

From Green Consumerism to Green Citizenship:

Understanding the Opportunities and Risks of Green Consumption

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Abstract

Green consumption is closely related to the notions of sustainable consumer behaviour which addresses the environmental challenges through adoption of environmentally friendly behaviours. However, the rising opportunities for profit associated with marketing of green products is becoming a worrisome factor in recent years. Many critics therefore are of the view that Green consumption has lost its vigour as a movement to save the environment in recent years. This research paper based on secondary literature review aims to focus on the derailment of green consumerism movement in recent years with a rise of niche market for green products by focusing on the issue of green-washing. It too offer a discussion on the ways in which this problem can be tackled by developing a pathway to green citizenship that can save this planet from excessive consumerism. It further adds to its discussion by taking into account the factors impacting the sustainability issue directly or indirectly with regard to consumption patterns. Further the major thrust of this paper therefore is to identify important questions stemming from discontinuities in consumption patterns, over consumption to more responsible consumption patterns by following the norms of green consumption paving its way towards attainment of green citizenship. The paper also highlights and discusses strategies for consumers, business houses and other stakeholders for a feasible roadmap towards attainment of Green Citizenship..

Keywords: *Green Consumerism, Green Citizenship, Global Warming, Climate Change, Sustainable Development*

Introduction

We are living in a consumer society wherein consumption has become a central feature. The importance of consumption of goods and services is growing in the present times and increased consumption on one hand is considered as an indicator of economic growth. 'Consumption' as a result plays an increasingly important role in individual's everyday lives. People are offered what they 'need' rather than what they 'desire'. The 'wants' are actively becoming 'needs'. The market propagates the conviction that everything can and should be viewed as a commodity. With over-consumption, the consumerist society generates excess waste.

Necessity for one consumer can be a luxury for another and the Need Hierarchy theory explains the different types of needs for an individual. The physiological need i.e. the basic need for any individual talks about the bare necessities for the survival purpose. It is basically about *Roti, Kapda aur Makaan* but the time has come when we need to think about the bare necessities in literal terms. Time and again, researchers and environmentalists have brought attention to the factors contributing mostly to Global Warming and Climate change which leads to the extreme weather situations that individuals are witnessing such as, Polar Vortex in USA; Rising Temperatures in UK and Australia; Floods in India and Spain, Wild forest fires in Amazon and Australia.

Recycling and use of renewable energy should be adopted by businesses to make the survival possible in the present challenging conditions and maximum efforts should be to control the Green House Gas emissions (GHG). The question arises regarding how these GHG emissions need to be controlled from and what would be the biggest differential factor? The top contributors for GHG emissions are transportation, electricity generation, industrial goods and services, buildings and agriculture. These sectors are spouting carbon because customers demand their products be it in the form of travel, electronics, entertainment, food, etc. so, how about measuring the emissions not only by economic sectors but also by consumer demand within those sectors. That shifts the focus of blame from industries & businesses towards the consumers themselves as main culprits.

According to Report of 94 world's biggest cities released in June 2019 (Atkin 2019), shows how consumption habits drive the climate crisis. The results were shocking as where a total 700 million people or more live, the consumption of goods and services 'including food, clothing, aviation, electronics, construction and vehicles' is responsible for 10 per cent of global greenhouse gases. It is nearly double as compared to the emissions from every building in the entire world. If consumption based emissions in those big cities continue on their current track, they would 'nearly double between 2017 and 2050—from 4.5 gigatons to 8.4 gigatons per year. This means the cities would not be able to achieve the reductions necessary for the world to stay below 2°C of warming, which the Paris Agreement says is necessary to preserve a liveable planet. The paper is divided into five sections, linked to each other showing how there should be a transitional shift from 'Green Consumerism' to 'Green Citizenship' so that there is movement towards sustainable development.

Climate Change Performance Index (2020)

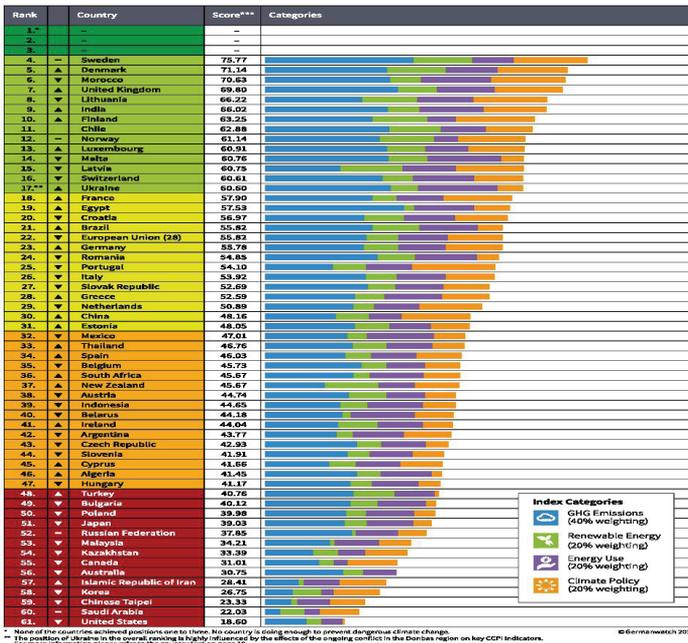
Due to our consumption patterns, we have reached a stage where the survival of present generation is in danger. Planet earth is facing severe environmental problems such as Global warming, deforestation, wild forest fires, rising temperature, drought, etc. due to the technological advancements to satisfy the unending consumer consumption. What initiated as the basic needs and took to another level of desires' satisfaction has resulted in the sacrifice of planet's resources.

The Climate Change Performance Index by German watch and New Climate Institute published together with the Climate Action Network (CAN) is a ranking of the 57 countries and the EU, collectively responsible for about 90% of global GHG emissions. It is an independent monitoring tool of countries' climate protection performance. The four categories assessed are: GHG Emissions (40%), Renewable Energy (20%), Energy Use (20%) and Climate Policy (20%). The latter is based on expert assessments by NGOs and think tanks from the respective countries.

Within the categories, the CCPI also evaluates to what extent the respective countries are taking adequate action to be on track

towards the global Paris-goal of limiting global warming to well below 2°C. Therefore, the CCPI is an important tool to enhance transparency in international climate policies and enables comparison of climate protection efforts and progress made by individual countries. *Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) 2020* (Jan Burck 2018) are as follows:

TABLE 1
Rankings as per by CCPI, Climate Change Performance Index (2020)



Source: (U.H.Jan Burck 2020)

The CCPI 2020 (U. H. Jan Burck 2020) results illustrate the main regional differences in climate protection and performance within the 57 evaluated countries and the EU. Still no country performs well enough in all index categories to achieve an overall very high rating in the index. Therefore, once again the first three ranks remain empty. In this year’s index, Sweden leads the ranking on rank 4, followed by Denmark (5) and Morocco (6). The bottom five in this year’s CCPI are Islamic Republic of Iran (57), Republic of Korea

(58), Chinese Taipei (59), Saudi Arabia (60) and the United States (61), rated low or very low across almost all categories. China, the largest global emitter, once again slightly improves its ranking to 30th place ('medium'). China scores with a very good performance for its increased share of renewables in the energy mix over recent years and relatively good policy ratings, but the poor performance in emissions and energy efficiency still weighs heavily. While only two G20 countries, the UK (7th) and India (9th), are ranked in the 'high' category, eight G20 countries are remaining in the worst category of the index ('very low').

India for the first time ranks among the top ten in this year's CCPI. The current levels of per capita emissions and energy use are still comparatively low and, along with ambitious 2030 targets, result in high ratings for the GHG Emissions and Energy Use categories. While the country receives an overall medium rating in the Renewable Energy category, India's 2030 renewable energy target is rated very high for its well-below 2°C compatibility. National experts commend the government for strong policies to support the expansion of renewable energy, which is needed to meet the ambitious targets as recent renewable energy capacity additions are below the level required. Despite an overall high rating for its Climate Policy performance, experts point out that the government has yet to develop a roadmap for the phase-out of fossil fuel subsidies that would consequently reduce the country's high dependence on coal.

After having a glance at the output of our efforts, it becomes necessary on our part to take a corrective step and move in the right direction. Actually the step was taken by the rightful minds few decades ago in the form of adoption of Green Consumerism. But the point is even after following a strategy for so long, we haven't been able to reach the desired destination. That is why; it has become more than important now to understand the corrective action taken up in the first place, then identifying what really went wrong and ultimately finalising the re-route to be taken up.

Research Methodology

The present research paper comprehensively reviews the academic

work on Green Consumerism, Sustainable Development, Green Citizenship and Climate Change and presents a précis of 20 research papers published in reputed international journals, over a period of fifteen years. The study makes use of secondary research in order to achieve the objectives of the research paper. In order to gather research papers for their review, a meticulous exploration was done using the following available scholarly database such as JSTOR, Sage Journals, Emerald Full Text; Elsevier; JSTOR; John Wiley Publications, SAGE Publications; Springer; Routledge and Taylor and Francis, Oxford University Press. An advanced search, within the scope of the title of present research paper was carried out using various combinations of search words such as Sustainability, green consumerism, green washing, and climate change for making a search for the papers. Only textbooks, international reports and research papers published in international journals were considered for the review of literature, as they are considered to be at a higher pedestal of research. Articles were searched using the keywords. The references of the articles studied, were also taken up. The articles were selected and shortlisted after reading the abstracts, matching with the selected topic. The literature review also takes into account the factors impacting the sustainability directly or indirectly, so as to safeguard the depleting resources of our planet. Exploratory research has been used by using R software. R is a language and environment for statistical computing and graphics. It is an integrated suite of software facilities for data manipulation, calculation and graphical display. It includes

- an effective data handling and storage facility,
- a large, coherent, integrated collection of intermediate tools for data analysis,
- graphical facilities for data analysis and display either on-screen or on hardcopy.

Review of Existing Literature

The existing literature can be studied in two parts. The first part discusses the Era of Green Consumerism whereas the second part discusses the various research studies on the derailment of Green Consumerism.

(a) Era of Green Consumerism

In the beginning 'green consumerism' agenda took off very aggressively and it was adopted by the matching enthusiasm and spirit by the marketers as well. The green consumers started demanding all green products be it in the area of green food (namely, organic food products like cereals, vegetables, dairy products, etc.), green energy (alternative to non-renewable resources like coal; environmental friendly alternatives, etc.), green fashion, green lifestyle.

The producers or the business tried to tap the opportunities knocking at their doors and they tricked the consumers by charging extra bucks for the organic items. To some extent, it was fair to pay extra money, keeping in mind the products, consumers gained such as, healthy and non-adulterated food items, keeping the nutrients of the soil intact by eliminating the use of the fertilizers; hybrid car engines, resulting in lower pollution from automobiles, using the technological advancement to keep the diesel usage minimum and combining it with electricity so ultimately the producers, the consumers and the environment gained in totality

The aggregated impact on the environment is the product of three main pathways: affluence (consumption), population, and technology (Thomas Dietz 2007). The one thing that has seen rising trend in the last four-five decades is the constantly-evolving technology. The improvements have been made on a continuous basis to make things easy for the consumers (Holdren 1971). The industries and the business-houses have spun the markets on their heads to provide the comfort and the satisfaction to the end users. Considering the last decade or so, a new term gained huge momentum, namely, 'Green Consumerism.' This market-based paradigm suggests that by greening the materials and services of the world's economy, industrial society's current levels of consumption can remain unchanged while we marginally redirect growth and mitigate environmental impact (Layton 2008).

In narrow terms, Green consumption is associated with sustainable consumer behaviour that is not compatible with the safe-keeping of only present generation but also, the next generations. It aims at redirecting the consumers responsibility

towards environmental problems, by means of adoption of environmentally friendly behaviours, such as the use of organic products, clean and renewable energy and the research of goods produced by companies with zero, or almost, negligible impact. Green consumerism involves actions from the government sector, the private sector and the civil society thereby concentrating on the triple bottom line i.e. economically viable, environmentally sound and socially viable (Hailes 1998).

(b) Derailment of Green Consumerism

The expanding trend toward green consumerism indicates towards the widespread recognition that the planet is in trouble and there is urgency for some sort of intention, to do something about it. For most of us, these green measures are a sign of progress. They are helping the environment. If the sheer number of 'environmentally friendly' products on the market is any indication, consumers seem pretty eager to do their part. But, whether the manufacturers are acting out of genuine environmental interest or simple financial interest in meeting consumer demand, that's beside the point! We are reducing our carbon footprint, recycling the products and supporting local farmers. It all seems to be an ideal scenario where in everything is going as per the plan, but still after following it for quite a few years, the conditions are deteriorating for the worse and no bleak sign of significant success is visible.

One of the prime reasons for movement of Green Consumerism, to waste from worth, is green washing (Wilk 2013). Green washing, also called 'green sheen', is a form of spin in which green PR or green marketing is deceptively used to promote the perception that an organization's products, aims or policies are environmentally friendly. Evidence that an organization is green washing often comes from pointing out the spending differences: when significantly more money or time has been spent advertising being 'green' (that is, operating with consideration for the environment), than is actually spent on environmentally sound practices. While green washing is not new, its use has increased over recent years to meet consumer demand for environmentally friendly goods and services. Therefore, the unethical spirit of green industries has polluted the whole idea of green consumerism which has led to

over consumption of goods and services claiming to be organic or environment friendly.

Strategies to Save the Planet: Green Citizenship

Shifting to greener consumption patterns is a necessary behavioural response but alone is suggested to be insufficient to effectively address the challenges presented by climate change and declining natural resource availability (Jackson 2009). Therefore, the consumers are expected to think and act, keeping in mind a broader range, and moving beyond the choices of alternates available. The problem with green consumerism is the presence of alternate consumption choices, being made available by the marketers. These alternate choices give the satisfaction to the consumers but in true sense, they are offered as a way of foregoing sacrifice with the numerous green products available in the market. This whole approach is equivalent to providing the solution to reduce the guilt of consumption and not to tackle the green washing.

The concept of green citizenship provides a framework for re-conceptualizing individuals' social role with respect to reducing consumption (Young 2014). Green citizenship refers to the breadth of environmental behaviours; individuals navigate and can engage in during common, everyday life patterns that span both the private and public sphere.

The idea of sustainable citizenship requires both the stretching of the spatial-temporal matrix and the material focus of being conventionally attributed to the modern citizen (Whitehead 2005). The same ideology is shared by other researchers as well, commenting that the households must be understood within broader contexts. They are enrolled in networks (social, industrial, governmental), with consequences for behaviour and resource use and for the extent to which households are actually able to change (Chris Gibson 2010).

There lies a deeper trend toward individualism, a result of the transition to modern society and the redirection of the energy toward the negotiation of identities that have become increasingly complex (Bennett 1998; Schor 2012). Researchers found positive correlations among pro-social behaviours (Paul C. Stern 1999).

Spill-over between pro-environmental behaviours in the private and public domain is potentially important for the mobilization of consumer-citizens for a sustainable society but the evidence on this matter is inconclusive and more research is needed (Crompton 2009).

Achieving a green city is not merely a question of delivering specific sustainability projects in transport, housing, and services; it is also about catalysing broader cultural changes and fostering the development of the institutions directed towards reimagining society and the economy (Broto 2018).

The ultimate problem of endangered mother planet can't be resolved only by adopting green culture. It can be one of the means of tackling the situation but can never be adopted as the holistic approach because we have already seen that the real spirit of green consumerism has already been washed away and losing its sheen every passing day as well. To put it in simple words, we can say that, 'Green Consumerism has become toothless in the prevailing circumstances.'

Analysis and Findings

In order to study the focus of previous research and insight, R software has been used to analyse the secondary data. As the results indicate, there is necessity to remove the geographical boundaries and to think, keeping in consensus with the developed economies and the developing economies. The negative effect of climate change is impacting both, the developed and the developing nations. It's just, that it is more visible in less developed countries. So that moves a green consumer to think as a green citizen. Based on the review of literature, we can see the impact of sustainability on exporting as well. There is a need to analyse different alternatives available to shift the care-free consumers to green consumers and then to green citizens.

The similar findings are presented in the form of Word Cloud and Tree map, prepared using R. A word cloud is a novelty visual representation of text data, used to depict keyword metadata or to visualize free from text. A word cloud is a visualization of a set of words, where the size and placement of a word is determined by

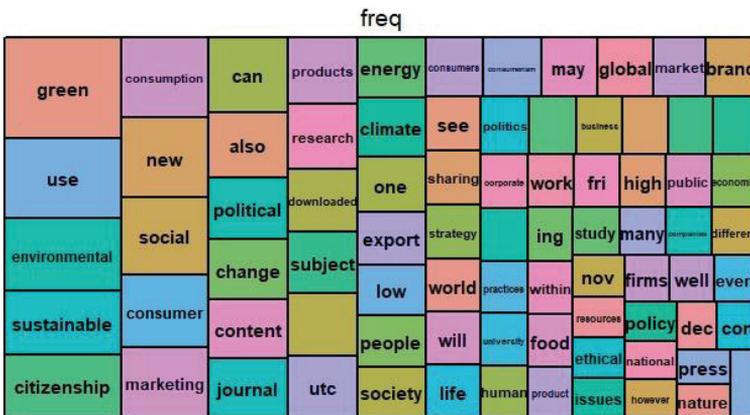
how it is weighted. It mostly serves the purpose of conducting the **word-frequency analysis** across tags, keywords, and so on.

Figure 1: Word Cloud



In Fig 1, we can see the Word Cloud, where the most frequent used word is ‘green’, followed by ‘sustainable’ and ‘consumption’. It focuses on the consumption patterns followed for a sustainable environment. Other terms like, ‘development’, ‘sharing’, ‘Global’, etc. reasserts the viewpoint shared in the above paragraphs.

Fig 2: Tree map



Treemapping is a data visualization technique that is used to display hierarchical data using nested rectangles; the tree map chart is created based on this technique of data visualization. It is used for representing hierarchical data in a tree-like structure. Data, organized as branches and sub-branches, is represented using rectangles, the dimensions and plot colours of which are calculated

w.r.t the quantitative variables associated with each rectangle. The dimensions and colours of the rectangles (nodes) in a tree map chart are configured based on the numerical values assigned to each node. This makes it easy to identify the trends and patterns between the nodes of all the categories plotted on the chart as well between the nodes of a single category.

In Fig 2, Tree map, has been made using R software where the association between 'green', 'environmental', 'sustainable', 'citizenship', 'consumption', shows that the articles studied in the research paper have hierarchical data and huge linkages whereas the words, 'sustainable', 'green' and 'citizenship' have the maximum frequency.

Conclusion

It is an awakening call for consumers, businesses and other stakeholders to realize that the solution lies in protecting the environment. Consumers need to challenge consumption patterns and curtail their desires. There is a shift in values which has led to less of 'Green Consumerism' and more of 'New Consumerism', whose symptoms include a preoccupation with materialism, status and competitive consumption. Saving the planet and expanding the consumption can't move together. Recently, marketers brought a new product in the form of 'Green Crackers' i.e. crackers with comparatively low noise and lesser air pollution, for those who don't hesitate while spending money unnecessarily. Such practices raise the bewilderment in the minds of concerned consumers and at the same time, making them feel sorry for the sad state of affairs wherein the resources and the upgraded technology is used for sheer wastage. All this happening around us, have made a lasting impact on a few of the individuals while others are boasting about their contributions for the planet by Green purchases or we shall say, the Green washing. The circumstances are so severe that we can't let the ignorance of many, be an exogenous variable and that is why we have to explore the alternatives. Some of the solutions to build a bridge towards the sustainable future are as follows:

- i. The gap between the ideas propounded under green consumerism can be filled up by inching towards green

citizenship. Individuals' obligation and responsibilities as citizens should extend beyond the nation-state and include non-human entities and future generations. What is being pointed out here is that, every individual will have to take responsibility for the others', not restricting the geographical boundaries within a house, neighbourhood, locality, city, or for that matter, even a country.

- ii. When the focus is on reduced consumption on part of the consumers, the objective can be achieved by sharing because studies have generally concluded that the sharing frequently found in the societies improves the efficiency of resource use.
- iii. The problems related to unsustainable consumption are growing, and the approach to addressing them must become more intentional, comprehensive, and systematic. That leads us to focus on the inconsistency of consumer attitudes and behaviours. Moving beyond anti-consumerism as a remedy for the social ills brought by the 'New Consumerism', a parallel trend has been identified toward Conscious Consumption. Conscious Consumption is defined as 'any choice about products or services made as a way to express values of sustainability, social justice, corporate responsibility, or workers' rights and that takes into account the larger context of production, distribution, or impacts of goods and services.
- iv. Another important consideration to be noted is that the focus shouldn't only be on building 'Green Spaces' because the geographical space is limited but to think about the redevelopment of already built up spaces. Achieving the new green vision means recognizing and building on existing arguments about urban sustainability.

The study undertaken in this research paper is novel and much more work is needed to be done in the same area like profiling the green citizens and differentiating them from green consumers, including their habits and preferences and cultural differences can also be articulated in the same area. Mandatory CSR reporting is already there in many of the countries but more importance should

be given to it to get rid of green washing and that is where the legal and ethical pillars need to be involved. The recent example is the idea of banning single use plastic, propounded by the Honourable Prime Minister of India, which is yet to come into existence. The role should be shifted to collectivism from individualism and that is the essence of transitioning a green consumer to a green citizen, henceforth achieving sustainable development.

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