

# Environmental Marketing

## A Tool for Protecting the Environment for Future Generation

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### Abstract

*Increasing awareness on the various environmental problems has led a shift in the way consumers go about their life. There has been a change in consumer attitudes towards a green lifestyle. People are actively trying to reduce their impact on the environment. However, this is not widespread and is still evolving. Organizations and business however have seen this change in consumer attitudes and are trying to gain an edge in the competitive market by exploiting the potential in the green market industry. In the modern era of globalization, it has become a challenge to keep the consumers in fold and even keep our natural environment safe and that is the biggest need of the time. Environment marketing or Green marketing is a phenomenon which has developed particular importance in the modern market and has emerged as an important concept in India as in other parts of the developing and developed world, and is seen as an important strategy of facilitating sustainable development. In this paper, main emphasis has been made on concept, need and importance of green marketing. Further, problems and opportunities in the context of green marketing have also been considered.*

**Key words:** *Conventional Marketing, Cost Reduction, Government Pressure, Green Marketing, Social Responsibility.*

### Introduction

One business area where environmental issues have received a great deal of discussion and attention is related to marketing. Although environmental issues influence all human activities, few academic disciplines have integrated environmental issues into their domain of understanding. This is especially true for traditional marketing. A society becomes more concerned about the natural environment when it experiences environmental problems due to mass production, mass consumption and mass marketing of environmentally

irresponsible products. As a result business houses have begun to modify their behavior in an attempt to address these kinds of 'new' concerns of the society. Some businesses have been quick to accept concepts like environmental management systems and waste minimization, and have integrated environmental issues into all organizational activities.

Many governments across the world have become so much concerned about the effects of green marketing that they have started regulating the environment. Conventional marketing involves selling products and services that satisfy consumer needs at affordable prices but green marketing has the additional challenge of defining what is green and developing and selling products that the consumer will like. For example, in the United States, the Federal Trade Commission and the National Association of Attorneys-General have developed extensive documents examining environmental marketing issues. A majority of people believe that green marketing or environmental marketing is all about promotion and advertising or advertising of products with environmental characteristics.

Though this may not be entirely correct, defining environmental marketing is a complex exercise. In broader terms, environmental marketing involves a range of activities including product modification, changes in the production process, changes and modifications in packaging as well as modifying advertising. In this paper, we will try to elaborate the concept of environmental marketing and explain why green marketing is important. We will also explore the reasons why organizations are exploring the possibility of adopting an environmental marketing philosophy. We will also discuss problems related to green marketing and illustrate some of the green marketing initiatives of the firms in the world.

### **Meaning of Environmental Marketing**

As mentioned before, a majority of people believe that environmental marketing refers solely to the promotion or advertising of products with environmental characteristics. Terms like Phosphate Free, Recyclable, Refillable, Ozone Friendly, and Environmentally Friendly are some of the things consumers most often associate with environmental marketing. While these terms are environmental marketing claims, in general, environmental marketing is a much broader concept, one that can be applied to consumer goods, industrial goods and even services. For example, around the world there are resorts that are beginning to promote themselves as 'eco-tourist' facilities, i.e., facilities that 'specialize' in experiencing nature or operating in a fashion that minimizes any negative environmental impact.

The terminology used in this area is varied and includes interchangeable words like Green Marketing, Environmental Marketing and Ecological Marketing. While environmental marketing came into prominence in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it was first discussed much earlier. The American Marketing Association (AMA) workshop attempted to bring together academics, practitioners, and public policy makers to examine marketing's impact on the natural environment. As per AMA's definition, ecological marketing is defined as: "The study of the positive and negative aspects of marketing activities on pollution, energy depletion and non-energy resource depletion". This early definition has three key components, (1) it is a subset of the overall marketing activity, (2) it examines both the positive and negative activities and (3) a narrow range of environmental issues. While this definition is a useful starting point, to be comprehensive, environmental marketing needs to be more broadly defined. Before providing an alternative definition it should be noted that no one definition or terminology is universally accepted. A broader definition can be used as under:

Green or Environmental Marketing consists of all activities designed to generate and facilitate any exchange intended to satisfy human needs or wants, such that the satisfaction of these needs and wants occurs with minimal detrimental impact on the natural environment. This definition incorporates much of the traditional components of marketing definition i.e. all activities designed to generate and facilitate any exchange intended to satisfy human needs or wants.

Therefore, it ensures that the interests of the organization and all its consumers are protected, as voluntary exchange will not take place unless both the buyer and seller mutually benefit. The above definition also includes the protection of the natural environment, by attempting to minimize the detrimental impact this exchange has on the environment. This second point is important, for human consumption by its very nature is destructive to the natural environment. It sounds logical that to be true green products, they should claim that they are less environmentally harmful' rather than 'environmentally friendly. So environmental marketing should look at minimizing environmental harm, not necessarily eliminating it. Environmental friendly products balance environmental compatibility with performance, affordability and convenience. They are typically durable, recyclable, non-toxic and should be made out of materials, which are either decomposable or recyclable. These products have minimum packaging and embody little energy carrying low environmental impact.

### **Importance of Environmental Marketing**

Let us look at the reasons why environmental marketing has become so important an issue to be observed closely by marketing managers of this century. The environment has both finite and infinite resources. Finite resources are coming to an end as the level of consumption has increased manifold. Since the finite resources are likely to end one day, the marketing manager should use them sensibly so that the life of the products can be extended. All those resources, which are infinite, have a part which is renewable and another part which is non-renewable. For renewable resources, the manufacturing and marketing practices should be such that they are renewable and provide convenience and value to the customers. For all those resources, which are infinite and non-renewable, the marketing manager should be sensible enough not to create waste and garbage in the world. All the above issues augment environmental marketing to be an important issue in marketing. Basic definition of economics suggests that it is the study of how people use their limited resources to try and satisfy unlimited wants. Thus, mankind has limited resources on the earth, with which she/he must attempt to provide for the worlds' unlimited wants. Environmental marketing looks at how marketing activities utilize these limited resources, while satisfying consumer, industry and society's wants as well as achieving organizational goals.

### **Use of Environmental Marketing**

There has been a growing concern for use of environmentally friendly products by marketers. Governments have also developed stringent norms for using environmental friendly products e.g. Euro norms for cars in India. The judiciary is also attentive to the issues of environmental pollution and brings stringent norms for implementation e.g. Supreme Court orders on using CNG buses in New Delhi to reduce pollution. Companies have identified environmental marketing as a strategic tool to compete in the market, for example Safal as a brand sells environment friendly vegetable in India. The companies are using environmental marketing concept as a sustainable competitive advantage for their firms and increasing customer awareness by making them socially responsible citizens. When looking through the literature there are several suggested reasons for a firm's increased use of environmental marketing? We summarize four possible reasons for use of green marketing.

Organizations perceive environmental marketing to be an opportunity that can be used to achieve their objectives. As the awareness level of people increases, environmentally friendly companies will have an advantage over others in marketing their products. Organizations believe they have a moral obligation to be more socially responsible. Governmental bodies are forcing firms to become more responsible. Cost factors associated with waste disposal, or reductions in material usage force firms to modify their behavior.

### **Opportunities in Environmental Marketing**

It appears that all types of consumers, both individual and industrial, are becoming more concerned and aware about the natural environment. Both the industry and the consumers have started modifying their behavior, including their purchasing behavior due to environmental conditions. As the demand changes and people look for environmentally friendly products, it will serve as a business opportunity for many marketers. In a 1992 study of 16 countries, more than 50 per cent of consumers in each country, other than Singapore, indicated that they were concerned about the environment. A 1994 study in Australia found that 84.6 per cent of the sample believed all individuals had a responsibility to care for the environment. A further 80 per cent of this sample indicated that they had modified their behavior, including their purchasing behavior, due to environmental reasons. As demands change, many firms see these changes as opportunities to be exploited.

Given these figures, it can be assumed that firms marketing goods with environmental characteristics will have a competitive advantage over firms marketing non-environmentally responsible alternatives. There are numerous examples of firms who have strived to become more environmentally responsible, in an attempt to better satisfy their consumer needs. McDonalds replaced its clamshell packaging with waxed paper because they found that consumers were concerned about polystyrene production and ozone depletion. Tuna manufacturers modified their fishing techniques because of the increased concern over driftnet fishing leading to death of dolphins.

In order to satisfy the demands of firms for less environmentally harmful products, Xerox introduced a 'high quality' recycled photocopier paper. This is not to imply that all firms who have undertaken environmental marketing activities improve their behavior. In some cases firms have misled consumers on environmental marketing issues just to gain market share. In other instances, firms have started implementing environmentally responsible strategies without considering the accuracy of their behavior, product/service claims and product -effectiveness Lack of appreciation of true 'greenness' of activities often results in firms making false or misleading environmental marketing claims.

### **Social Responsibility and Environmental Marketing**

The concept of environmental marketing is also a result of corporate social responsibility phenomenon in which firms are beginning to realize that they are members of the wider community and they should behave in an environmentally responsible way. This social responsibility phenomenon translates into firms believing that they must achieve both

environmental and profit related objectives. This results in environmental issues being integrated into the firm's corporate culture. Firms in this situation can take two perspectives: (1) they can use the fact that they are environmentally responsible as a marketing organization and (2) they can become responsible without promoting this fact.

There are examples of firms adopting both strategies. Organizations like the Body Shop heavily promote the fact that they are environmentally responsible. While this kind of behavior serves as competitive advantage, the firm was established specifically to offer consumers environmentally responsible alternatives to conventional cosmetic products. This philosophy is directly tied to the overall corporate culture, rather than simply being a competitive tool.

An example of a firm that does not promote its environmental initiatives is Coca-Cola. They have invested large sums of money in various recycling activities, as well as having modified their packaging to minimize its environmental impact. While being concerned about the environment, Coke has not used this concern as a marketing tool. Thus many consumers may not realize that Coke is a very environmentally committed organization. Another organization, which is very environmentally responsible but does not promote this fact, at least outside the organization, is Walt Disney World (WDW). The organization has an extensive waste management program and corresponding infrastructure in place. These facilities are not highlighted in the organizational tourist promotional activities.

Now-a-days, Indian firms have increased use of Environmental /Green Marketing practices. Five possible reasons cited are:

### **I. Opportunity**

In India, around 25% of the consumers prefer environment friendly products, and around 28% may be considered health conscious. Therefore, green marketers have diversified to fairly sizeable segment of consumers to cater to.

### **II. Social Responsibility**

Many companies have started realizing that they must behave in an environment friendly fashion. They believe both in achieving environmental objectives as well as profit related objectives respecting the principle of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).

### **III. Governmental Pressure**

Various regulations are framed by the government to protect consumers and the society at large. The Indian government too has developed a framework of legislations to reduce the production of harmful goods and by-products. These reduce the industry's production and consumer's consumption of harmful goods, including those detrimental to the environment; for example, the ban of plastic bags, prohibition of smoking in public areas, etc.

#### **IV. Competitive Pressure**

Another major force in the environmental marketing area has been firms' desire to maintain their competitive position. In many cases firms observe competitors promoting their environmental behaviours and attempt to emulate this behavior. In some instances this competitive pressure has caused an entire industry to modify and thus reduce its detrimental environmental behavior.

#### **V. Cost Reduction**

Reduction of harmful waste may lead to substantial cost savings. Sometimes, many firms develop a symbiotic relationship whereby the waste generated by one company is used by another as a cost-effective raw material.

### **Problems of Environmental Marketing**

No matter why a firm uses green marketing, there are a number of potential problems that the firm must overcome. One of the main problems is that firms using environmental marketing must ensure that their activities are not misleading consumers or industry, and do not breach any regulations or laws dealing with environmental marketing. For example, marketers in India must ensure their environmental marketing claims can meet the following set of criteria, in order to comply with the environmental protection regulations. Environmental marketing claims must clearly state environmental benefits; explain environmental characteristics; explain how benefits are achieved; ensure comparative differences are justified; ensure negative factors are taken into consideration and only use meaningful terms and conditions for promoting environmental marketing.

The second problem about concerns those firms who modify their products due to increased consumer concern. They must contend with the fact that consumers' perceptions are sometimes not correct. Take for example the McDonalds' case where it replaced its clamshells with plastic coated paper. There is an ongoing scientific debate about which of the two is more environmental friendly. Some scientific evidence suggests that when taking a cradle-to-grave approach, polystyrene is less environmentally harmful. If this is the case McDonalds bowed to consumer pressure and chose a more environmentally harmful option.

When firms attempt to become socially responsible, they may face the risk that the environmentally responsible action of today will be found to be harmful in the future. Take, for example, the aerosol industry, which has switched from CFCs (Chloro-fluorocarbon) to HFCS (Hydro-fluorocarbons) only to be told HFCs are also a greenhouse gas. Some firms now use DME (Di-methyl ether) as an aerosol propellant, which may also harm the ozone layer. Given the limited scientific knowledge at any point of time, it is impossible for a firm to be certain that they have made investments on correct environmental decisions. This may explain why some firms like Coca Cola and Walt Disney World, are becoming socially responsible without publicizing this point. They may be protecting themselves from potential future negative backlash, if it is determined that they have made a wrong decision in the past.

While governmental regulation is designed to give consumers the opportunity to make better decisions or to motivate them to be more environmentally responsible, there is difficulty in establishing policies that will address all environmental issues. Let us look at guidelines developed by governments to control environmental marketing claims. If governments want to modify consumer behavior, they need to establish a different set of regulations. Thus, governmental attempts to protect the environment may result in proliferation of ineffective regulations and guidelines, without a central controlling body.

Reacting to competitive pressure can cause all 'followers' to make the same mistake as the 'leader'. A costly example of this is the Mobil Corporation, which followed the competition and introduced biodegradable plastic garbage bags. While technically these bags were biodegradable, the conditions under which they were disposed of did not allow biodegradation to occur. Several USA states sued Mobil for using misleading advertising claims. Such blind following of competition can lead to costly ramifications.

The push to reduce costs or increase profits may not force firms to address the important issue of environmental degradation. End-of-pipe solutions may not actually reduce the waste but rather shift it around. While this may be beneficial, it does not necessarily address the larger environmental problem, though it may minimize its short-term effects. Ultimately most wastes will enter into the waste stream. Therefore, to be environmentally responsible, organizations should attempt to minimize their waste, rather than find 'appropriate' uses for it.

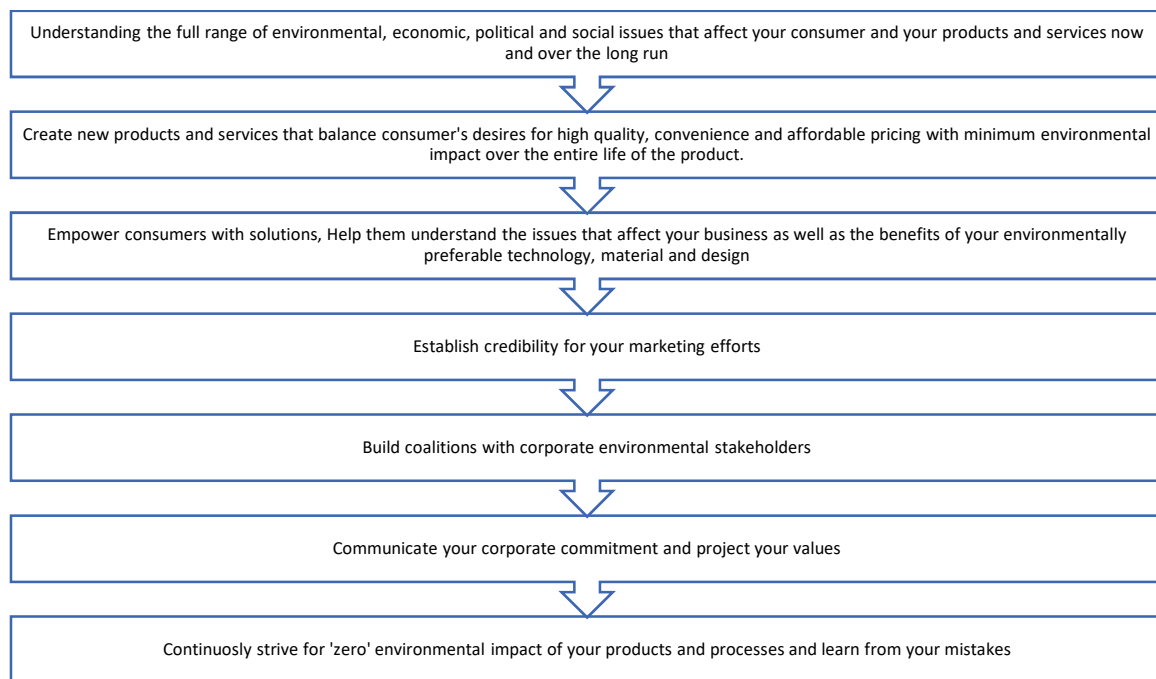
### **Environmental Marketing Strategies**

The practice of environmental marketing cannot be successful as a concept without the follow up strategies to implement it and leverage on it to create a competitive strategy.



Environmental marketing strategy involves a whole gamut of subjects starting from understanding of the environment to empowering customers to make informed choices. The environmental marketing strategies encompass addressing issues beyond the buyer-seller relationship. It attempts to build a society of environmentally hazard free consumption. Through environmental marketing, the company plans to build a world of tomorrow, which is free from have been pollution and environmental problems. The seven steps of these strategies have been explained in the following Figure 1:

**Figure 1: Environmental Marketing Strategy**



**Kilbourne, W.E. (1998)** discussed the failure of green marketing to move beyond the limitations of the prevailing paradigm. The author identified areas that must be examined for their effect in the marketing/environment relationship, namely economic, political and technological dimensions of the cultural frame of reference. **Prothero, A. (1998)** introduced several papers discussed in the July 1998 issue of 'Journal of Marketing Management' focusing on green marketing. This included a citation of the need to review existing literature on green marketing, an empirical study of United States and Australian marketing managers, a description of what a green alliance look like in practice in Great Britain, ecotourism and definitions of green marketing.

**Prothero, A. & Fitchett, J.A. (2000)** argued that greater ecological enlightenment can be secured through capitalism by using the characteristics of commodity culture to

further progress environmental goals. Marketing not only has the potential to contribute to the establishment of more sustainable forms of society but, as a principle agent in the operation and proliferation of commodity discourse, also has a considerable responsibility to do so.

**Oyewole, P. (2001)** in his paper presented a conceptual link among green marketing, environmental justice, and industrial ecology. It argues for greater awareness of environmental justice in the practice for green marketing. A research agenda is finally suggested to determine consumer's awareness of environmental justice, and their willingness to bear the costs associated with it. **Karna, J., Hansen, E. & Juslin, H. (2003)** interpreted that proactive marketers are the most genuine group in implementing environmental marketing voluntarily and seeking competitive advantage through environmental friendliness. The results also give evidence that green values, environmental marketing strategies, structures and functions are logically connected to each other as hypothesized according to the model of environmental marketing used to guide this study.

**Jain, Sanjay K. & Kaur, Gurmeet (2004)** in their study of environmentalism which had fast emerged as a worldwide phenomenon remarked that business firms too have risen to the occasion and have started responding to environmental challenges by practicing green marketing strategies. Green consumerism has played a catalytic role in ushering corporate environmentalism and making business firms green marketing oriented. Based on the data collected through a field survey, the paper made an assessment of the extent of environmental awareness, attitudes and behaviour prevalent among consumers in India. **Donaldson (2005)** in his study realized that in general the ecological attitude of consumers changed positively in the Great Britain. This study reported the strong faith of consumers in the known commercial brands and in the feeble behaviour referring to the "green" claims, which was the main cause behind the consuming failure to interpret their concerns beyond the environment in their behavior.

**Alsmadi (2007)** while investigating the environmental behaviour of Jordanian consumers reveals a high level of environmental conscience. Unfortunately however this positive tendency and preference in the "green" products did not appear to have any effect on the final decision, obviously because these consumers had a stronger faith in the traditional products and a small confidence in the green statements. The above obstacles were further strengthened by the lack of environmental conscience by a lot of enterprises and the existence of a large scale of prices for the same product, many of which included an impetuous estimate of environmental responsibility. The same phenomenon has been presented in other researches too (**Ottman, 2004; Donaldson, 2005; Cleveland et al, 2005**).

**Brahma, M. & Dande, R. (2008)**, in an article The Economic Times, Mumbai stated that, Green Ventures India is a subsidiary of New York based asset management firm Green Ventures International. The latter recently announced a \$300 million India focused fund aimed at renewable energy products and supporting trading in carbon credits.

### **Integrating Environmental Marketing Strategy with Corporate Strategy**

A cohesive, detailed and future oriented corporate policy statement should be developed to serve as corner stone of any environmental marketing program. Such a policy will serve two basic purposes. First, when it is expressed in public, it expresses a company's commitment to high standards to be held in front of the customer and public. Secondly, from an internal perspective, the policy statement informs all employees of the company's commitment to act responsibly in developing and marketing green products.

In majority of corporations, short-term profitability and short term decision-making are the dominant orientations. Short-term pressures and changes in the market place often motivate managers to take decisions having immediate economic consequences. Environmental products and programs should not be viewed as a quick fix solution for making greater profits. Instead, the environmental initiatives should be integrated into long-term corporate programs. This requires explicit management support for the program. Top management must provide adequate resources and reflective leadership in incorporating environmental initiatives into the long-term goals of the organization. Individual business units must be given flexibility and freedom to resist pressure from top management to make radical adjustments in the unit's long term plans to accommodate a hasty marketing program of green products.

It is also recognized that the total corporate image should be online with the product image of the firm. The reputation of the company is the most important asset, which must be protected and managed on a daily basis. The quality and truthfulness accompanying the introduction of a green product will have a profound effect on the company's reputation and through the ripple effect on all of the company's products, Consumers are increasingly showing a willingness to avoid all products of companies perceived to be deceptive in the presentation of green product claims.

The corporate philosophy of green marketing involves maintaining profitability while not exploiting the environment. The consumer acknowledges the fact that it is expensive for a company to develop environmentally improved products and companies are entitled to a fair amount of profit. Consumers are willing to pay more for goods and services felt or shown to

be either environmentally serviced or improved. The company can attract up to 5% premium on their products. Beyond this level, consumer interest supporting this claim severely declines. The preferred alternative is to provide environmentally sensitive or improved product at the same or lower cost as the competing but less environmentally sensitive products.

As a result of rising awareness about Green/ Environmental Marketing a good number of corporates have introduced Green Products in India; for example,

- Wipro Info tech (Green It) was India's first company to launch environment friendly computer peripherals.
- Samsung, was the first to launch eco-friendly mobile handsets (made of renewable materials) – W510 and F268- in India.
- Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Ltd. (ONGC), India's largest oil company, has introduced energy efficient Mokshada Green Crematorium, which saves 60% to 70% of wood and a fourth of the burning time per cremation.
- Reva, India's very-own Bangalore based company was the first in the world to commercially release an electric car.
- Honda India introduced its Civic Hybrid car.
- ITC has introduced Paper Kraft, a premium range of eco-friendly business paper.
- Indusland Bank installed the country's first solar-powered ATM and thus brought about an eco-savvy change in the Indian banking sector.
- Suzlon Energy manufactures and markets wind turbines, which provide an alternative source of energy based on wind power. This green initiative taken by the company is extremely important for reducing the carbon footprint.

In order to reap the benefits associated with the Green/Environmental Marketing, the Corporates should follow undermentioned Five Golden Rules viz.

- ✓ **Know your Customer:** Make sure that the consumer is aware of and concerned about the issues that your product attempts to address.
- ✓ **Educating your customers:** It is not just a matter of letting people know, whatever you're doing is to protect the environment, but also a matter of letting them know why it matters.
- ✓ **Being Genuine & Transparent:** it means that you are actually doing what you claim to be doing in your green marketing campaign and the rest of your

business policies are consistent with whatever you are doing that's environment friendly.

- ✓ **Reassure the Buyer:** Consumers must be made to believe that the product performs the job, in this firm should not forget product quality in the name of the environment.
- ✓ **Consider Your Pricing:** If you are charging a premium for your product and many environmentally preferable products cost more due to economies of scale and use of higher-quality ingredients make sure those consumers can afford the premium and feel it's worth it.

### Summing-up

Green marketing is still in its infancy and a lot of research is to be done on green marketing to fully explore its potential. There are some suggestions that an organization should implement for catering challenges of green marketing and successful exploitation of green marketing.

Consumer needs to be made more aware about the merits of Green products. The consumer needs to be educated and made aware of the environmental threats. It should be made sure that the consumer is aware of and concerned about the issues that your product attempts to address. Green Marketing campaign and green advertising is good step toward it. Consumers must be motivated to switch brands or even pay a premium for the greener alternative.

Make sure that consumer feel that they can make a difference. This is called "empowerment" and due to this main reason consumers will buy greener products. Further steps should be taken to control false promise and claim by the marketer to maintain legitimacy and trustworthiness of green products. For effective and efficient implementation of this concept of Green Marketing the factor that plays a major role is the Government. Unless the government creates specific and stringent laws and utilizes its authority to implement them, the concept cannot be conceptualized. If the Consumer, the Organization and the Government work in unison towards the common goal of minimizing the detrimental environmental impact of their activities, then they can surely save this environment and make this world a better place to live in. It is not enough for a company to green its products, consumers expect the products at they purchase pocket friendly and also to help reduce the environmental impact in their own lives too. Green marketing is very low on the agenda of most businesses and therefore it's still an under-leveraged USP (Unique Selling Proposition). Therefore, effective green marketing targeted at the right audience will make a difference.

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