Green product quality, green customer satisfaction, and green customer loyalty

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Abstract--A lot of attention has been given to the quality of products and the satisfaction of the customers in the studies that have been previously conducted; however, in none can be seen an attempt to explore the green innovations or the different features of environmental management. What this study tries to achieve is to fill that research gap. As a result, what this study proposes is the scarce and the new and original constructs respectively – the satisfaction of the green consumers, the loyalty of the green consumers and also provides framework for the study which makes it possible to explore the relation between the quality of green products, the satisfaction of green customers, and the loyalty of the green customers.

Key words--Green product quality, green customer satisfaction, green customer loyalty.

1. INTRODUCTION

Corporate environmentalism or green management appeared in the 1990s and gained international and global popularity in the 2000s. In the current century, the issues of green management and corporate social responsibility have become two topics that are discussed quite often. After the parliament of the European Union approved the EU's directions about the waste of electrical and electronic equipments (WEEE), Restriction of Hazardous Substances (RoHS), and Eco-design for energy-using products (EuP), a group of the leading organizations and companies whose line of work is in the electronics and the customer products industry, have chosen to make use of the green standards in the strategies they choose. The idea that green management can serve as a weapon that helps the corporations in improving their competitiveness has been proposed by some researchers (Ambec and Lanoie, 2008; Hart, 1995; Porter and Van der Linde, 1995; Trung and Kumar, 2005). It was necessary for the concept of green management in corporations to advance further than just regulatory compliance and to move on to comprise conceptual devices like preventing pollution, product stewardship, and the sense of social responsibility organizations should have (Hart, 2005). The relation of customer satisfaction with the loyalty of the customers have been investigated in many researches (Hellier et al., 2003; Butcher et al., 2002; Gountas and Gountas, 2007; Zboja and Voorhees, 2006; Fornell et al., 2006; Oliver, 1999). Furthermore, it has been found by many researches that the quality of products has a direct effect on the performance while also being closely linked with the satisfaction of the customers, their loyalty, and the intentions of repurchasing (Mittal and Walfried, 1998; Eskildsen et al., 2004). Even though the issues which are related to customer satisfaction and the loyalty of the customers have been given a lot of attention to and have explored and investigated in many of the previous researches, in none of these researches could be found traces of investigating the green or environmental issues. Trying to fill this gap in the studies, this research proposes the rare and novel constructs respectively – the satisfaction of green customers and the loyalty of the green customers, while developing a framework for the researches which allows us to investigate the relationship between the quality of green products, the image of green organizations, the satisfaction of green customers and the loyalty of green customers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
For many marketers and consumer researchers, the issue of customer satisfaction is considered to be among the issues that have both great theoretical and practical importance (Jamal, 2004). Satisfaction can be defined as the judgement made by a customer that a certain product or service feature or the product or service itself, brought a sense of pleasurable fulfilment, varying from the levels of under fulfilment to the levels of over fulfilment, which is related to consuming the product or service (Oliver, 1997). It is also possible to view customer satisfaction as fulfilling the consuming goals and objectives of the customers as the customers themselves experience and describe it (Oliver, 2006). Previous researches indicate that two different conceptualizations for customer satisfaction exists which are: transaction-specific and cumulative (Anderson, 1973; Anderson et al., 1994; Fornell, 1992).

The transaction-specific customer satisfaction was an evaluation and judgement of a particular purchase occasion after making the choice or post-choice (Anderson, 1973). However, cumulative customer satisfaction can be referred to as an overall evaluation; that is, an evaluation of the overall and whole experience that a customer has had with the products and services of an organization over the time (Oliver, 1980). Although, all the definitions that have been suggested agreed on one point which is; the concept of satisfaction implies that there needs to be a goal or an objective which the customer wishes to achieve.

Many organizations were pressed to feel more responsible and try to be greener. A lot of the stakeholders put pressures on the organizations to lower the negative effects they have on the society and the natural environment (Bansal, 2005; Barnet, 2007). With the growth of environmentalism, the willingness of the customers to purchase goods that create lesser environmental obstacles and has minimum amount of negative impact on the society has grown along with the concerns of the society for the environment. In addition, the global regulations related to the environmental issues have hugely increased and have become stricter in the recent years. In this relation, this research has suggested a rare construct – the satisfaction of the green customers, and has defined the term as a sense of realization by the customer that the consumption has fulfilled a desire, a goal, an objective or a need about the concerns over the environmental issues and that this feeling of fulfilment has brought along pleasure. The result of the consumption was that the performance was on par with or surpassed the: green needs of the consumers, the environmental regulations' requirements, and the maintainable expectations of the society.

Green customer loyalty

Customer's behaviour concerning keeping a relation with an organization through buying its product or services can be interpreted as customer loyalty (Behara et al., 2002; Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000). Loyalty can also be defined as an extremely kept decision to re-buy or be a patron of a selected product or service in the future (Oliver, 1997). This means that, loyalty can be perceived as the future decision to buy a product or service, or connection with a company on all occasions as other options were also probable. Hence, customer loyalty required a positive approach toward the product or service of the firm, accompanied by encouraging behaviour that bring about purchasing and suggesting it to the others (Backman and Compton, 1991; Martensen et al., 2000). Customer loyalty was also considered as a fixed source of income for firms, acting at the same time as information channel that function casually by suggesting the product or service to friends or family (Reid and Reid, 1993). Customer loyalty can be explained through different perspectives such as behavioural, attitudinal or situational (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Uncles, Dowling et al., 2003). Behavioural loyalty can be expressed as an acquisition and consumption behaviour performed by customers in their former purchasing and employing brand. Attitudinal loyalty can usually be expressed through an emotional association with a brand together with the customer preference for that brand. Situational loyalty was contingent upon the situation of shopping and purchasing. In spite of the fact that, all three kinds of loyalty play an important role in marketing, most of the firms would rather attitudinal form of the customer loyalty to its other forms. As stated earlier, this study proposes a new concept – green customer loyalty, which is related to environmental decisions and concerns and has an impact on them. According to this study, green customer loyalty is the customer's desire to keep his or her relationship with an institute which has environmental or green concerns and re-buy or be the patron of its preferred product regularly in the future. In other words green customer loyalty has the desire to buy something back, suggest something to others, resist the higher price and buy other products from an institute.

The positive effect of green consumer satisfaction on green customer loyalty

Satisfaction is usually interpreted as a means of predicting customer's future purchase (Newman
and Werbel, 1973; Kasper, 1988; Oliver, 1999). Satisfied customers are more likely to repeat their purchase in future (Zeithaml et al., 1996). The possibility of recommending the preferred product to others is higher for satisfied customers (Reynolds and Arnold, 2000; Reynolds and Beatty, 1999). Satisfied customers are also less responsive to the competitor's offering (Fitzell, 1998). Moreover, some studies investigated the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty and conclude that there is a connection between these two (Hellier et al., 2003; Butcher et al., 2002; Gountas and Gountas, 2007; Zboja and Voorhees, 2006; Fornell et al., 2006; Oliver, 1999). Despite the fact that, former studies considered different aspect of customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, none of them explored their green or environmental issues.

The positive effect of green product quality on green customer satisfaction and green customer loyalty

The quality of the product is an important factor in generating customer loyalty and customer satisfaction. Johnson and Ettlie (2001) believed that the quality of the product is the outcome of a well performance or in other words is the degree to which it can meet the customer's need and it is customized and not being subject to defects. Product packaging, product design, product features, warranties, etc are different dimensions of the product's quality (Abdul-Muhmin, 2002). When the quality of the product is high, it is more accepted and purchased by the customer and brings about the satisfaction of the retailers and wholesalers as well (Schellhase et al., 2000). The quality of the product influences its performance directly and is highly related to customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and the intentions of buying the products back (Mittal and Walfried, 1998; Eskildsen et al., 2004). Furthermore, the results of several studies support empirically that the quality of the product is an antecedent and has a positive relationship with the overall customer satisfaction. This means that keeping high level of quality for product will brings about customer satisfaction and also gives rise to customer loyalty (Chumpitaz and Paparoidamis, 2004; Kotler et al., 2005).

In the middle of customer environmentalism's trend and with regard to the sever international environmental regulations, companies should not only involve themselves in green or environmental concepts of the future design or package of their product in order to extend product differentiation but they also should meet the environmental needs of customers in order to create customer loyalty together with competitive advantages (Chen et al., 2006; Hart, 1995; Peattie, 1992; Porter and van der Linde, 1995; Shrivastava, 1995).

3. PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

Following the above mentioned discussions, the framework we propose for this research is as it is mentioned bellow and all linkages are supported by previous researches:

Figure 1:

Green Product Quality  \rightarrow  Green Customer Satisfaction  \rightarrow  Green Customer Loyalty

4. CONCLUSION

For the past few years, ethics, social responsibility, sustainable development, and environmental issues have been among the most important strategic concerns of the organizations. Simultaneously, customers of the greatest international markets were asking the companies to produce high quality products which were compatible with social and environmental standards if they wanted to be competitive in global markets. hence, companies started focusing on green concepts including green management, green marketing, green products, etc. this study developed a research framework to examine the relationship between green product quality, green customer satisfaction and green customer loyalty. First of all, the study expressed that the green product quality likely influence green customer satisfaction and green customer loyalty. Next, the study showed that green customer satisfaction had potential impact on green customer loyalty.
Future study

For future studies, the research suggested framework can be used to examine different green products in different industries and different countries as a quantitative research.

REFERENCES


