

CURRENT CHALLENGES TO ECO-MARKETING

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This paper is focused on determining upcoming challenges for eco-marketing due to such factors as global pandemic and approaching recession as well as to identify local consumer behavior changes in response to aforesaid events.

Keywords: eco-marketing; lean consumption; Covid-19; global recession; local market orientation.

The object under study is eco-marketing which can be defined as marketing for a product that emphasizes the fact that it does not harm the environment [4]. This concept refers to brands changing their practices to more environmentally aware and marketing the products specifically with ecological benefits. Thus, the goals of eco-marketing are defined as demonstrating social responsibility, implementing sustainable business practices, avoiding waste. The strategies implemented under this type of marketing include collaborating with green organizations, supporting community efforts in sustainability positions. Eco-marketing objectives are creating awareness about the ecological process, educating customers, utilizing maximum resources in the most efficient manner. The eco-marketing mix will be more specific and focused on green products produced locally and packaged in eco-friendly materials, promoted through highlighting the product's positive environmental aspects. However, in the current situation eco-marketing faces many challenges in reaching its goals.

The objective of this work is to identify the major challenges faced by eco-marketers, to identify recent tendencies of local consumer behavior with the intent to determine its impact and to find the ways eco-marketers can cope with those challenges we have identified. While carrying out the research, several methods were used including analysis of literature and a survey on the changes in consumption behavior. Empirical data was gathered with the help of a questionnaire using Google Forms.

January 2020 shook the world to the core, with China announcing the first death from novel coronavirus, which a month later would get its new name: Covid-19 [1]. At the end of the month, the World Health Organization declared global emergency [2] and soon many cases of Covid-19 got reported around the world. The possibility of a full lockdown and overall continuous panic has a great impact on consumer behavior. Basic necessities goods are getting swept off the shelves in local stores and supermarkets, customers hope

to stock up with what is just left [3]. In such a global crisis, ideas of lean consumption are getting quickly forgotten and people no longer think of such aspects as environmentally-friendly packaging or ecological production; we've returned to the first stage of Maslow's hierarchy of needs: physiological, and now it's all about basic survival. The message that eco-marketing has been trying to convey to people is overshadowed by consumer's anxiety and panic. The question is: how eco-marketing will cope?

Let's consider the finding of the survey carried out in March among BSU students and their parents. The survey consists of 6 questions. It was available in the English language and distributed locally through social media, with overall 50 participants.

The results of the survey show that in general there is no panicking behavior observed in Minsk, with 60% of respondents saying they did not buy more products than they need [Fig.1]. Nevertheless, the opinions of the respondents regarding the behavior of other people split by half: 52% think that people started emptying shelves, while 48% of the participants think that people around them still consume consciously [Fig. 2].

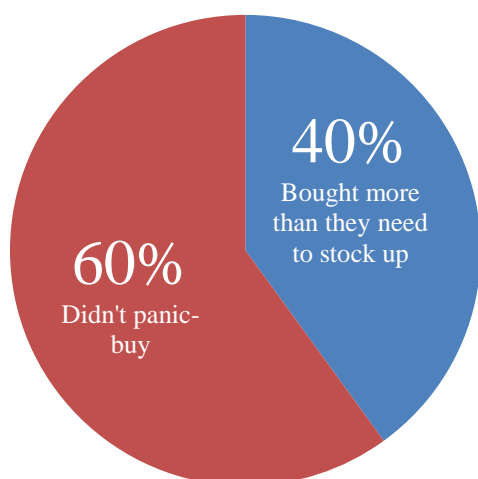


Fig. 1. Answers whether respondents bought more than they need under panic

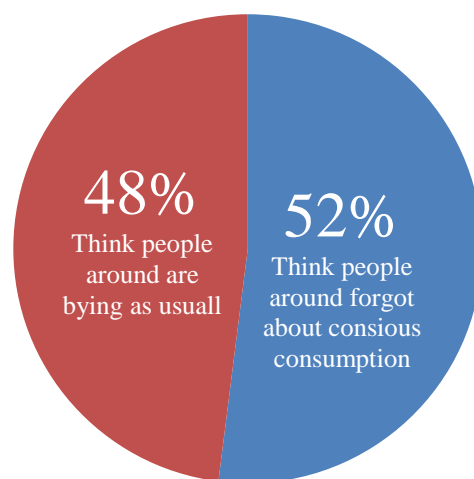


Fig. 2. Answers whether respondents think that consumer behavior changed in other people

Moreover, almost half (45 %) of respondents, who said that they usually care about ecological part of the products they buy, meaning they search specifically for biodegradable packaging, environmentally-friendly brands, admitted that now due to the strike of coronavirus they do not pay attention to such aspects anymore.

As the result we can observe a change in purchasing patterns connected to the overall consumer confusion which stems from Covid-19 with less attention towards green products.

Another challenge eco-marketers are going to face in the foreseeable future, resulting from the pandemic, is a severe global recession. Green products and services are more expensive than non-green ones, thus making all efforts to promote them very difficult. As the IMF argued, the global recession would be «the deepest for the best part of a century» and poorer economies will suffer much more than the rich ones. As research suggests, taking into consideration such indicators as a country's industrial structure, the composition of its corporate sector and the effectiveness of fiscal stimulus, Greece is the most vulnerable country with 68 % of jobs that cannot be done at home as well as extremely low fiscal stimulus of 1.0 % [5].

In response to the arising problem, eco-marketers can implement several strategies to fight the panic, such as advertising through social media or promotion through social advertising [6], major eco-campaigns or collaboration with medical institutions [7],[8], contents assets (social media, e-mail, blog), market research for visualization, cross-promotion with green companies. Besides, when the pandemic passes and after those initial fear-driven response strategies to Covid-19, societies might be pushed to change their consumption attitudes, along with combating the impacts of the ensuing recession. The argument is supported by the findings of another research conducted by the author last autumn, which identified the tendencies to lean consumption [9] and the readiness to sacrifice convenience to a greater good among young people in Belarus, specifically 66.7 % of the surveyed agreed that they would give up using plastic bags for the sake of protecting the environment [10].

As it has been suggested, one of the concepts which has been built over years will get massive damage: globalization, as countries are closing borders and international trade is paused [11]. And thanks to this societies might emerge more focused on local products and services, thus greener lifestyles. Provided economic help and benefits by authorities, local businesses will combat the consequences of the pandemic, and in the future a local market orientation will result in further development and evolution of eco-marketing.

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