



Journal Homepage: -www.journalijar.com

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)

Article DOI:10.21474/IJAR01/11489
DOI URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/11489>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

GREEN CONSUMERISM - EMERGING TRENDS AND EVOLVING CONSUMER PERCEPTION IN INDIA

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Manuscript Info

Manuscript History

Received: 05 June 2020
Final Accepted: 10 July 2020
Published: August 2020

Key words:-

Environmental Knowledge,
Environmental Concern, Perceived
Knowledge, Organizational Green
Image, Social Influence

Abstract

An old age proverb is that only change is always constant, the global markets and the consumers also pursue this world-wide phenomenon with time and space. Since the business industries and marketers could not be untouched by these changing internal and external events, even a consumer also, being a part of market, adopted the change rigorously. Therefore, a mid-way was introduced by the world's environmental concerned community to prevent the businesses and environment both, which is known as sustainable development. However it has been too challengeable. But marketers started to pursue the sustainable path due to consumers' preference and choices for product selection that has been changing from time to time. Therefore, the primary aim of every marketer remained to capture the changing demand of the consumers. This paper try to explore how this turn has come in consumer's perception regarding environment and green products. This paper also seeks how a consumer reacts towards green products. To find out the answers of these questions the methodology is used as analytical and descriptive by conducting a survey and using the SPSS software to calculate the acceptance for green product by the consumers. As a result, we found that the independent factors as environmental knowledge, environmental concern, perceived knowledge, organizational green image and social influence always reflect in the mind of consumers as green perception. These factors will also help in making a world more green and harmless with sustainable development.

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Introduction:-

With a growing competition in the marketing discipline, research and development (R&D) passes through many phases to tackle the changing perception of the consumers to satisfy their demands. For which marketers have to capture the consumers' psychology with an innovative and integrated approach. They often face drawbacks over this landscape. Maintaining consumers' pleasure or choices have always been a challenge to the every marketer. The current century following the green agenda in marketing field, it includes societal and holistic approach regarding sustainable development and environmental protection approach. In this regards a marketer and consumer are

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travelling in a same ship. Therefore, marketers now also started to adopt the social responsibility of business model so that they may stand in the line of societal benefits. However, it is too hard for the marketers to establish a green consumerism approach in this competitive age. On the contrary, Green is slowly and steadily becoming the symbol of eco-consciousness among consumers. Growing awareness among consumers about healthy life-style and protection of natural resources has become the integral part of the consumers' perception. For Ottman, a green scholar, the rising of green marketing approach is not new, it has been passing through the various phases with a timeframe such as it initiated in 1980s and getting downslide in 1990s and upswing in 21st century and onward (Ottman, Stafford & Hartman, 2006). Numerous surveys have been conducted in this field to highlight the consumer's interest in buying green products. As green marketing expert, Ottman expressed that in the 1990s consumers agitated for adopting a new trend called environmental consumerism or green consumerism.

More advanced technology has been implemented; deceptive claims are taking at sticker enforcement, new regulations from the government and a thorough and detailed inspection from various environmental organizations and the media, are bringing the positive change in consumers' attitude and their perception regarding green. Marketers are helpless and forced to supply the green products in the markets. Green consumerism has been introduced with much more challenges and opportunities. There have been begun to think over the recycled, bio-degradable, disposable and less harmful product to the environment by green consumers. We will hereby try to disclose or explore the factors that behinds the perception of consumers. This study will try to scrutinize the components that reflect in the consumers' minds by which it becomes a threat to the marketers.

Research Objectives:-

1. To find out the different characteristics of green consumers.
2. To find out the factors affecting the purchase behavior of green consumers.
3. To find out the changing pattern of consumers' perception, attitude and behavior towards green products.

Research Methodology:-

The main objective of this study was to find out the factors affecting the purchase behavior of green consumers. A study has been done through random sampling method with keeping in mind the intellectual level of the people. The respondents have been taken of the age group, i.e. 18-45 years of age.

Sample Size:

This research study has been based on the views of 175 respondent mainly from intellectual background from Delhi based universities and colleges in Delhi region.

Sampling Type:

A non-probability-based sampling method has been taken into consideration, specifically convenient sampling method.

Analytical and Statistical Tools:

The data for the research works has been collected through questionnaire and analyzed with SPSS Software. To represent the frequency and percentage of the responses provided by the respondents a tabulation data have been applied only in demographic variable.

Secondary data:

For reviewing the previous works on the same discipline a secondary data have been reviewed such as research articles, books, reports to discuss the pattern of the green and non-green consumers.

Review of Literature:-

To escape the danger of the environmental hazard a new phenomenon upsurge regarding products in marketing discipline called Green Products. As green products steadily getting its space in the market, green consumerism generated and those people who started to demand the environment-friendly goods and services in lieu of traditional products were called green consumers. However, as the green consumerism was introduced, a swing wave was upsurge in the field of consumers' purchase pattern. By which a new study got its space in the field of green consumerism called changing behavior of green consumer. Tan and Lau stated that consumer consumption pattern is one of the reasons behind environmental deterioration. Study reveals that gender makes no difference in their

attitudes towards environment and green products rather personal norms effects more on consumers' attitude towards the green products (Tan & Lau, 2010). Not only did, Tan and Lau believe that consumers' sensitivity towards the green products is more responsible for purchase behavior (Tan & Lau, 2011). Nath and Kumar study reveals that environmental knowledge and awareness might have an impact on the perception of consumers by which they turn into green consumers. For getting knowledge, education and awareness about the green and environmental safety is must to get a space in mind. Green advertising and eco-labeling helps in the mind makeup of a general consumer to buy green products (Nath & Kumar, 2012). Ahmed and Sarkar express that product information and knowledge is necessary to retain consumers as a green consumers. Most consumers do not sacrifice with the product features like utility, availability, price, quality, green attributes etc (Ahmed & Sarkar, 2013). Haws and Winterich analyzed in their study that Green consumers strongly in favors of protection of natural resources at both environmental and personal level. Green scale favors the consumers' preferences for environmental friendly products and less harmful to the human (Haws & Winterich, 2014). Polo's study reveals that promotion and consumers' awareness deals with each other in the positive sense or vice-versa in handling the purchase behavior of the green products. Market strategy and consumers awareness are interrelated to each other to create a perception of neutral consumer (Polo, 2015). Kirmani and Khan pointed out the characteristics of green consumerism and found that the various variables of green consumerism e.g., Demographics, environmental, non-environmental variables etc. Among all these variables they found religiosity (non-environmental) is an important variable which may effect on the consumers' attitude towards green products (Kirmani & Khan, 2016). Handayani's study shows that consumers' knowledge and health awareness might be a cause behind the purchase intention. Mostly green consumer reacts positively towards green products by investigating green symbols (Handayani, 2017). Rahman examined that green purchase behavior of consumers is influenced by the three main components of attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Study mentioned that consumers' perception also changes due to socio demographic factors such as age, education level, income level and marital status (Rahman, 2018).

Hypotheses of the Study

On the basis of literature review some hypotheses can be created to understand behavioral pattern of consumers that help the consumers to become a buyer of the green products.

H1: Socio-demographic factors can change the perception of the consumers to buy green products.

H2: Environmental Knowledge has a positive impact on green products purchase intention.

H3: Environmental concern plays a major role to create a positive perception of consumers towards green products.

H4: Perceived Knowledge has a positive impact on consumers' perception in buying behavior to green products.

H5: Organizational Green Image has a positive impact on consumers' perception by which attitude could be inclined towards Green Products

H6: Social influence plays a major role to create a positive image in consumers' mind to make a positive perception to purchase green products.

Variables of the Study

It is a non-deniable fact that consumers play a major role in any country's economic advancement. Evidence shows that more than one fourth of environmental degradation is caused by private household activities. Therefore, consumers are becoming promptly aware of this fact and have begun to exhibit concerns towards environment degradation. Marketers are forced to realize that they have to move towards now sustainability. Marketers need to be aware of this behavioral change and have to incorporate with these changes into their marketing strategies that are met with the consumer's demands. This led to scholars attempting to explore the characteristics of a green consumer, to facilitate marketers in drawing up appropriate green marketing strategies and to society welfare. A green consumer is defined by the Business Dictionary as "a person who is mindful of environment related issues and obligations and is supportive of environmental causes to the extent of switching allegiance from one product or supplier to another even if it entails higher cost" (Cited in Mishra, 2019).

Socio-Demographic Factors

Socio-demographic variables include age, gender, income, education and place of domicile. These factors play a major role in market segmentation. Schwegker and Cornwell analyzed that the limited efficacy of socio-demographic factors shows that environmental concern is no longer a marginal issue but a socially accepted norm (Schwegker Jr. & Cornwell, 1991). These factors played a prominent role in deciding the consumers' purchase behavior towards the requirement of green products. Our study investigates these factors by random sampling survey tabulation.

(a) Age:

From the previous studies it is analyzed that young and middle-age people more concerned towards the environmental issues and awareness of benefits of green products (Fisher, Bashyal, & Bachman, 2012; Saeed, Lodhi, Khan & et al, 2013; Straughan & Roberts, 1999) In the given table n=175, out of this 96 respondents are from 18-25 years, 38 from 25-30 years, 9 respondents from 30-35 years and 31 respondents from 35 and above years. This study depicts that age-group of 18-25 years are more active in consuming green products.

Table 1:-

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid		1	.6	.6
	18-25 years	96	54.9	54.9
	25-30 years	38	21.7	21.7
	30-35 years	9	5.1	5.1
	35 and above	31	17.7	17.7
	Total	175	100.0	100.0

(b) Gender: After analyzed previous studies created the confusion that gender makes (no) significance difference in usage of green product. In many studies it is mentioned that females are more aware for the usage of the green products and willing to purchase green products (Fisher, Bashyal, & Bachman, 2012). Because people believe in a common perception that the feminine characteristics of 'care', 'concern', 'empathy' and 'sensitivity' make females more concerned of the environment than man (Roberts, 1996). However, some studies shows that men showed more environmental concern and more positive outlook towards green purchase compared with women (Mostafa, 2007). In this survey it is found that males are more aware for the usage and consumption of the green products.

Table 2:-

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid		1	.6	.6
	Female	68	38.8	38.8
	Male	106	60.6	60.6
	Total	175	100.0	100.0

N=175, from the table it is cleared that male respondents are 106 (60.6%) and female respondents are 68 (38.9%). Study depicts that male are more inclined towards the green product purchasing.

(c) Education Qualification:

There was substantial amount of research had been conducted to find the impact of demographic factors on consumer purchase behavior towards green products. It was found that education can change the people's perception of analyzing and understanding the things. The logical reason is considered behind that better educated consumers are more knowledgeable and conscious of environmental issues. They could be reacting as positively in their purchasing decisions. But several studies show positive relationship between education and environment knowledge, attitude and behavior individually. These studies show that education and environmental knowledge might have a relation but education and environmental attitude and behavior go to another path. It is mentioned in the study that educated and aware people prefer to buy the environmental friendly products because education increases knowledge and awareness level of the people (Nair, 2015). Our study shows that highly educated people are more interested to buy and prefer green products.

Table 3:-

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid				
	Under Graduate	7	4	4
	Graduate	14	8	8
	Post Graduate	71	40.6	40.6
	M. Phil.	35	20	20
	Ph.D.	48	27.4	27.4
Total	175	100	100	

Here our study supports the belief as several studies considered that environmentally conscious consumers are mostly young, urban dwellers with better education and higher income (Arbuthnot, 1977; Liere & Dunlap, 1980; Chan, 1999).

(d) Income:

It is believed that section of higher income exhibits more environmental concern and the logical reasoning for this is that they could afford to bear the additional costs associated with green products (Zimmer, Stafford & Stafford 1994). But several studies posit that this shows a negative correlation with income and environmental concern (Jain, & Kaur, 2006). These studies create contradiction that income could be a variable of the green consumerism.

(e) Domicile:

Some scholars believe that place of domicile could be a profiling variable of green consumers. Those who have believed in this fact they observed that urban residents are more concerned about the environment than rural residents. The logic behind this observation could be due to the exposure that urban residents have towards issues concerning environmentalism, compare to consumers in rural areas (Liere, & Dunlap 1980). But in India these studies would be act as refutable since rural residents are considered in India as environmental lovers.

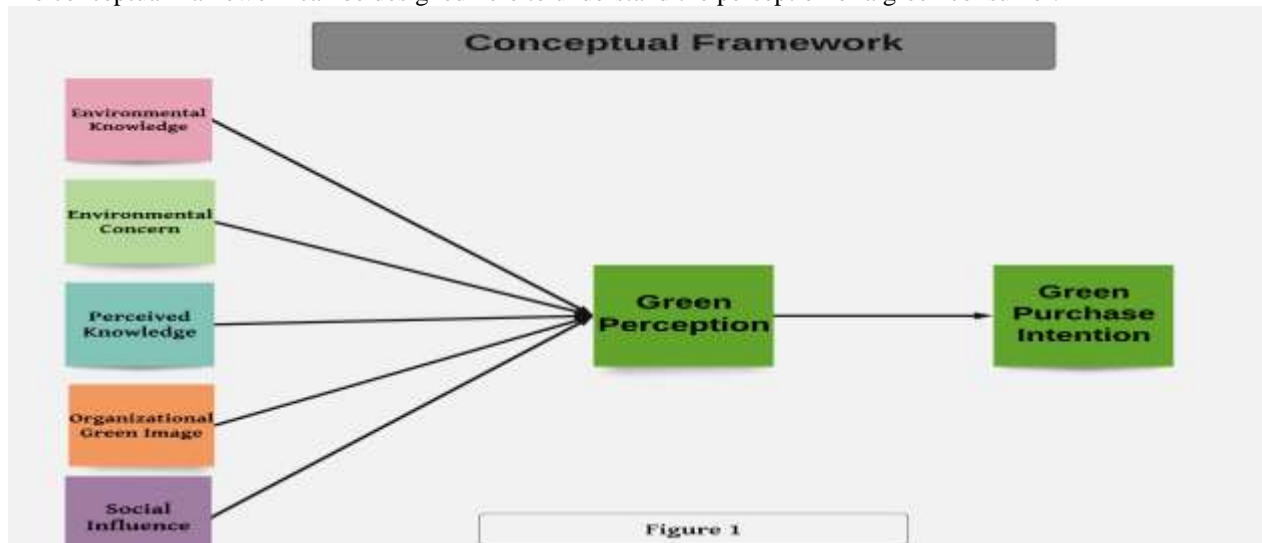
At the beyond level some studies in this area have identified more variables like environmental knowledge, attitudes, personality, personal intentions and involvement, cultural values and perceived consumer effectiveness (Dembkowski, 1998; Rios, Martinez & et al, 2006).

Some Major variables of Making of Perception towards Green Products

Perception, as crucial variable, plays a major role in the consumer's life. Business environment always try to attract the consumer's attention with numerous stimuli. The quality of the consumer's perception depends on the way that he/she processes and interprets the stimuli or the information reaching their senses. It means that perception is the process, by which a consumer selects, organizes and interpret information inputs to create a meaningful picture of the world. When a consumer interpret a situation or events he/she is then in the position to respond (Kotler 1997). According to Gregory, "Perception is a set of process by which an individual becomes aware of and interpret information about the environment" (cited in Gregory et al., 1996; Agyekum, Haifeng & Agyeiwaa, 2015). In other words, "perception is nothing but the acquiring of knowledge of, or, on occasions, the acquiring of an inclination to believe in, particular facts about the physical world, by means of our senses" (Armstrong & Kotler, 2010).

For a producer or the manufacturer, perception process is as crucial as his product because consumer decision will play an important role in purchasing a product and his/her decision will be influenced to a large extent by the attribute which a marketer gives or lends to the product by advertising, packaging, manufacturing, and promotional techniques that often determines product quality.

The conceptual framework can be designed here to understand the perception of a green consumer.



- 1. Environmental knowledge:** A knowledge regarding protection of natural world—land, sea, air, plants and animals. It is also knowledge of environmental negative and positive aspects (Mostafa, M. M. 2006).
- 2. Environmental concern:** It is a degree to which consumer is aware towards environmental problem and his/her personal contribution regarding the solution to the problem (Phau, I., & Ong, D. 2007). In this process consumer choose the eco-friendly products and solve the problems related to the environment. Consumers seek genuinely solution of the environmental problems by purchasing of green products.
- 3. Perceived Knowledge:** Basically, this term is used to refer to consumer's self-assessment/evaluation or feeling of knowing the information about the product, its price, quality, value and risks (D'Souza, Taghian & Khosla, 2007). Basically it is related to the green value. Green value plays an important role in influencing green purchase intention (Zhuang, Cumiskey, & Alford, 2010).
- 4. Organizational Green Image:** A good organization must take part in environmental activities with maintaining its profit and also strict check and balance upon manufacturing activities. It tries to fulfill the need of the present world and does not compromise with the security of future generation.
- 5. Social influence:** A change in an individual's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, or behaviors that results from interaction with another individual or a group (Walker, 2007). In this process a consumer interact with another person or green consumer who can change his/her behavior and attitude through influencing by his thoughts as this one perceived to be an expert on the matter at hand. The influence of others is one of the important determinants of a consumer behavior. Influence can change the thought process and can make a part of the consumer's perception in buying process of green products.

These all factors can become the part of green purchase perception of any consumer that will orient the consumer behavior towards the green products. Basically, attention, attributes, sensory data, and interpretation are the major parts of the perception which becomes the crucial component for a manufacturer by his advertising, packaging, manufacturing, promotional techniques and product quality. They all create a purchase intention in any consumer towards green products. It can be understood by the given figure.

The Relationship between Variables Affecting Consumers' Purchase Behaviors for Green Products

The major objective of the study was to explore the factors/variables that affect the purchase decision of green consumers. The factors that emerged most crucial for perception of the green consumer are environmental knowledge, environmental concern, perceived knowledge, organizational green image, and social influence. The past researches have posited a statistically significant correlation between these factors and purchase behavior of green consumers. Discussion is based on the structure of the questionnaire which can be interpreted as follows:

Table 4:-

Green Variables	Factor : Question from the questionnaire	Frequency N=175	Percentage
Environmental knowledge	Are you aware about the environmental issues such as pollution, global warming and climate change etc.?	175	100
	Are you aware of the impact of plastic packaging of the product on the environment?	173	98.8
	Are you aware about the impact of Green product on the environment?	161	92
Environmental concern	Do you know about Green Product?	161	92
	Will you prefer recyclable product over conventional product?	167	95.4
	Would you prefer paper packaging of the product?	151	86.2
	Are you aware about Green Labeling?	146	83.4
Perceived Knowledge	I buy Green Products because they help in environmental protection.	165	94.2
	Do you keep in mind the health aspect while purchasing a product?	166	94.8
	Do the following factors such as personal requirement, price, quality, brand image, and eco-friendly influence you more while purchasing a product?	103	58.8

	Do you consider more important the following factors such as quality, health, sustainability and durability while purchasing a product?	101	57.7
Organizational Green Image	Do Government policies play a positive role in the promotion of green products?	129	73.7
	Do the consumers' awareness and knowledge about environment and health have positive impact on his/her intention to buy green product?	167	95.4
Social influence	Do green advertisement and Eco-labeling influence your purchase intention for green product?	146	83.4
	Do Green logos and symbols have a positive impact on the consumers purchase intention?	151	86.2
	Will you be in favor of purchasing and promoting green product?	175	100

Result and Discussion:-

As we have analyzed that the socio-demographic factors influence the consumers' perception a lot, we found that several study differently analyzed the behavioral pattern of the consumers towards green products. But here one thing is cleared that socio-demographic factors play a major role to reflect the attitude of the consumers towards the same which might be highlighted by age, gender, educational qualification, income and domicile differently.

As we mention before that our survey included the intellectual respondents so we found that 100% respondents had the knowledge about the environmental issues. And they were aware of the disadvantage of plastic packaging of the products and have known the impact of the green products on the environment also. It means that environmental knowledge plays a major role to create a clear-cut perception to buy green products. Uneducated people might be exceptional cases for the same.

A major and fundamental factor to understand the perception of the green consumers is an individual concern for the environment. Environmental concern is totally different from the pro-environmental behavior because pro-environmental behavior may lose the whole perspective of the environment. However if an individual has environmental concern he will have definitely pro-environmental behavior. Moreover, an attribute that posits an individual's worries and compassion about environment is known as environmental concern behavior. If the environmental concern is calculated with the demographic factor then this highlights that environmental concerned consumers express more willingness to pay more for green products than other (Lee, 2009). As we found in our study that consumers are well aware of the green products and they prefer recyclable product than other. 92% consumers are concerned about the green products and 95.4% prefer recyclable products. Even 86.2 % prefer paper packaging of the product. Not only this, they (about 83.4) are well aware of the green labeling. It has proven by the study that those consumers prefer recyclable product, paper packaging, and aware of green labeling, are more environmental concerned. They are too mature to recognize and rank the green labeling and also investigate the claims by the manufacturers. According to Laskova, consumers who are more active towards environmental issues and are highly concerned about environment show positive attitude towards natural problems (Laskova, 2007). It means that there is a positive relationship between environmental concern and green consumer purchase intention. As M.M. Mostafa stated that the behaviors of consumer who purchase eco-friendly products are different from other non-purchasing eco-friendly products (Mostafa, 2007).

Many scholars believe that perceived knowledge/experiences are major factor to understand the buying behavior of the consumers. Green perceived knowledge represents the green commitment to the green products. As Shahira Ariffin, Jamaliah Mohd Yusof, Lennora Putit, Mohd Izwan Azalan Shah believe that green value has significant relationship with both perceived quality and repurchase intention (Ariffin, Yusof & Shah, 2016). Teoh and Noor analyzed that consumption values as an important predictor in predicting consumer purchase intention (Teoh, C. W., & Noor, N. A. (2015) Brown and Reingen defined that the value which is connected with consumers' emotions (e.g., feeling great, excited) and affective states, resulting in consumer assessments of a product can be known as emotional value of the consumer (Brown & Reingen, 1987). Here we can say that perceived knowledge includes a consumer's self-assessment and experiences regarding product quality, its value and effectiveness. Thus, perceived

knowledge helps a consumer to predict consumer purchase intention and it fully manage the perception field of the consumers. Our study presents that 94.2% respondents know about the environmental protection and to protect the environment they prefer to buy a green product. 94.8 % consumers keep in their mind the health aspect while purchasing the product because their perceived knowledge discourage them to buy non-healthier product. Not only this, the consumers believe and experiences that price, quality, brand, image always become the part of their knowledge and this set of knowledge becomes their perception to buy green products that promptly change in buying intention. About 58.8% respondents in this study believe that perceive knowledge regarding price, quality, brand image etc. are matched to the personal requirement of the consumer. In addition, their feelings regarding the green products much more reflect in their behavior because they prefer qualitative, healthier, sustainable and durable products which do not harm environment and the human also. This study has a range of 57.7% people those prefer that kind of knowledge and believe these are more influencing factor in purchase behavior.

By habit consumers change their perception according to the trends. But in the case of environmental concerned consumer, this fact is refutable because they always feel very touchy with the environmental protection. That's why they virtually feel an attachment with those organizations which prefer environmental protection whether it is a government or it is a manufacturer company. So those companies adopt higher standard quality in their products with keep in mind the environmental protection their fan-following indeed reach to the unlimited range. Our study posits that 73.7% respondents believe that if government plays a major role in promoting green product then public may try to become environment friendly. As a consumer they believe that policy should be in favor of green consumerism may play a pivot role in environmental protection. Not only this, green packaging, green advertising, green labeling, green claims by a company can people aware about of environmental protection and green products as well. However organizational green image may include how to use product safely, how a product effects environment, providing non-harmful products, and thinking in the benefit of the society. 95.4% respondents of the study believe the environmental awareness and knowledge and health perspective have a positive impact on the intention to buy green product. It means they expect that if manufacturers keep in mind these aspects in benefit of the society then they may have a long range of the green consumers. According to several theories there is a competitive advantage between green purchase strategies and concerns (Engardio, Carey & Hall, 2007). Several theories shows that no contradiction between goals and business and goals of environmental issues (Lovins, Lovins, & Hawken, 1999).

It is believe that social influences and physical structures within the environment develop and change the human expectations, beliefs, and cognitive competencies. The social environment has a strong effect on green purchasing behavior (Cheah, & Phau, 2005). An individual learn attitudes and behavior for his/her past experiences as social learning theory declares. Several studies show that individuals learn attitudes and behavior through the observation of the other individuals or by media—electronic or print (Bandura, & Walters, 1977). Social media as an influencer has a major impact on purchase behavior of a consumer (Choshaly, 2017). Therefore social influence plays a major role to create a positive image in consumers' mind to make a positive perception to purchase green products. This study represents that 83.4% respondents believe that green advertising and eco-labeling works as big influencer in purchase intention for the green products. About 86.2% respondents believe that green logos and symbol have a positive impact on consumers' purchase intention. And 100% respondents accepted that they will prefer to promote green products.

Conclusion:-

The outcome of the study clearly shows that there is a positive and significant correlation between dependent variables of green purchase intention and independent variables of environmental knowledge, environmental concern, perceived knowledge, organizational green image and social influence where study reveals that higher educated peoples are more influenced with these factors (as table 3 represents). Study also reveals that the youngest peoples are more active in consuming green products (as table 1 represents) and males are more aware for the usage and consumption of the green products (as table 2 represents). Study posits that all hypotheses have proven true. On the basis of the outcomes it has been concluded that these five factors are the major part of creating consumers' perception in order to make up a purchase intention of green product. When the level of these factors is increased then it will lead towards green purchase intention. But even then, it is recommended that marketers should pay more attention on the advertising and promotion of the green products, and should work for cheap and best qualitative brands and strive to use labeling which would enable consumers to create a clear-cut perception for buying intention of green products.

Research Limitation and Suggestions for Future Research:-

To examine the factors that affect the purchase intention of green consumers which often helps in making green perception of the consumers also, the small sample size has been selected that consisted of 175 respondents of Delhi based universities. Therefore findings of the study cannot be generalized for general population. As a recommendation it is advised that future research should conduct with a large sample size and enlarge the study scope to include other sections of the population in order to compare their attitude towards green product and to examine the green behavior on the basis of their perception. This study considers only five factors that influence consumers to buy green products but these are not the only determinants which influence the consumers' intention to buy green products therefore it is suggested that the future research should consider some other demographic factors which are left in this study and should consider some other psychographic factors which should help in understanding the behavior of the green consumers more effectively.

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