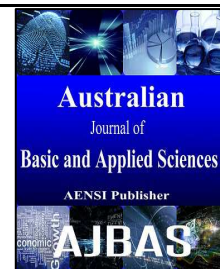




ISSN:1991-8178

Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences

Journal home page: www.ajbasweb.com



The Consumers' Attitudes in Front of Organizations' Environmental Management

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 3 October 2015

Accepted 31 October 2015

Keywords:

Environmental Management, Sustainability, Conscious Consumption

ABSTRACT

The paper aims to present the attitude of consumers regarding the environmental practices adopted by Brazilian organizations. It is understood organizations adopt practices about environment is essential, as their internal processes as external actions, the corporative and social changes are considered in this scene. It is observed consumers are important, therefore, more and more they analyze the responsible performance of Brazilian organizations. It was performed a quantitative research through questionnaire for achieving the objectives of this study. The sample was composed by 336 people at capacity consumption fully. The survey results demonstrate environmental management can be an excellent tool for conquering consumers, because consumers realize the great responsibility assumed by organizations regarding to the environment, nowadays. This finding was possible because most of the respondents answered the environmentally responsible behavior of organizations is decisive factor at the purchase's moment. However, the data revealed consumers do not realize the practices adopted by companies. This lack of awareness may prejudice environmentally responsible organizations' worth by consumers.

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To Cite This Article: Vera Lúcia Da Silva Ventura, Valmir Alves Ventura, Marcelo Fernandes, Marcelo Okano, Oduvaldo Vendrametto, Osmildo Santos., The Consumers' Attitudes in Front of Organizations' Environmental Management. *Aust. J. Basic & Appl. Sci.*, 9(33): 203-209, 2015

INTRODUCTION

In the age of environmental protection, sustainable development and concern with nature and the shortage of natural resources, environmental management emerges as an allied to the preservation of the environment, as well as improving the acquisition and retention of customers.

Nowadays, an important challenge faced by the world, according to Tachizawa (2005), it is to make the market and organizations are able to protect the environment and their resources, using economic instruments, in regulated business environment.

The author also highlights this new scenario presents as remarkable features like rigid attitude of customers. Such customers interact with organizations which act as ethic and ecologically responsible manner and good corporative image.

Despite all the influence done by environmentally responsible consumers as by regulatory agencies, NGOs and the government itself companies must adopt new responsibilities in their

business and there is a great trend for all over the years (DONAIRE, 1999).

The number of adepts on environmentally responsible products or brands who has solid environmentally responsible has been growing all over years. The consumer says, in most cases, if you have a choice, prefer to purchase products from companies that operate with ecologically responsible manner. As justified by Ottman (1994), the consumers are increasingly concerned with environmental values and their livelihood, and this is reflected on purchase's moment, because customers opt for products considered environmentally sustainable over those which are not.

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the attitudes of consumers regarding to environmental management practices adopted by Brazilian organizations. The theoretical reference exposes social and environmental responsibility and how it is inserted in the new world socioeconomic scenario. Also, it was presented the subject of sustainability and how companies are treating the subject

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sustainable development, focusing on the benefits brought by them, not only the environment, but also from the economic aspect. The importance of environmental management in organizations, and the relevance of environmental labeling programs or green seal in the market context, and the impact caused by this program into national and international market are subjects contained this chapter.

It is presented a field research, which target is to check the level of environmental awareness of consumers and analyze the influence of ecologically friendly actions by organizations when customer decides to purchase. It was observed through data collected in the survey as the environmentally responsible behavior from companies has the power to communicate the organization's image to the consumers regarding to their socio-environmental actions.

The conscious consumption is another important aspect treated, because, the intent is to verify if these consumers who express 'ecologically friendly' practice actions for supporting the environmental protection or if they are just adepts of ecologically friendly speech. The great reflection around subject and the big environmental regulations are important factors of high competitiveness in the global market, nowadays.

The dissemination of information over need for use of renewable resources, the engagement of international organizations and studies demonstrate the relevance of the theme, the consumers are more sensitive to environmental responsibility, therefore, the chance of attracting new customers have been appearing of this new green market niche.

Currently, despite the investment in socio environmental responsibility shows a great growth, all the market is deficiency of companies which develop products that contribute more effectively for sustainable development, benefiting the environment and maximizing their market potential.

Due to the increasing of environmental awareness, the number of adepts for environment protection products has increased all over time. From then on, the present study was intended to answer the following question: How environmental management practices can influence the attitudes of consumers? Therefore, the main objective of this research was to present the consumers' attitude regarding to environmental management practices adopted by Brazilian organizations.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The Socio-Environmental Responsibility:

Important changes have been occurred in the Brazilian production environment in the last decades. This environment changed from the economy which was export of agricultural products to strong industrialization ones. Although the success and

benefits reached by capitalism, the author considers, due to technological advancement and efficient resource management; when the economic results are faced by social outcomes, for example, environmental degradation, the economic index is not enough for measuring social performance, only. (DONAIRE, 1999).

Besides that, the planet suffers with effects of degradation's years and irresponsible use of their natural resources, beyond the degradation of urban areas. The worrying pollution levels registered currently, among other social and environmental index, it exposed the issue of sustainability, which can be seen as some balance among the environmental, social and economic attributes for business way.

In this context, companies are being compelled to take on new responsibilities, even though many of the companies are showing the opposite to these changes, and it is projected expansion of the spectrum for next years, yet (DONAIRE, 1999).

These responsibilities are considered by many authors so important for business, as Tachizawa (2005, p. 45), who says, 'the social responsibility is becoming parameter, and reference of excellence, for the business world and all Brazilian corporative'.

According this author's view, this new scenario presents some tougher attitude by consumers who reach to touch with ethical organizations, good market image and environmentally friendly ones.

Donaire (1999, p. 50) believes on the growing awareness of consumers, organizations should 'incorporate the environmental attribute in the exploration of their scenarios for taking decision'... as well adopt an environmentally responsible attitude. For the author, the skill to meet the needs of its customers, without compromising the survival of future generations it is presented a great challenge for organizations in the 21st century. Then, organizations must adapt their processes and their relationship with society and the environment for achieving this goal.

Among the main effects found by the use of natural resources, over the decades, it is soil degradation, due to erosion and desertification; deforestation; the pollution of continental waters, as rivers, lakes, aquifers; soil pollution because inadequate management of waste and the indiscriminate use of fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides, and other forms of pollution, be atmospheric, marine, sound or nuclear.

Environmental awareness:

Environmental awareness, according to Donaire (1999, p. 23) 'refers to the organization's skill for reaching the expectations and pressures of society'. For the author, this concept of environmental awareness surpasses the concept of social responsibility, which is characterized by obedience to the law, for any more technical approach and

comprehensive, which is able to identify and advance the internal mechanisms implanted by organizations for answering the demands imposed by society. The author also points out for following the growth of these claims and their consequences represent a great and extreme task for the survival and profitability of company in a long term.

The classical theories of organization and management, according to Donaire (1999) did not view society and the environment as constituent part of the organization. Up to the 60s, the prevailing belief was the natural sources would be endless and the free market would maximize social welfare. The Conventional economic theory just approached the allocation of scarce resources and the environment was not considered limiting factor, this model considered the nature as irrelevant to the economy. Despite this kind of idea is absurd nowadays, its predominance is found in certain segments of society, yet.

The perception of climate change, the degradation on the ozone layer, the reduction of biodiversity, among others, contributed to the need for categorizing other types of industrialization and consumption patterns. It can see this paradigm had been imposed over the years, and it had changed to favor of the environment and society, fortunately.

For Pereira (2002) the worth of the ecological aspect by people ranges according to some attributes, such as age, social class, cultural groups, i.e. according to the reality of people. For the author there is a significant and growing environmental awareness in Brazil, although the level of information regarding the ecological question is incipient in the country, yet. For the author people sympathize by organizations which acts on environmental protection, but not everyone get to engage in projects as effective. That is, when the subject is environmental responsibility, the practices are not consistent with them. This demonstrates the next level of achievement in awareness scale is the own action exactly.

Sustainability And Environmental Management:

Sustainable development is a kind of subject so discussed within the environmental awareness, according to Tachizawa (2005), it began its consolidation in the 90's, from the observation the planet's natural resources are limited faced the effects of production and consumption. This decade marked by strong economic globalization, the global of environmental problems, by organized action of environmental and consumer groups, the green seal programs such as governmental initiative or not, and the generation of regulations demanded more and more legal attitude and awareness by organizations.

Supporting for Moura (2000) is synonymous of conservation and maintenance, this involve expansion of the productive use of natural resources within the ecological context. For the author,

economic growth has been done according to the view of sustainable development, i.e., keeping the availability of natural resources used by this generation and future ones. Sustainability involves the idea of nature's stock maintenance, or a kind of guarantee by its replacement natural or artificial processes.

Actually, talking about sustainable development, according to Moura (2000), is possible with management and environmental responsibility to reconcile the needs of economic growth with quality of life, therefore, the development of industrial activities will cause higher generation wastes and pollutants through use of natural resources. 'However, this must be followed by development of new technologies, new production processes, new materials and new procedures and management practices which reduce the negative effects on acceptable limits' (Moura, 2000, p.4).

A truly sustainable development, as stated Pereira (2002), does not involve just moderate use of natural resources, but, satisfy the economy and ecological aspects as effectively, also.

The importance of environmental management in organizations:

The demanding on environmental protection had been seen as restrictive of the growth in production. For Donaire (1999), the unconcern about environmental factors by organizations is reflected in the increase costs, the reduction of profit, loss of market share, besides representing a potential loss of opportunities in international markets.

According to Tachizawa (2005), for treating on environmental and social issues, it needs an expansive and integrated view, which can relate cause and effect, resources raised and values obtained by organization.

Donaire (1999) states the uninterrupted growth regarding to the environment reached the market, generating the establishment of a green niche, with consumers who are concerned about the content and the production's form of the products they wish to consume.

The socio-environmental responsibility, according to Churchill and Peter (2000) is an important subject for the organization, due to long term it can be won potential consumers interested in shopping organizations which shows concern with them or society. These consumers can use as criterion an option by companies in which they respect, in an extremely competitive environment.

According to these authors, organizations considered the environmental consciousness aspect so important and necessary, since the current situation given to the planet and the imminent scarcity of natural resources, it can be so interesting from a financial view, that is, one more possibility for increasing the earned profits.

Then, concerning for environmental responsibility requires organizations to choose suppliers and partners who use resources and materials in accordance to the organization's environmental requirements and environmental legislation ones. (TACHIZAWA, 2005)

On making decisions of products, organizations need to consider aspects such as existing policies, regulations about requirements and disposal of products, among other ones. (KOTLER and ARMSTRONG, 2003)

According to Castro (1996), the companies committed to the environment shows confidence and bet on the future. That's mean: they seek for new expectation which environment cares are no longer obstacles to the organization's activity, becoming a kind of the guarantee for establishing a great opportunities into market.

This thought about 'green issues' is so valuable for organizations as well for all mankind, because, although there is so many dissemination around environmental awareness, the impact and forecasts of global warming are worsening, diversification forward, deforestation and pollution destroying our ecosystem and billions of people without access to potable water around the world.

Nowadays, this view is not addressed only to companies who have business abroad, which eliminate restrictions in environmental non-tariff imposed by developed countries, but to all who want to get the best relationship with nature.

Pereira (2002, p.45) states 'pro-active companies view system of management and it brings benefits to the rational use of natural resources, energy saving and commitment to sustainable development'.

The author states, the decision of adopting environmental policy reduces the impacts on the environment, it can't be seen by the financial angle only. Although, their waste can represent higher costs to the organization, the corporative image linked to the contamination of rivers, for example, it may reflect as negative to society, then, it will generate huge losses (PEREIRA, 2002).

The impact of environmental management in the corporative image :

An important challenge is to do the market and organizations are able to protect the environment and its resources faced the world today, using economic instruments, in a regulated business environment. (TACHIZAWA, 2005)

Into economic sphere, the author also points out, this new scenario 'which is characterized by customers' hard attitude, focused on the expectation of interacting with ethical organizations, with good corporative image in the market, and acting in an ecologically responsible manner' (TACHIZAWA 2005 p.23)

This scenario of big social pressure, due to the disordered population growth, quantity less and less

of available natural resources, among other things, requires new ethic from the organizations around the world (JOHR, 1994).

Organizations design a better corporative image by taking this environmentally responsible attitude, which may represent increased sales as opportunity, better employees and suppliers, among other benefits. 'A company who is seen as socially responsible has a strategic advantage over ones which does not have this image in front of the public'. (DONAIRE, 1999, p. 22)

It is worth the corporative image presented to the society can be a competitive advantage, since according to Kotler and Armstrong (2003), competitors present similar characteristics and advantages, then, customers can distinguish them by brand image or the company. According to the authors, 'the corporative image and brand must communicate the positioning and benefits which distinguish the product' (KOTLER and ARMSTRONG, 2003, p.192)

The differentiation realized by consumers, could be understood as recognition for environmentally responsible practices adopted by the organization.

Donaire (1999) highlights the main arguments for company which is involved in the environmental cause, among others, recognition by customers, and good image compared to its competitors, consumers, communities and government agencies.

For Pereira (2002), this recognition increases according to people become conscious of the problem, as shopping products or services, through the action of NGOs, or by legislation.

From then now, investing on corporative image construction along with all involved and interested become essential, i.e. the stakeholders. According to Johr (1994), this image is made from organization's commitment with ecological management, who treats truly and honestly environmental issues.

That's why, it is necessary the participation of the organization's environmental on decisions and how ecological issue will be used as a tool for leveraging corporative image, then, it will be provided adequate information about the company's activities regarding to this subject (DONAIRE, 1999).

Johr's view (1994), the articulation of environmental protection actions can be an important contribution to the corporative image in society, such as projects for building green areas in the company, support in maintaining public parks, or other actions which reflect on 'cleaner image' and aid to establish in the consumer's minds the company's connection with environmental causes.

The author also points out organizations need to disseminate their internal practices and effective actions taken, revealing the achievement results, such as reducing waste of raw material, in opposite to those ones who just communicate their plans on the

environmental issue, but fewer actions. (JOHR, 1994)

The environmental benefits generated by companies are essentials for their communication through marketing and advertising tools. Ottman (1994, p.120), points out 'establishing an environmental image to products help to increase sales and distribution as well the aggregated value of the product and trimming legislative threats'. This communication presents an organization's ethical attitude.

Thus, as understanding the environmental management practices as an ethical performance of organizations, Ventura *et al.* (2010) noted the attitude of organization's ethics is according to the purchase of consumer attitudes

Methodology:

It was developed an exploratory and quantitative research for achieving the study's targets. The sample consisted of 336 people, with 201 women and 135 men, including in the 20 age range as plenty consumers. The educational level ranged from incomplete middle school to complete college, with 48% of interviewees as incomplete college and/or studying.

The questionnaire was developed by the authors and validated by experts which approach a total of 17 questions, 15 of them with five alternatives, one question the respondent could choose more than one alternative, and one open question, in which the respondent could mention the company's name considered to be environmentally responsible.

Data analysis was made by frequency table in which the responses were tabulated, then, the research results were obtained in absolute numbers and as percentages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

It was revealed by research the evaluation of consumers regarding the Socio Environmental responsibility of organizations is determined by a number of factors.

It was noted 6% of respondents said the environmental factor never influences their decisions at moment of purchasing. The majority, 45%, said the environmental factor influence on some occasions their preference, while 10% said they are often influenced by environmental issues, against 2% who said they always pay attention at the moment of purchasing.

Although the adoption of eco-labels is highlighted as an important competitive advantage, in terms of export products especially, it was found the majority of respondents (47%) never notice this label on product, against 33% who said they pay attention to this fact rarely. Around 20% answered to observe the eco label 'sometimes', and 2% said to

observe frequently. None chosen the alternative 'always'.

In Brazil, this result shows some incipient market products with green label yet, then, companies and appropriate agencies are in a position for reviewing how this knowledge is being offered to consumers. Because, according to survey, it is observed the alternative 'never' around 90% of answers. It is understood this option due to lack of Knowledge about these kind of seal (label), and not because they didn't consider as an important environmental labeling.

The respondents were faced about the conscious consumption daily, 40% answered 'sometimes, and 39% were split among alternatives often and always. Just over 20% said they never or rarely do use of conscious consumption, which figure is well representative, as 85% identify themselves with the phrase 'I am very concerned about environment situation'.

The trend of big societal pressure is being reinforced by companies, 90% of respondents believe in obligation of organizations for treating the waste generated by the production process, against 10% who said to be indifferent to the subject.

As the same argument, the majority of respondents (95%) agree with statement when they were asked if business has a great responsibility in the current state of the environment.

The concern about environment was considered essential for the survival and organizations' growth by majority respondents. They agreed fully or almost, around 80%, companies don't seek to reduce the impact caused on the environment will lose market. These figures show the importance for organizations, regarding to adoption of a good and efficient environmental management system.

The respondents (22%) stated never paid or they would pay higher value by ecologically friendly product and 28% said rarely. However, the research shows 48% of respondents already bought or they would buy products because 'environment' attribute.

Regarding to question about those companies produce 'clean' form, if they could have competitive advantage over competitors, similar percentages are measured. The majority (85%) agreed or agreed fully.

Finally, there is a new consumer profile according to the data. This new consumer is more informed about the excessive consumption consequences, natural resources and he makes actions for reducing the impact on the environment and society, although they can't realize the environmental management practices adopted by companies

Conclusions:

Companies always are concerned as developing products which becomes easier to customers' life and serve overconsumption. However, observing which

would be the greatest need of the society, it is noticed more and more natural resources are scarce. If companies do not adapt to an environmentally responsible awareness, it is possible for checking, their main focus which is to attend customers' needs, it won't be attended. Fortunately, it has been growing the number of companies with this awareness as the years. Organizations are increasingly concerned about impact on their activities caused to the environment.

The increase of discussion and concerning for all society about the environmental responsibility, besides taking measures for using natural resources as correct, and reducing the impact on the environment, companies must be visible in actions implemented for communicating to the society, specially, to their consumers, their real organization's commitment to the environmental cause. This visibility must be exposed, not only on environmental projects as well into practical actions showing effectively the organization's attitude.

The paper's study provided the search by profitability in organizations get new contours, since this result presents a set of other attributes fewer explored or left on second level of priorities.

The adoption of environmental management emerges as an important option because according to their premises, the company certifies its level of commitment and demonstrates its adaptation to this set of standards, besides educating its employees, providing an organizational environment in concordance to their overall targets.

Probability of customers and sales increasing of those products or services are evident, because, new consumer's generations learn the importance of conservation of natural resources earlier and they tend to be more susceptible to environmental appeal at the purchase's moment.

It was found, in fact, the environmental awareness by consumers is more and more high trend. This check appears quite significant in percentage of answers about how much consumers are concerned with environment and their determination for alerting others about the need of conscious consumption.

It must be highlighted while authors such as Johr (1994) and Donaire (1999) quote the green seals (eco label) as very important at the consumer's purchase decision, this research showed few consumers observe whether there is environmental labeling on the product. This result is due to the lack of knowledge about these seal or label by consumers, despite the potential market of this labeling, their exploration is ineffective.

Therefore, it doesn't matter the organizations' segment or activities, their main challenges are to search sustainable practices with economic profitability.

In addition, they should be ready for the constant and endless changes, and environment must be

considered as key point to their success, taking into consideration that, as the research's results present, environment changes reflect directly into business.

It is considered some limitations on the present study, especially, regarding to the quantitative methodology just, and sample. Thus, it is suggested further studies be done with the same goal, but as qualitative method, or companies' case already work with environmental management practices and present changes in the consumers' attitude pos implementation of those ones.

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