

REFERENCE NO 65

OFFSETTING THE GREEN GUILT OR BARGAINING FOR CHEAPEST: DISCOURSE OF GREEN CONSUMPTION OF DEVELOP AND DEVELOPING WORLD CUSTOMERS

*Buddhika Hewawasam
University of Colombo,
Colombo, Sri Lanka
bhewawasam@gmail.com
Nalin Abeysekara
Open University of Sri Lanka,
Nugegoda, Sri Lanka
nabeysekara@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT

Green guilt in consumption or consider consumption as harmful to the environment became an increasingly acceptable concept among customers of developed world. Even within developing countries, green consumption dialogue is spread to considerable extent. But whether it reaches the acceptability of general consumer in developing part of the world is still a question. Researchers attempt to understand Asian consumers sensitive to environment in their consumption practice of air travel. Airline marketers all over the world understand customer's green guilt and use it heavily in their promotions and communications. Carbon calculation and mitigation of the carbon emission by voluntary financial contribution of customers is a popular choice given by almost all the major airlines of developing as well as developed countries. Researchers attempt to explore the major discourses of green consumption among airline customers through such voluntary offsetting mechanism. Customer in-depth interviews are the data collection method using by researchers. Sample of ten airline passengers taken by using judgmental sampling technique were interview by researchers. Interview transcriptions analyzed using discourse analysis method in order to identify the main discourse/s of green consumption among developing country airline passengers. This research is significant by its pioneering effort of identifying the green consumption facets among developing country consumers and exploring the green consumerism discourse in relatively unexplored context of developing part of the world. Findings of this research is also helpful to identify how green guilt exists on different customer groups and identify how global phenomenon like green consumerism affected to different markets. This paper is not only having theoretical understanding of green consumption in different scenarios, it will be practically viewed on identify global solutions for environment sensitive areas.

Key Words: Green Consumerism, Green Guilt, Carbon Offsetting, Discourse Analysis

Introduction

General public of West concerned about environment as early as 1970. Increased awareness about industrial pollution and its effect on human health and deterioration of environment attract the public interest within this period (Connelly & Prothero, 2008). Several ad-hoc up rises against environment sensitive industries as well as setting up the regulation for environment protection in such industries gradually taken place in Europe with involvement of various community groups and environment pressure groups. But purchasing behaviors of the consumers did not affected by consumption until mid 1980's (Peattie & Crane, 2006). Enormously successful global boycott of CFC based aerosols is one of the first incidents which shape the consumer purchasing decisions in global level (Peattie & Crane, 2006). At the end of 80's and early 1990 green consumerism found its place in European market place. Manufacturers increasingly claimed the environment friendliness of their products; marketing communication efforts gave birth to "Green advertising" campaigns and subsequently gave the birth to whole area of "Green Marketing" (Peattie & Crane, 2006). Year 1990 marked a phenomenal increase of green marketing efforts. US green advertisement growth at 1990 compare to 1989 is 430% (Ottoman, 1993). Not only existing firms like Leaver Brothers, 3M, Volvo and even McDonalds claming about their diversion to environment friendly practices, New breed of "Enviorprenures" whom build their businesses with innovative environment excellence (i.e. Body shop , Ecover, Tom's of Maine) flourish within the decade of 1990 (Menon & Menon,1997). In early and mid 1990's marketing academics increasingly accept that "Green Marketing" as important growing area of marketing (Iyer and Banarjee, 1993; Menon & Menon, 1997). Yet the subject areas of green marketing is still not clearly demarcate. According to Peattie and Crane (2006) any form of marketing which represent the progress towards sustainability is green marketing. They further claimed that Green Marketing broadly cover areas of adherence to environment best practices in production processes , compliance with all related environment regulations and changing products to least harm to natural environment or may be decreasing the existing harm to environment (i.e. Plastic waste recycling). Numerous practices, claims and philosophies adding up to this list everyday which make it ever difficult to define green marketing (Cleveland et al, 2005).

Visible environment consequences of the manufacturing industries made them adopt the environment best practices earlier than the service industry (Straughian & Roberts, 1999). But growth of Green Marketing expanded to services industry also in early 20th century. Growth of eco-tourism, green investments and consideration of environment friendly service expanded to various sections of service industry in an increasing speed (Autio, Heiskanen & Heinonen, 2009).

At present , Greener products market in developed world passing down various phases and reaching growth phase in both services and manufacturing businesses (Bhate2002). Still majority of consumers are not consider the environment or sustainability as considerable factor in their purchasing decision, but the segment of consumers whom consider the importance of greenness in purchasing increasing continuously (Bhate,2002). Several researchers identify and collate the consumers

behavior related to environment and sustainability under the heading of ‘Green Consumerism’ (Bhate, 2002; Cleveland et al, 2005; Autio et al, 2009). Bhate (2002) explain the green consumerism as set of environment concerns which affect the purchase behavior of the consumers. Cleveland et al (2005) further expands this idea of environment concerns in purchasing to the level of “Green Guilt”. According to him Green guilt is the concern of consumers about the damage created to the environment by purchasing, consuming and disposing the particular product. Increase awareness and education about pollution, environment hazards created by conspicuous consumption practices, evidence of the consequences of wasteful consumption and natural resource depletion increasingly create “green guilt” among European and US consumers (Autio et al, 2009). This guilt is also fueled by the continuous marketing communication efforts of the green marketers whom remind the responsibility of the consumer to purchase environment friendly alternatives (Pattie & Crane, 2006). In most cases, consumer’s willingness of developed world to pay premium for better environment conserving product is due to this guilt (Bhate, 2001). Autio et al (2009) in their narrative study of the green consumers pictured this very clearly by the words of a young Finland consumer. *“Environment friendly consumption has become the behavior norm for educated and conscious people, but nevertheless there remain challenges for those aiming to influence consumer behavior in future”*

While Europe and US consumers increasingly boarding to the green marketing bandwagon passing by, studying of their counterparts in developing countries limited to very few. Bhate (2002) in his exploratory study of environment friendly consumption in three countries claimed that developing country consumers (specifically the Indian Consumers) still in the early introductory stage of green consumption. According to him environment values are domain specific and relative value of environment concerns in most of the developing countries are not a prime concern of purchasing behavior yet. His study does not indicate clearly whether green consumerism is growing in developing countries. But he identified compare to price and convenience of the purchase environment is still not considered as the main factor of purchase. More interestingly even the pro-environment activist/consumers of India are having environment skepticism on Developed country model of green consumption. They question the proportion of responsibility developing country’s want to bear on behalf of the environment damages done by developed world (Cleveland et al). Yet the closer understanding of developing country consumer’s green consumerist behaviors is still suffering from insufficient researches. Most of the studies limited to the quantitative market size analysis or structured questionnaires which limit the in-depth understanding about developing country green consumer dynamics. Also the multiple factors which differentiate the developing country consumers from developed countries yet to be understand in related to green consumption.

Researchers attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the green consumerism of developing countries in this paper. They explore the green consumption influence of purchasing behavior of airline passengers in Sri Lanka and attempt understanding green consumer discourse prevail among them.

Nature and Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the green consumption patterns of developing country and also attempt to compare their green consumption behavior to developed country counterparts. Researchers mainly focus on studying green consumption pattern of the airline passengers of Sri Lanka, whom using Bandaranaike International Airport. Study is done on different segments of consumers in order to get a broader understanding about how they react to the environment concerns and green marketing efforts in the airline industry.

Research Design

Social constructionism is the research philosophy of this study. Social constructionist viewpoint of knowledge of particular individual is construction of his interaction with society (Philips & Hardy, 2002) facilitates studying the notions of green consumerism among selected consumers and understanding their social setting. Society's influence on construction process of green consumerism in develop countries can establish with this view of social constructionist.

The methodology adopted by researchers in this study is discourse analysis. Discourse analysis can be identified as a strategy of exploring the social construction of reality and world through language (Philips & Hardy, 2002). This allows researchers to use discourse analysis on the talk and written texts of different contexts and cultures with emphasis to the contextual and cultural differences of the texts constructed by social phenomena which perfectly match with the needs of this study.

Sampling

Researchers used a sample of ten airline passengers for this study. They were selected on the basis of different layers of the social strata identify through a screening interviews taken place at airport.

Since researchers used the freedom to select the respondents who can particularly suit with the theoretical need of the research, sampling technique engaged in this research can be identified as theoretical sampling (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).Furthermore, prime need of discourse analysis is to identify rich and meaningful data which sufficiently illuminate and facilitate the comparative analysis (Philips and Hardy, 2002). Particularly important theoretical sampling approach in this kind of situation is using "Polar types" (p.27, Eisenhardt & Graebner). In order to more easily observe and contrast the patterns in data researchers sample extremes in a pairing order.

The sample was purposefully limited to ten in order to avoid complexity and inability of identifying a prominent set of discourses due to a large sample (Elliot, 1996). Discourse is a method which deeply studies the texts and their emergent themes and discourses which needs a thorough focus on the selected text in order to identify the most number of emerging themes. Also researchers should actively interpret themes to discover discourses since it is not a self-emergent process. This nature of discourse analysis required researchers to select a limited set of rich in-depth texts.

Collecting Data

In-depth interviews were conducted by researchers to collect data. An interview guideline was used by the researchers to ensure that all concepts related to the study will be addressed in every interview. Though interviewers used guideline to lead the conversation with his questions researcher encouraged interviewee to give rich descriptive details and to tell stories without interrupting if he/she needs to.

Each interview took approximately 90-120 minutes. Interviews were conducted in the language which was preferred by the respondents in order to acquire linguistically rich data with versatile perspectives (Silverman, 2000). All interviews were audio recorded. In addition, the interviewer made field notes to record his observations regarding the surroundings, the dress code of respondents and the manner in which the respondents participated in the dialogue. Data gathered through audio tapes were be transcribed by the interviewer. The transcribed original texts were used in the analysis process.

Process of Analysis

In the analysis process researcher identified major conceptual categories identified by the background analysis and literature review. However, in discourse analysis while the coding categories are initially determined by research questions (Gill, 1996), it is also stressed that the coding should be done “as inclusively as possible” (Gill, p. 145). This requires constant changing of codes. Therefore, new codes were developed and new categories created based on what was emerging from the interview texts.

The codes facilitated researchers to categorize interview texts into separate thematic groups. This was the preliminary level of analysis which led to the process of theme identification. In the next level of analysis broad discourses were identified based on groups of themes

Findings

Discursive constructions of Green Consumerism

Analysis of the in-depth interview leads to four main discourses of green consumption among selected respondents. Researchers name those discourse as below:

1. Green Unaware
2. Green Incapable
3. Anti-Green
4. Green contributor
5. Green Rebel

Green Unaware; “*Knowing only where to go and rest is done by our recruitment agent*”

“I am working in Middle East as a housemaid, I came to Sri Lanka every two years and this is my second term after four years. I am going back to Qatar tonight in Qatar airways flight. My master paid direct to the recruitment agent in Sri Lanka and they decided which airline I fly. Even Last occasion I flew with Qatar Airways. I don’t know anything about how environment is damage by airline or how it happened. I don’t think I

can understand that also since it is more of a science thing. I only went up to grade five and don't know any English. I just able to understand and speak little bit of Arabic"

Sriyavathi, female, 45, translated from Sinhala

Researchers interviewed Sriyawathi (pseudonym) on her way back to Qatar after the holidays. She did not have the basic knowledge about the environment neither interested on the particular topic also. For her, air travel is just a necessity which is not decided by her master and recruitment agency. Furthermore, she is not interested on something which does not seem to be part of her day to day life. This interview proves environment sensitivity in purchasing need a minimum level of formal education, awareness and also the purchasing power capability.

Green Incapable

"I am working in Middle East Courier Company. I did my education up to my Advance Levels and joined a local company as a messenger. Then I got the opportunity to join this company in Dubai. My holiday air ticket has to be purchased by my own money. This time I came to Sri Lanka for my sister's wedding.

I know little bit of environment concerns of air travel and herd that we can compensate the environment by contributing the money for such projects introduced by the airline. Yes ... I think they indeed contribute to saving the environment. But I was not interested in such in my purchase of air ticket. I only checked the lowest price because I cannot afford to spent money on those. I really need to save a lot for building my house in Sri Lanka as well as my sisters wedding. I think only rich people can contribute on such environment projects, they have no worries on whatsoever

They spent"

Anton 34, Translated from Sinhala

Extract of Anton's conversation on environment concerns in consumption provide another main discourse of environmentally sensitive but incapable due to financial restrictions. Anton explained his knowledge about environment consequences .But at the same time he was unable to contribute for mitigating such environment efforts due to insufficient income and different priorities. His statement of "Only rich people can contribute on such environment projects" is summarizing this discourse. Person's like Anton every dollar he earned has more priorities than investing on environment conservation attempt of the marketers.

Anti-Green

"I am frequent traveling to Singapore. I normally travel more than four to five times a month to purchase computer accessories and electronic goods which is my main business. I know people are talking more and more about environment. But I think it's more of a European and American fad rather than a reality. I don't think my personal efforts will make any difference to the environment and its waste if you put money on such fancy project. I choose the airline which gives more benefits to me such as higher baggage allowance and lowest airfare. I don't consider environment at all in purchasing

my ticket and never will! Also I don't think there's major threat to environment from air travel, though people lament about pollution and everything I don't see any major effect of such. Those are just unnecessary worries when science is so advance and capable of providing solution to environment problem, I think it's needless to worry for such things
Kamal, 40, English transcript

Kamal, a mature traveler and a computer accessories trader whom frequently travel to Singapore represented a different discourse which is totally against the environment sensitivity and sustainability concepts prevail. He does not think there's a major need of protecting the environment from pollution or an environment friendly practices. Most of the claims related to environment is just fancy and far from reality. Individually he neither accepts nor contributes for any environment project. He thinks that environment can be saved by technology if there's such danger, which others don't want to worry about.

Green Contributor

"I am working in UK for past five years and on my extended work permit. I work in an IT related job. Every year I came to Sri Lanka to see my parents. May be this is my fifth or sixth time in this usual annual trip. Of course, environment is a major concern for me, I even joined sustainable movement in London. I am really concerned about purchasing environment friendly things as much as possible. I am a fan of organic foods as well as contributing as much as possible in environment areas. Even this time in my air travel I ask my agent to calculate my carbon footprint which I contributed 20 pounds which converse whole journey. I think its everybody's' responsibility for contributing such. I always encourage my friends for such. If we don't save our planet whom else will save?"
Susan, Female , 45, English transcription

Susan is representing the dominant green consumer discourse of Europe. She considers it is responsibility of the individual to aware about personal environment damages and mitigates every possible area in a more active manner. Her decision of purchasing combined with environment concern.

Green Rebel

"I am a medical student in Ukraine came after three years on my vacation. I love my environment and also do as much as possible to keep it clean and healthy. I know its really polluted now and it everybody's' job to identify this and work toward reducing the damage. This should be a community movement rather than individual attempt. Compensating personal carbon footprint is definitely not the answer. I think we sri Lankan are anyway protecting the environment. It is so called developed world that destroy it by factories and burning fuel oil. They chop their forest and even destroy our environment in the name of development. So we don't need to buy their fancy project like mitigating carbon by putting our money there project. Why should we? If they are responsible they should invest their own.

I think what we need to do is pressurize those Europeans to clean the polluted environment for the betterment of us whom never destroy Mother Nature. We need to do it actively . I will not invest even a cent in these fancy project which doesn't server any purpose. I simply don't believe in this kind of commercial efforts... Just gimmicks”
Ravi, 30, English transcript

Ravi represents discourse of “green rebel” whom consider about environment problems in a different angle. While well aware and educated about contemporary environment logic of individual compensation he is fully against it. Not only identified the problem but he attempts to highlight the responsible party for such environment hazard also. It's the develop world according to him. He doesn't want to put his money for compensate somebody else's wrong behavior. He approached the problem with more of a rebellious mindset to start pressurizing and penalizing the responsible parts without charging fancily from responsible countries and people. Susan represent unique and different discourse which contradicts with developed country environment logic.

Discussion

Researchers attempt to understand main discourses related to green consumerism and green guilt among contemporary Sri Lankan. Active social construction of green consumerism is evident among certain level of Sri Lankan travelers but yet the knowledge of green consumerism and sustainability does not reach the lower strata of air travelers of the country which is evident from the discourse of *Green Unaware*. Especially the large number of lower end occupants still unable to understand the environment impact of industries. This is similar to Bhate's (2001) observation of Indian general consumer's unawareness of environment friendliness in consumption. Still environment does not perceived by the low end air traveler of Sri Lanka as an important consideration or priority in their travel. Unlike developed country consumers whom well aware about environment consideration, major portion of developing country consumers cannot relate their purchase to environment. Similar to Bhate's observation this can be consider as a domain specific concern which environment still not consider by the general public as high valued issue in consumption.

Discourse of *Green Incapables* highlights a situation unique to developing country consumers. Unlike developed country's general consumer whom able to finance their environment friendly purchases, developing country consumers are not financially stable to support environment friendly initiatives. Though they aware and considering the environment friendly purchases as ideal option, they are not able to support due to their restrictive financial situation. With limited income they need to prioritize on several other important areas in life other than the environment concerns. This situation is a considerable limiting factor for success of any green product or services charging premium from consumers in developing countries.

Discourse of *Anti green* is similar to the antihero narrative of developed country consumer whom does not believe in sustainability or environment friendly consumption (Autio et al, 2009). This discourse indicate the development of science and technology can mitigate environment hazards if needed and general public does not want to unnecessarily worried about such. Desire of comfort and easy living is the underline

motive of this claim. Unlike the developed country consumer's of Autio et al , Sri Lankan consumers also claimed that environment consumerism and greenness as a fantasy created in Europe and USA. This might be indicating the skeptics developed among developing country consumers over European and US model of green consumerism

Discourse of *Green Contributor* is again similar to the general green consumers ethos explained by Autio et al (2009) whom consider responsible consumption as part of the lifestyle. Being environment friendly in every possible purchase is major part of green consumption. Sri Lankan's represent this discourse directly link their green consumption tendencies to the inspiration they got from their close ties with Europe and USA. Most of them either living or working in developed world and inspired heavily by the green consumer ethos popular in those societies. Their social construction is more or less link to the developed world in that sense.

Discourse of *Green Rebel* represents unique discourse in environment concern which is not explored in earlier studies or literature. While extremely concern about the environment hazards and pollution, *Green rebels* does not want to adopt the commercial mechanisms developed under green consumerism in developed world. They think this mechanism does not serve the real purpose of sustainability in more of a global level. Existing model of green consumption hide the real problem and unfairly attempt to collect money from developing world to mitigate harmful practices of developed world. They think developing world need to lobbying against and pressurize the developed world to minimize their harmful practices and compensate the damages they did. Environment anarchism explained by Autio et al has some similarities to this discourse. Rebellious consumers or Anarchists of developed countries also more interested in developing green consumption as a community activity rather than marketing practice. They are extremely critical about multinational's became green consumption promoters. They also claim that current green consumption promotions are gimmicky and bogus but not address the real issues of sustainability. While sharing more of a common platform, considerable difference between green rebels of developing world and anarchists of developed world is their accusations. Developed world anarchists blame the multinationals while developing world rebels commonly accused the developed countries for damaging the environment.

Conclusion

Identified discourses in this study justify the claim of Bhate on domain specific characters of green consumption and environment sensitivity. While inability of consumption and unawareness can be consider as the two main shapers or restriction of green consumption among Sri Lankan , anti European and anti US discourses mainly affect the green consumption concept among able and actively environment friendly consumers. They don't need to adopt or contribute to the current green consumer models which they think as gimmicks instead they need green consumerism to be develop as a community activity.

Practical Implications

Results of this study indicate the importance of creating higher awareness among general public about environment friendly consumption. Policy makers must join with other groups to make environment as a priority of consumption. Currently considerable amount of general public does not have value opinion about environment friendliness in consumption due to this unawareness.

Also current mechanism and practice of green consumerism allows only financial compensations for environment protection. But considerable numbers of developing country consumers are unable to contribute financially for such efforts. They are excluding from current green consumption mechanisms without providing any non financial alternatives. Instead of direct financial contribution they can be inviting for community efforts, recycling initiatives and voluntary projects which must be lead by country's policy makers. Such alternatives will be able to include currently neglected but large number of lower end customers for sustainable consumption projects.

Also the current model of green consumerism creates global generalization without considering about domain specific customization. This has been increasingly question by matured and active environment concerned consumers in this study. Developing country consumers question the validity of requesting them to participate in green consumption while harm for environment is more of a cause of developed world activities. Proportion of responsibility which Bhate (2001) highlighted is supported by the findings of this study. Community based domain or country specific structure is increasingly demand by active and environment sensitive consumers of Sri Lanka.

References

1. Autio, M., Heiskannen, E. & Heinonen, V." Narratives of "green" consumers-the anti hero, environmental hero and the anarchist". *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*,8, 2009, 40-53
2. Bhate,S. "One world, One Environment and One vision: Are we close to achieving this?" *Journal of Consumer Behavior*,2001, 169-184
3. Cleveland, M., Kalamas, M. & Laroche,M. "Shades of Green ; Linking environmental locus of control and pro-environmental behaviors". *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 22(4),2005, 198-201
4. Elliot, R. (1996). Discourse analysis: exploring action, function and conflict in social texts. *Journal of Marketing & Intelligence Planning*, 14/6, 65-68.
5. Gill, R. (1996). Discourse analysis: practical implementation. In J. T.E. Richardson (Ed.) *Handbook of qualitative research methods for psychology and the social sciences*. (pp. 141-156). Malden, MA: BPS Blackwell
6. Kotchen, B., " Revisiting Green Consumption" *International Journal of Consumer Studies* ,2009, 301-319

7. Laroche, M., Bergeron, J.& Barbaro-Forieo, G. "Targeting consumers who are willing to pay more for environmentally friendly products" *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 17,2001, 503-520
8. Menon, A. & Menon, A. "Evolving paradigm for environment sensitivitiy in marketing programmes" *Journal of Marketing Theory & Practice*, 7, 1999, 1-15
9. Moisander,J. "Motivational complexity of green consumerism". *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 2007, 404-409
10. Peattie, K., Crane, A. "Green Marketing: Legend, Myth, Farce or Prophecy?" *Qualitative Marketing Research: An International Journal*, 8, 2006, 357-370
11. Philips, N., & Hardy, C. (2002). *Discourse analysis an investigative process of social construction*, Thousand Oaks, Sage
12. Silverman, D. (1993). *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analyzing Talk, Text and Interaction*. Thousand Oaks: Sage
13. Straughan, R. & Roberts, J. "Environment Segmentation Alternatives: A look at green consumer behaviors in new millennium". *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 16,1999,