

Green consumerism

Social, cultural and economic factors of society are assumed to set the framework for green consumerism. Each country has its own traditions, norms and taboos. This sets limits to designing and planning of a Social marketing campaign especially when a same concept is replicated in different countries.

The programme management should examine consumers' attitudes and values towards environmental issues in general (e.g. environmental concern) and the way they in the particular country think about and use the products towards which the campaign is directed before planning a marketing programme. The cultural barriers in the target country must be identified. Understood widely, cultural dimensions can mean:

- the social organisation of society
- the heavy reliance on the welfare system (e.g. in Finland) or the class hierarchy (e.g. in United Kingdom)
- religion (the secular approaches of Western countries)
- customs and rituals
- values and attitudes, for example, towards environmental protection
- education provision
- political system and infrastructure
- language

If we think about green consumption and purchase situations, individuals are put in trade-off situations where they have to make choices between the environment and their own needs, wants and desires. The battle between individual needs and the environment easily leads, however, to a moral and puritanical standpoint that consumption "is a bad thing we should do without." (Slater, 2001) In environmental debate, such standpoints come up in the context of modern consumer culture, which, on one hand, deregulates desire and, on the other hand, operates as an engine for generating an endless amount of new desires.

Making consumers feel guilty for the buying decisions they make should be avoided. Awareness may create a guilty feeling in some users, as was reported by French case "Climate" (F 1). Today's consumers are not very willing to bargain about their own standards of living. People with low environmental concern tend to prefer free-market solutions rather than government policy, and shift the responsibility for solving environmental problems on others. Free riding is, by definition, a problem typical to green consumerism. This came up in a Finnish Climate change communication campaign (Fi 3), which reported the attitude change of Finnish people: people's readiness to make changes in their lifestyles to a more green direction has increased while in the same time there have not been any real changes in their consumption habits. This demonstrates the fact that attitudinal and behavioural change are different. The key is to convert attitudinal change into action.

Moreover, green consumers are more likely to control their consumption in comparison to more traditional consumers and therefore, the environmental impact of green behaviours is direct. For example, the decision on whether or not to purchase a

car tends to have much greater environmental impact than changes in the use of the same vehicle. This aspect involves the consumer's responsibility to control her/his consumption choices. There are people who are altruistic by nature, and therefore regard environmental issues, such as energy saving, an important matter. This came up in some of the case studies as well; those already motivated take best part in the campaigns.

One way to overcome the typical problems is to emphasise in marketing the positive sides of green purchase decisions and making low carbon products aspirational. That is, consumers want to know what they benefit when putting their money on greener – and often more expensive – product alternatives. The cost-benefit thinking should be more clearly adopted in green marketing. From one case-study came also an interesting marketing concept “intelligent purchasing” (Germany) that sounds like fun and also “flatters” consumer for her/his good choice. In short, show the advantages without moralising.

With regard of green consumption there are some core elements that influence it. Some of them are presented in figure below.

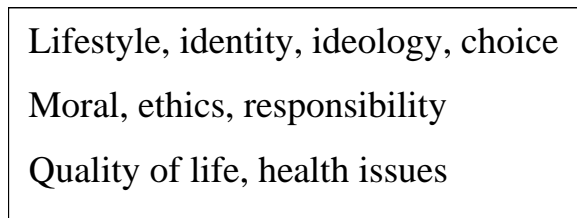


Figure 1. The elements that affect environmentally responsible consumerism

The designers of marketing should take these influencing factors into account. However, in questions about human beings it is impossible to give any universal list that could be applied to every individual.