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Corporate environmental marketing and environmental competitive advantage: investigating role of customer focus in India

Mihir Shah*
GUNI - V. M. Patel Institute of Management, Gujarat
mbs01@ganpatuniversity.ac.in

Mehul Yogi
Shanti Business School, Gujarat

Dharmesh Gadhavi
GUNI - V. M. College of Management Studies, Gujarat

Abstract

This study inquires the role played by environmental marketing strategy adopted by Indian corporates that lays the path to achieve environmental competitive advantage, along with customer and supplier centricity. Based on samples drawn from Indian corporates, SEM was performed on 223 managers' responses. The validity was established for all the constructs. The findings showed that environmental orientation effects environmental performance and environmental quality in a beneficial way for competitive advantage. Further, supplier focus was positively related to environmental orientation, while customer focus was negatively related to environmental orientation. This study offers sizable insights into corporate environmental marketing along with the importance of supplier relationships and customer centric approach explaining dominance in competition.

Keywords: Environmental marketing, supplier, customer-focus, competitive advantage, Indian corporate

Introduction:

Organizations must rise up and take notice of environmental challenges in today's industry as a result of global resource exhaustion and escalating environmental damage. Environmental protection and the purchase of green products are becoming increasingly popular across the world (Paul et al., 2016). To prevent the environment from being harmed, worldwide corporations and governments from many nations came to an agreement and acknowledged the need for remedial action. According to The Climate Action Tracker (CAT) report- India 2021, "The country is more climate-friendly, with two-thirds of the funds dedicated to a green recovery, including around USD 3 billion in battery research and solar PV. While the additional stimulus is a great move, India continues to promote coal with new loans to a number of thermal power projects, putting the green recovery at risk".

To pursue greener supply chain management, the company must foster a pro-environmental corporate culture and increase awareness to the environmental concerns of significant external stakeholders (Chan al el.,2012), particularly for the current scenario when the firms are operating in a market where competition is fierce. Further, Gavronski et al. (2012) added that Environmental problems are increasingly being considered by businesses in their production operations and, more recently, in their supplier bases. Companies should expand their environmental initiatives throughout the supply chain since GSCM (Green Supply Chain

*Corresponding author

Management) helps enterprises build distinctive expertise that results in competitive advantage and enhanced firm performance (Bu et al., 2020).

There is a research curiosity in academia to get an answer to a crucial question: if and how environmental orientation affects business performance. Shultz et al. (1999) believed that Marketers' responsible and responsive prosocial behavior, as well as the efficient application of marketing techniques to public policy, might help in the search for answers to problems arising from the environmental social trap. Researchers in environmental management have consistently claimed that increasing a company's environmental orientation will enhance its strategic solutions to environmental concerns and, as a result, its performance (e.g., Chan et al.,2012; Lindell & Karagozoglu, 2001). According to a survey conducted in Hungary by Keszey (2020), environmental marketing is heavily influenced by a firm's environmental orientation and has a major role in driving the latter. Senior executives in corporations should recognize the critical role that internal and external factors orientation play in fine-tuning their Green supply chain management. Given senior management's considerable focus inside the company play a vital role in promoting the infusion of this viewpoint Chan et al. (2012).

Given the competitive nature of the supply chain and the focus on evolving customer demands, it is imperative to identify and implement strategies that offer a competitive edge at the supply chain level and enhance the performance of individual supply chain participants (Chopra and Meindl, 2004, Green et al., 2008). Seth et al. (2018) quoted that Increased emissions and wastes result from inefficiency in energy, supply chain management, and production, negatively impacting the environment and financial performance. Furthermore, Bu et al. (2020) stated that enterprises should examine and enhance their suppliers' environmental performance in order to meet the expectations of the general public, government organizations, and consumers. This argument highlights how supply chain management and marketing are related, as well as the potential advantages of using a cross-functional approach by marketers (Chan et al.,2012) in order to remain competitive in the context of environmental consciousness. In this context, there has been a progressive trend in these Organizational connections toward increased collaboration and integration with supply chain partners Gunasekaran et al., 2008). By setting environmental standards for purchased items from suppliers and partnering with them to achieve its environmental aims, green purchasing has a significant impact on the upstream link of a company's supply chain (Zsidisin and Hendrick, 1998; Zhu et al., 2008b).

Unlike green purchasing, close customer collaboration has an impact on the downstream portion of a company's supply chain through collaborative activities including customer education, customer assistance, and customer engagement initiatives with the goal of increasing their willingness to pay high in eco-supply chain activities (Eltayeb et al.,2011, Fang and Zhang, 2017). Understanding the demands of the end consumer is critical in green supply chain management. (Zhu & Sarkis, 2004; Closs et al., 2011, Famiyeah et al., 2018,). Customers want more environmentally friendly goods, governments tighten rules and regulate company operations, and communities expect businesses to safeguard and preserve natural environments Bu et al. (2020). Laari et al. (2016) found that customers' environmental monitoring had a vital role in improving environmental performance. The green supply chain management focused environmental strategy may encourage companies to choose, interact, and integrate with suppliers & customers. Bu et al. (2020) believed that such a strategy aids businesses in developing a distinct "green" competence in operational processes, R&D, and product creation. As a result, businesses are able to meet the demands of environmentally sensitive clients while still achieving excellent performance.

2. Review of literature

2.1 Environmental orientation

Environmental orientation is defined as "the extent to which a company integrates ecological issues into its business strategy to reduce the harmful effects of its business-related activities on the natural environment" (Hirunyawipada, 2018). Chan et al. (2012) believe that Environmental orientation is a key idea in environmental management research. Bu et al. (2020) further added and denote environmental orientations as environmental concerns and their integration into business operations in order to address environmental difficulties, as a result, environmental orientation aids in the creation of a positive organizational climate conducive to the execution of environmental marketing strategies (Keszey, 2019).

The term "green purchasing" describes the cooperative efforts of the company and its suppliers to lessen the adverse environmental effects of their incoming logistical operations (Chan et al., 2012). Some marketing researchers have recently asserted that integrating environmental considerations into marketing procedures may significantly improve marketing practices and competitiveness, as environmental concerns in supply chain management have received little attention in the field of marketing (Closs et al., 2011). According to Fraj-Andres et al. (2009), environmental marketing is a management process that recognizes, foresees, and satisfies societal and consumer needs in a sustainable manner. It also has an impact on business performance (Zhou et al., 2005). Customer collaboration is the joint efforts of the company and its clients to lessen the adverse environmental effects of its outbound transportation operations and services.

2.2 Supplier focus

Previous research has emphasized the elements that will affect how easily GSCM and other environmental policies are adopted by organizations. The second most significant of the ten major environmental supplier assessment criteria put out by Walton et al. (1998) in their study is the examination of second-tier suppliers' environmentally friendly practices. Green supply chain management, which integrates supply chains from supplier to manufacturer to consumer, is referred to in supply chain management literature as "closing the loop" (Zhu and Sarkis, 2004; Closs et al., 2011, Famiyeah et al., 2018).

According to stakeholder theories, the two key drivers motivating enterprises to expand their environmental orientation are legitimacy and resources. Furthermore, enterprises should examine and enhance their suppliers' environmental performance in order to meet the expectations of the general public, government organizations, and consumers (Bu et al., 2020).

H1: Supplier focus has a favorable and noteworthy impact on Environment orientation.

2.3 Customer focus

Manufacturers have realized that in order to compete in global markets, they must adhere to severe national and international environmental norms and requirements. Customers are likewise getting more concerned about a company's environmental performance (Rehman et al,2016). Indian manufacturing businesses are not immune to these issues, and green marketing and green manufacturing is no longer just a term. Industry leaders have begun to see the advantages of deploying environmentally friendly products.

Consumers are choosing businesses that prioritize environmental practices as they become more conscious of the importance of environmental degradation. This has led to a rise in ecological awareness and a desire to purchase environmentally friendly goods and services (Kalafatis et al., 1999; Laroche et al., 2001). Businesses must be aware of consumer preferences and rival reactions in order to compete in marketplaces with high-level customer and competitor environmental orientations (Hanvanich et al., 2006). External

influences can also have an impact on the degree of environmental orientation (Keszey, 2019).

H2: Customer focus has a favorable and noteworthy impact on Environment orientation.

2.4 Environmental Performance

The ability of a nation to produce environmental public goods is known as its environmental performance (Duit, 2005). In a similar vein, a firm's environmental performance is its capacity to produce environmentally friendly products and enhance environmental sustainability through GSCM. An environmental performance matrix has been provided by McIntyre et al. (1998) to assess the overall effects of environmental practices along the supply chain and the environmental performance results of the different stages of the product life cycle.

Many studies have shown that using GSCM methods can improve environmental performance (Zhu and Sarkis, 2004; Green et al., 2008, Closs et al., 2011, Famiyeah et al., 2018, Lewis & Sheppard, 2006, Bernard, 2002). Green supply chain management helps to enhance environmental performance through lower pollution and economic advantages from reduced energy and resource use as organizational environmental innovation (Zhu et al., 2011).

H3: Environment orientation has a favorable and noteworthy impact on Environmental performance.

2.5 Environmental Competitive advantage

Green supply chain management is a metric that helps firms to enhance their reputation and environmental performance while also helping them gain a competitive edge (Tran et al.,2020). From a management standpoint, decision-making is examined as a solution to the sustainability issue. Management is ultimately accountable for the company's sustainability actions in order to retain or gain a competitive advantage, taking into account a variety of factors (Schrettle et al.,2014).

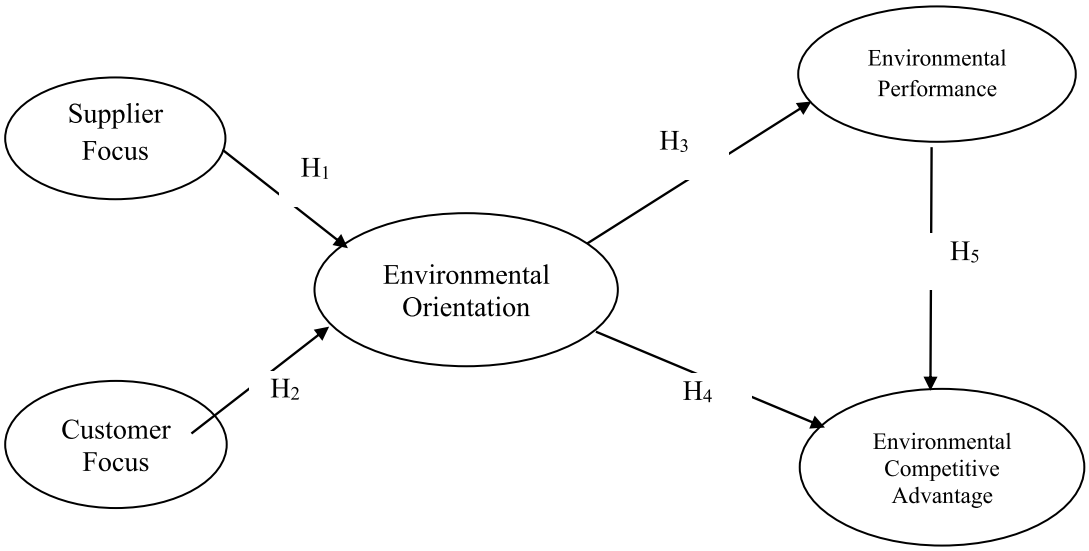
GSCM (Green supply chain management) not only assists firms in effectively responding to stakeholder expectations, but it also helps them build a positive reputation and develop green capabilities like (Reuse, Reduce and Recycle) which gives them a competitive advantage and improves their performance (Green et al., 2008; Bu et al.,2020), as a result, environmental orientation forces businesses to devote more time and resources to GSCM, resulting in green competency and competitive advantage. Moreover, (Laari,2016) believes that Inter-organizational environmental activities provide socially complex resources that are difficult to duplicate and hence provide a competitive edge. Arseculeratne & Yazdanifard (2014) confirms that green marketing can create a sustainable competitive advantage for a business.

H4: Environment orientation has a favorable and noteworthy impact on Environmental competitiveness.

H5: Environmental performance has a favorable and noteworthy impact on Environmental competitiveness.

Based on the aforementioned literature, the research model proposed is presented in figure 1.

Fig. 1: The research Model



3. Research methods

3.1 Target population

The composition of the population for this study was senior level executives (CEO, CFO, COO, VP, Director, etc.) primarily engaged in manufacturing activity. Manufacturing companies were a very natural population of interest for policymakers as they were directly linked with natural environment. Environmental constructs used in this study requires relevant knowledge and expertise and therefore individuals who can and who will provide desired information were selected using “key informants technique” (Famiyeah et al., 2018, Lewis & Sheppard, 2006). Consequently, in order to find important "informants" who are educated on environmental marketing, the purposeful sampling technique was employed (Bernard, 2002). Because they should communicate at a high level of the organizational hierarchy, the responses should be aware of the strategic environmental challenges facing businesses. Using a cross-sectional intercept survey, a structured questionnaire was used. The participants were contacted at the companies to collect unbiased data.

In this study, manufacturing companies served as the sampling unit, and owners, senior managers, or top management made up the sampling element. A total of 302 respondents were contacted on the businesses' property after giving their previous consent over the phone. Of these, 75 responses—roughly 70% of the total—were incomplete or contained only partial information. These were received over the course of six months. After eliminating all responses with missing values, 223 valid responses were kept for study. The profile of the responders is as follows (refer to Table 1): 37.7% of respondents worked in public, 40.4% in private companies. Considering size, 28.3% respondents were working in small size enterprises, 52.9% were working in medium size enterprises (n=118) and remaining 18.8% were working in large size enterprises. On employee’s total working experience, 46.2% were having 11 to 20 years of experience and 44.4% were having more than 20 years of experience.

Table 1: Company characteristics of the respondents in the Gujarat region

Variables	Particulars	Frequency	%
Type of company	Public	84	37.7
	Private	90	40.4
	Partnership	38	17.0
	Others	11	4.9
Size of the company	Small	63	28.3
	Medium	118	52.9
	Large	42	18.8
Total years of experience	< 10 years	21	4.5
	11 to 20	103	46.2
	> 20 years	99	44.4

Note: Computed based on n=223 responses.

3.2 Measurements and bias

Environmental orientation scale was adopted from Chan et al. (2012) study which has five items. Supplier focus was measured with seven items and adopted from Terawatanavong et al. (2011) and Agan et al. (2014). Further, customer focus was measured with six items which were adopted from Lee, Jo, & Jeong (2019). Moreover, the 5-item environmental performance scale, which is included in the dependent performance measures, was developed based on the research of Zhu, Sarkis, and Lai (2008) and Famiyeh et al. (2018). Finally, the 5-item Environmental Competitive Advantage Scale developed by Singh et al. (2019) was employed. Each of these categories was scored using a 5-point Likert-type scale, where 1 meant strongly disagree and 5 meant strongly agree.

However, it should be mentioned that using self-reported surveys to gather responses carries the risk of common method variance (CMV) (Fuller et al., 2016). Harman's single-factor approach was the most suitable measure to address this, as it was employed to evaluate the existence of CMV (Babin, Griffin, & Hair, 2016). This method's outcome showed that one component accounted for 20.84% of the variance, or less than 50%, indicating that there was no risk of common method bias (Harman, 1976).

3.3 Reliability of scales

This study employed Cronbach's alpha, which is the most widely used reliability metric (Zikmund et al., 2010:306). Measurements of dependability before to EFA were shown in Table 2. Reliability was indicated by factors having a Cronbach's alpha greater than 0.6 (Wiid & Diggines, 2013; Zikmund et al., 2010). The item-to-total correlations for all items was above 0.35 (Cristobal et al., 2007).

Table 2: Constructs' scale reliabilities

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's alpha	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Composite Reliability (CR)
Supplier focus	7	0.600	0.897	0.946
Customer focus	6	0.656	0.940	0.969
Environmental orientation	5	0.782	0.516	0.787
Environmental Performance	5	0.741	0.969	0.989
Environmental competitive advantage	5	0.931	0.743	0.935

4. Results

According to Hair et al. (2010), two stages of structural equation modeling were carried out: testing the structural model for hypotheses and verifying the measurement model. First, the underlying stricture was verified using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Path modeling was done in the second step in order to evaluate the importance of the modeled paths.

4.1 Measurement model

Statistical analysis was carried out with AMOS 26.0 to run CFA with maximum likelihood estimation method (MLE). All fit indices were found to be outside of the advised range in the measurement model's initial run; as a result, the items with factor loadings of less than 0.5 were removed from the model (Hair et al., 2010). Subject to review, the following items were removed from further analysis: items 2 and 3 of supplier focus, items 3 and 5 of environmental performance, item 6 of ECA, and items 2 and 3 of customer focus. These items had lower factor loading values. When CFA was run again, all of the indices were found to be within allowable bounds [CMIN/df = 4.116; CFI = 0.918; AGFI = 0.87; IFI = 0.918; PNFI = 0.718 and RMSEA = 0.078]. t-values of each item were significant with factor loading above 0.5 and the composite reliability values above 0.7 for all the constructs, indicating establishment of construct validity (refer table 2).

4.3 Structural model

The structural model was developed to test the hypothesized paths. It was observed that all the fit indices were very close to the acceptable fit indies: CMIN/df = 4.263; CFI = 0.91; IFI = 0.912; PNFI = 0.738 and RMSEA = 0.072. To gauge the significance of each hypothesis, paths with its t-values and standardized estimates were presented in table 4. R-square for environmental competitive advantage was 31%. Table 3 shows the path coefficients.

Table 3: results of the structural analysis

Hypothesized Paths	Standardized Estimates	t-value	Sig.	Results
SF → EO	0.26	2.281	0.023*	Supported
CF → EO	-0.07	-0.72	0.472	Not supported
EO → EP	0.20	1.874	0.06**	Supported
EO → ECA	0.28	2.37	0.029*	Supported
EP → ECA	0.23	4.093	0.001*	Supported

*Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.1; SF= Supplier focus; CF= Customer focus; EO= Environmental orientation; EP= Environmental performance; ECA= Environmental competitive advantage*

In this case, the direct influence of supplier focus was found to be significant and positive on environmental orientation (γ=0.26; t=2.281; p<0.05). The direct influence of customer on environmental orientation was found to be non-significant (p>0.05) and marketing performance (γ =0.15; t=2.130; p<0.05). Interestingly, the direct influence of environmental orientation on environmental performance was significant and positive (γ =0.20; t=1.874; p<0.1) and environmental competitive advantage was significant and positive (γ =0.28; t=2.37; p<0.05). Further, environmental performance was significantly related to environmental competitive advantage (γ =0.23; t=4.093; p<0.05). Therefore, environmental performance partially mediates environmental orientation environmental competitive advantage relationship.

As per the observation, among the independent variables, supplier focus was significantly influencing environmental orientation but customer was not influencing. On the base of results, environmental orientation was found significant and influencing environmental performance and environmental competitive advantage with mediating effect. Environmental performance was also significantly influencing environmental competitive advantage as dependent variable.

5. Discussion, implications and limitations of the study

5.1 Discussion

The originality of this study lies in understanding the effect of environmental marketing on environmental performance, and environmental competitive advantage of Indian manufacturing companies. This is the rare study testing the environmental marketing strategy framework for in business environmental impact relationships. As per the findings, study confirms partial mediation of E EP ECA. One direct relationship hypothesis was not found to be significant (Customer focu EO). In the model, all the predictor constructs explain upto 31% for ECA. Interestingly, EO affect EP positively (consistent with Yasir et al., 2020) and leads to enhanced ECA, consistent with Chavez et al. (2020).

5.2 Theoretical and practical contributions

This study offers following valuable theoretical contributions: first, the study's findings in fact broadens our understanding of Resource-based-view of the business by exploring their relative contribution to implement more environmental centric focus enrooted through suppliers and customers subsequently enhance business environmental orientation. As per RBV, businesses can sustain a competitive advantage in the form of their environmental performance if they continuously build and develop resources and competencies in the

form of adoption environmental marketing strategy as their core. Finally, businesses can adopt more and more dynamic environmental strategies with practicing green supplies eventually help them to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Therefore, this study offers valuable strategic insights in allocation of resources to raise environmental orientation of business offers the most rewarding resources to invest upon.

This study explains how customer focus and supplier focus with environmentalism has been a most significant step that can be considered its ability to bring environmental sustainability, not only in the form environmental performance but outperformance of competition. Therefore, managers are encouraged to adopt more and more green practices and develop the resources which are difficult to copy and sustainable. Further, the findings indicated positive effect of supplier focus and customer focus is bi-fold: first, the direct effect of supplier green focus on environmental orientation is positive as compared to customer focus. Therefore, companies should adopt practices that strengthen the supplier relationships.

The short-run implementation focus of any manager of manufacturing companies in India should be on improving environmental performance, by clearly identifying their environmental orientation. Importantly the communicational practices of suppliers and within the company that yields improvement in year-on-year environmental performance that gradually increases companies' reputation among the customers which translates into higher customer satisfaction and loyalty. The increased footprint through better environmental performance help manufacturing companies to position themselves as environmentally friendly that helps to favor the public and other stakeholders' attitude and actions.

Therefore, this study also helps senior level management of a manufacturing company in taking key business decisions to drive adoption of environmental-friendly business practices in various departments and at the same time augment business performance. At the same time, environmental competitive advantage gained by the company through pro-environmental orientation is also believe to affect the environmental performance (Buil-Carrasco, Fraj-Andrés, & Matute-Vallejo, 2008), ultimately leading to enhanced performance.

5.3 Limitations of the study

As far as this study is concerned, following limitations are noted: heavy reliant on self-reported measures may be biased in the case where "key informants" have exaggerated their environmental ordination and business performance ratings. Future researchers may use data triangulation in the form collecting actual data of environmental performance to reduce the bias. The study used single cross-sectional data that reduces the generalizability of the results and therefore sizable studies can be carried out taking longitudinal data using panel data of Indian manufacturing companies for better understanding. Further, this study broadens the understanding of the research model using Indian manufacturing companies and therefore the results may vary and the interpretations for the manufacturing SMEs. The future studies can also add another context such as multinational enterprises (MNEs) or more relevant variables such as resource commitment and control variables as business size etc. to understand relationships better.

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