|---|--------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| | | Equal variances assumed | Equal variances not assumed |
| Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | .730 | .400 | |
| | T | | |
| | df | -5.558 | -5.558 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .28 | .26229 |
| t-test for Equality of Means | Mean Difference | .000 | .000 |
| | Std. Error Difference | -8.667 | -8.667 |
| | 95% Confidence Interval- | 1.559 | 1.559 |
| | Lower | -11.861 | -11.870 |
| | Upper | -5.473 | -5.463 |

Allahabad

The mean difference between the two group (refer table 6.0) is too high i.e. (-8.133) which is proved in the result of t-test that the consumption perception of rural people is significantly different from that of urban people as p value (refer table 6.1) is .000. Thus, null hypothesis regarding this is rejected by this result.

Table-6.0 Group Statistics

| | Area | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|-------|----|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| Consumer Perception Score(CPS) Statistics | Rural | 15 | 49.67 | 4.320 | 1.116 |
| | Urban | 15 | 57.80 | 2.456 | .634 |

Table-6.1 Independent Samples t-Test

| | F | Sustainable perception score | |
|---|--------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | | Equal variances assumed | Equal variances not assumed |
| Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | 2.588 | .119 | |
| | T | | |
| | df | -6.339 | -6.339 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .28 | .22189 |
| t-test for Equality of Means | Mean Difference | .000 | .000 |
| | Std. Error Difference | -8.133 | -8.133 |
| | 95% Confidence Interval- | 1.283 | 1.283 |
| | Lower | -10.762 | -10.793 |
| | Upper | -5.505 | -5.474 |

As the test explain and prove that there is significant difference in consumer perception towards sustainable consumption of rural and urban people in both the districts so we can conclude that the area has a significant role in deciding the perception and thinking towards sustainable consumption.

Comparison of Varanasi and Allahabad District

To make a comparative analysis of both district the null hypothesis is taken that there is no significant difference in the consumption perception (in terms of sustainable perception score) between Varanasi and Allahabad district. The statistics shows that their mean is almost equal i.e. have negligible

difference. The t-score .893 which more than .05. The null hypothesis is being accepted i.e. there is no significant difference in the consumption perception of the both the districts. (Refer table 7.0 and 7.1)

Table-7.0 Group Statistics

| | Area | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|-----------|----|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| Consumer Perception Score(CPS) Statistics | Varanasi | 30 | 53.93 | 6.085 | 1.111 |
| | Allahabad | 30 | 53.73 | 5.388 | .984 |

Table-7.1 Independent Samples t-Test

| | F | Sustainable perception score | |
|---|--------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | | Equal variances assumed | Equal variances not assumed |
| Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | .035 | .853 | |
| | T | | |
| | df | .135 | .135 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .58 | .57162 |
| t-test for Equality of Means | Mean Difference | .893 | .893 |
| | Std. Error Difference | .200 | .200 |
| | 95% Confidence Interval- | 1.484 | 1.484 |
| | Lower | -2.770 | -2.771 |
| | Upper | 3.170 | 3.171 |

Limitations of the study

- This study has covered limited number of respondent.
- Only educated people has included in the study who has attained the intermediate education.
- The study has covered Limited number of variable. There has been some more variable which has significant impact of consumption perception of consumer.
- The scope of study is limited to only two districts.
- The study have used convenience sampling method.

Suggestion

Since Sustainable Consumption is a new phenomenon so it requires awareness how to avoid over-consumption and use eco-product to ensure such move. The N.G.O. as well government can organize awareness program to improve it. The difference found in sustainable score on the basis of gender and area basis is due to lack of awareness. The consumer can use eco- friendly product. Environmental education should be compulsory in education system which will help in promoting sustainable consumption. Further researches should be conduct by academicians so that the society can take the help of findings to aware themselves.

CONCLUSION

The basic objective of study to analyze consumer perception towards sustainable consumption. The study has concluded that there is gender effect on consumption perception. There is significant difference in the consumption perception of male and female. The study has found that the education level of the consumer does not affect the consumption perception towards sustainable product. There is no significant difference in the consumption perception of graduate and post graduate respondents. In addition, it has also been found that consumption perception of rural people is significantly different from that of urban people. A comparative analysis is also done to analyze consumption perception of people of Varanasi and Allahabad district. The result shows that there is

no significant difference in consumption perception of both the district.

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