Green Marketing as a strategy for sustainable purchasing behavior in Mexico

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Abstract – **Nowadays, environmental deterioration is considered as a public problem. The need to stop the current trends that contribute to its destruction, like intense consumption and the effect of business activities, has led to the application of Green Marketing strategies. The aim of this article is to analyze, in a sample of 190 Marketing students, the influence these strategies have on young Mexican consumers when trying to change their consumption behavior and encourage them to purchase green products. Based on the Chi Square Test used to examine the questionnaire we applied; the results indicate that there was a significant difference between gender when considering an ecological production before buying a product. A lack of knowledge of Green Marketing strategies was also revealed, obtaining differences between salary, work and semester. According to our analysis, companies in Mexico should improve three key factors for their strategies to have a greater impact. More attention should be given to young male consumers, more innovative ways of promotion and an ecological production process must be developed.**

I. INTRODUCTION

During the past years, the consumption of different products and services has increased enormously around the world, due to this, so has the lack of natural resources. The current rapid growth in the patterns of consumers' consumption and behavior worldwide are the main causes of environmental deterioration [1]. Sustainability is a worldwide concern since the environment destruction has worsened. Its recovery has become a global commitment and one of the main objectives of the United Nations, who constantly encourages countries to work together [2].

Considering this, countries mainly throughout Europe and North America, such as United Kingdom, Denmark, Finland, USA and Canada are beginning to address this problem [3]. They have started working towards minimizing the harmful impact of their business activities on the environment while still looking after their financial interests [4]. The need to encourage sustainability has led countries to promote modern business strategies like Green Marketing and (corporate) social responsibility into their companies and firms [5]. As declared by the [2], 93% of the world's 250 largest companies are now reporting on sustainability. More precisely, van Marrewijk [6] states that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) refers to all company activities demonstrating an inclusion of social, environmental and economic concerns in business operations, and in interactions with stakeholders.

The growing concern and interest of consumers to acquire green products, items that are consciously produced without affecting the environment, has caused firms to use these strategies to gain reputation and to stay in all regulations. Consumers are trying to be responsible citizens of the world, and they expect the same from corporations, which means that CSR practice is part of a proactive reputation management [3], and an important factor of successful business competition [7]. In 2015, sales of consumer goods from brands with a demonstrated commitment to sustainability grew more than 4% globally, while those without the commitment, grew less than 1% [3]. When perceived as socially responsible, companies can improve consumer satisfaction. In fact, previous studies show that CSR associations are linked to stronger loyalty behavior because consumers develop a more positive and stronger evaluation of the firm [2]. They enhance consumers´ consumption, purchase behavior, attitude and disposition to recommend the company to others. Indeed, a study from Cone Communications [8] confirms that 87% of American consumers will purchase a product because a company advocated for an issue they cared about, whereas 76% will refuse to purchase upon learning it supported an issue contrary to their beliefs. Arikan and Güner [7] present contradictory results, suggesting that CSR is far away from being the most dominant criteria in purchase behavior, considering traditional standards such as price, quality and brand familiarity as the most important choice criteria. Even though, 45% of global consumers surveyed by Nielsen [3] consider that commitment to the environment has the power to influence product purchase. Which reflects that personal values are more important than personal benefits, such as price or convenience.

Along with CSR, is the application of Social Marketing, a discipline that seeks to encourage social change by persuading the preference and adoption of a more positive behavior in a target market, which leads to the benefit of an individual, group or society. Behavioral change is achieved through the creation, communication, delivery and exchange of a competitive social marketing offer that satisfies consumer´s needs through the consumption of socially less common products and causes voluntary change [9].

Green Marketing on the other side, as part of CSR and Social Marketing practices, focuses on the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying the requirements of customers and society in a profitable and sustainable way [1], which includes alteration of the production process, adjustment of product lines and progression in packaging, as well as transforming advertising [10]. Nielsen´s Global Sustainability Report [3] verifies that Marketing techniques remain the most commonly used strategy across

regions, where 65% of total sales come from brands that use marketing tactics to communicate sustainability efforts.

Govender and Govender [10] state that visual aesthetics surrounding the product's packaging and emotional advertising can be used as an effective marketing tool to influence consumer preference and decision making when they do not have prior knowledge about the product, where packaging is more likely to influence the buying behavior of women consumers than male consumers. In the case of green products, mostly women, examine the labelling to see if it was manufactured with recycled materials. Furthermore, they tend to purchase ecologically compatible products [10]. On the other side, environmental advertisements can enhance consumers' knowledge about the environment and green products, thus, helping them to make informed decisions about the products they consume and their impact on the environment [10].

However, nowadays, in order for CSR practices to be effective, they should be adapted to the particular country or region in which they are being developed [10]. Meaning that Green Marketing applications, such as emotional advertising campaigns and packaging, can be influenced by the consumption pattern a certain culture has [3]. The main problem with this is that, so far, CSR implementation has been dominated by the northern American and European multinational companies, NGOs, governments, trade unions and academics [5] – used by 36% of companies in North America, 41% in Europe, and 48% in the Pacific countries of Australia and New Zealand, compared to only 9% in Latin America and 19% in Asia- [3]. Thus, in developing countries, mainly in Asia, Central and Latin America, there is a noticeable absence of knowledge and development on Green Marketing, where there is still much to be done. Especially in the creation of a responsible consumption culture in countries like Mexico, where this strategy is almost new and barely developed, to the point that it is addressed with confusion [11], not causing the desired impact in Mexican consumers.

However, Govender and Govender [10] believe that, particularly young adults in the 18 to 25-year age group, are more common to be influenced by their natural and social surroundings which impact on their marketplace knowledge and purchase decisions. Even though, while exploring green purchase behavior, [4] have reported a discrepancy or "gap" between consumers' willingness to purchase and actual purchasing practices. At the same time, the Global New Product Innovation Survey, a study that polled 30,000 online respondents in 60 countries, including Mexico, revealed that from the 26% of consumers who want more eco-friendly products only 10% say that they actually purchased them [12].

Therefore, considering the consumption culture like the one Mexico has, characterized for being compulsive, nor responsible or intelligent, this article aims to examine if promotional and visual strategies in Green Marketing, e.g. packaging, labelling of products and emotional advertisement campaigns can influence or attract young consumers' green purchase behavior. For this purpose, a sample of bachelor students from La Salle University in Mexico City is selected to provide initial perception about the problem. An additional aim is to identify the level of awareness of young Mexican consumers (students) about sustainable consumption patterns. And yet another objective is to recognize the factors that influence purchasing behavior of green products and not only thinking about it. Synthesis of these objectives will verify how effective are Green Marketing applications in Mexico, given the characteristics of their consumers, when trying to create awareness to actually purchase ecologically compatible products.

II. Materials and methods

Sample

In order to explore and analyze the influence that Green Marketing strategies have on young Mexican consumers´ purchase behavior of green products, the study applied an electronic questionnaire survey. Since the non-probabilistic sample was not part of a random selection process, respondents were generally selected based on their career. So, respondents in this research were students from third to eighth semester of the bachelor study program in Marketing at the Business School at La Salle University in Mexico City. The questionnaire was applied to a total of 16 students from third semester, 59 students from fourth semester, 16 form fifth semester, 49 students from sixth semester, 13 from seventh semester and 52 students from eight semester, between the ages of 18 and 27 years old. At the end, 190 respondents (92.68%) out of the total sample completed the survey. This means, that the sample covers the majority of students in the study program.

The questionnaire was divided into three sections. All three sections were evaluated using a five-point Linkert scale. The first section consisted on socio-economic data such as age, gender, semester, working hours and monthly income. Within this first section, general knowledge database about the care of the environment was also included, to understand the level of awareness regarding the sustainability concept. The scale in this section (1 to 5) went from "totally disagree" to "totally agree". In the second section, the information contained factors considered as important by consumers when purchasing a new product. It also included a segment with questions about green products, to analyze the perception of the respondents regarding this type of products, using a five-point scale that went from "not important" to "important" and the segment questions going from "totally disagree" to "totally agree".

Finally, the third section evaluated the general knowledge our respondents had about Green Marketing strategies and also how often they paid attention to specifically visual tactics of Marketing, with the scale going from "never" to "very frequently". This section included a segment where we could analyze which strategies were considered by our respondents to be the best ones to advertise green products and how much they influence them, so they could know about these products and buy them; with the scale going from (1-5) "never" to "most of the time".

Chi-Square Test

The Chi-Square test, also known as Pearson´s Chi-Square Test, is a nonparametric or free distribution test, considered as one of the most useful statistic methods [13]. Chi-Square test assesses whether an association exists between two variables by comparing the observed frequency and to the frequency that would be expected if the variables are independent of each other. The text is represented as follows:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(f_0 - f_e)^2}{f_e} \qquad (1)$$

where X^2 is the Chi-Square value, f_0 is the observed frequency, f_e is the expected frequency.

Procedure

Chi-square test is commonly used for testing hypotheses when working with two qualitative nominal or ordinal variables [13]. Nominal variables are data that have no meaningful range or order and are measured as categories (e.g. gender, type of color, etc.). Meanwhile, ordinal variables are data that do have a meaningful order (e.g. level of satisfaction, feeling, etc.). In the study, the following four variables and their categories were compiled:

- Salary (organized in 6 ranges: no income; earning from $1,000 to $5,000; from $5,001 to $10,000; from $10,001 to $15,000, from $15,001 to $20,000 and from $20,001 to $25,000).
- Gender: 112 women (58.94%) and 78 men (41.05%).
- Semester (from third to eight semester).
- Work, where we obtained 111 respondents that did work and 79 that did not.

We chose those variables because it can be expected from the students in our sample to know more about Green Marketing, based on the career that they are studying. However, we were trying to find if these factors, can affect their knowledge and willingness to buy green products.

The method evaluates the existence of significant dependence or independence between the variables and organizes the data in tables that contain crosstabs. Crosstabulation presents the distribution of two categorical variables simultaneously. For the calculations, we used the IBM SPSS (Statistical Product and Service Solution Statistics) software, which provides basic data preparation, crosstabulation capabilities, descriptive and inferential procedures such as *t*-test, contingency and correlation analysis, and nonparametric tests [14].

In order to examine whether or not an association exists between the variables, we compared the pattern of the responses in the cells (observed data) to the pattern that we would hope to obtain if there was no association between the variables (expected data).

For this, the following three hypotheses were formulated:

H1: There is no significant difference between salary, gender, semester and work in the consumer´s willingness to purchase green products.

H2: There is no significant difference between salary, gender, semester and work in the consumer´s knowledge of Green Marketing strategies.

H3: There is a significant difference between salary, gender, semester and work in the influence that Green Marketing strategies have on young consumers.

We considered to either accept or reject the null hypothesis of the Chi-Square test. The null hypothesis expresses that there is no relationship between the categorical variables based on the X^2 value, so they are independent from each other.

The Chi-Square value was represented by a "p" and was provided by the SPSS. We worked with three levels of confidence, depending on the *p*-value. If *p* equaled .1, there was a 90% level of confidence, *p* had to be less than or equal to .05 so that the hypothesis had a 95% of confidence, and finally, a *p*=.01 represented 99% of confidence; meaning that there was a statistical difference [15].

Thus, if the *p*-value was greater than .05, the null hypothesis was accepted. When the assumption was violated, we also used Cramer´s V. The Cramer´s V is a form of a correlation and is interpreted exactly the same as the Chi-Square value [13].

III. RESULTS

In this section, we present the achieved findings of the Green Marketing influence analysis. The results are divided between the following three hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between salary, gender, semester and work in the consumers' willingness to purchase green products.

For the analysis of this first hypothesis, we compared the four variables previously described (*salary, gender, semester and work*), with the answers of one question included in the survey (*would you be willing to pay more for green products?*). We found out that there was no significant difference between work, semester, salary or gender and the consumers' willingness to pay more for green products produced by a CSR.

TABLE 1: CHI-SQUARE TEST FOR SALARY AND WILLINGNESS TO PAY MORE FOR GREEN PRODUCTS (SOURCE: SPSS SOFTWARE)

	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Salary						
0	1	10	30	21	19	81
Expected Count	1.3	9.8	23.0	26.9	20.0	81.0
1,000 – 5,000	1	6	6	13	7	33
Expected Count	.5	4.0	9.4	10.9	8.2	33.0
5,000.1 – 10,000	1	5	15	19	16	56
Expected Count	.9	6.8	15.9	18.6	13.9	56.0
10,000.1 – 15,000	0	2	1	8	4	15
Expected Count	.2	1.8	4.3	5.0	3.7	15.0
15,000.1 – 20,000	0	0	2	2	1	5
Expected Count	.1	.6	1.4	1.7	1.2	5.0
TOTAL	3	23	54	63	47	190
Expected Count Total	3.0	23.0	54.0	63.0	47.0	190.0

Table 1 provides the results of the test for salary and their willingness to pay more. Based on the Chi-Square test results, since the *p*-value was .533, our hypothesis was not rejected. However, the results indicate a great interest in supporting socially responsible companies. Consumers' salary has no influence, but most of the consumers (57.89%) are willing to pay more for green products.

Similarly, costumers' gender does not affect consumers' willingness to pay more for green products or not ($p = .134$). Although there is no statistical difference, there are differences in absolute numbers: 33 women (29.46%) out of the 112 would actually pay more for green products and just 14 men (17.94%) out of the 78, would do the same. So, it can be concluded that there are more women than men who would actually pay more for green products.

As the research continued, neither students' current semester at the university nor if they worked or not, had a significant relation; with a $p = .688$ and $p = .147$ respectively. However, there were more eighth-semester students (34), as well as, more students who worked (64.86%), who were willing to pay more.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between salary, gender, semester and work in the consumers' knowledge of Green Marketing strategies.

For the second hypothesis, the same process was used. The same four variables, in the same order, were, but this time against whether or not our respondents knew about Green Marketing strategies. With a $p = .019$ and a 95% level of confidence, we found out that there was a statistical difference between salary and the consumers' knowledge. Students who earned between 5,000-10,000 and 10,001-15,000 pesos monthly (31) knew more about Green marketing strategies than the expected count (21); which led us to conclude that the more they earn, the more knowledge they have. This result made us to reject our hypothesis in case of this variable.

TABLE 2: CHI-SQUARE TEST FOR SEMESTER AND KNOWLEDGE OF GREEN MARKETING STRATEGIES

	Sí	No	Total
Semester			
Third	**1**	**12**	**13**
Expected Count	3.9	9.1	13.0
Fourd	**18**	**36**	**54**
Expected Count	16.2	37.8	54.0
Fifth	**2**	**14**	**16**
Expected Count	4.8	11.2	16.0
Sixth	**11**	**35**	**46**
Expected Count	13.8	32.2	46.0
Seventh	**7**	**6**	**13**
Expected Count	3.9	9.1	13.0
Eighth	**18**	**30**	**48**
Expected Count	14.4	33.6	48.0
TOTAL	**57**	**133**	**190**
Expected Count Total	57.0	133.0	190.0

However, respondents' gender did not have a relation with the Green Marketing strategies knowledge ($p = .847$). Even though, there again are more women (57.89%) than men (42.10%) that know about Green Marketing strategies. Further, semester in which the respondents currently study had almost the same effect as the salary. With $p = .032$ and the same confidence level of 95%, semester had a significant relation with Green marketing strategies knowledge. According to Table 2, we can observe that the number of students that knew about Green Marketing strategies increased along with the semester. This means that the higher the semester, the more knowledge students have about these strategies. However, it is important to mention that surprisingly only 30% (57 students) out of 190 students knew about Green Marketing strategies. In addition, fourth, sixth and eighth semesters were the ones with more students who knew the most about the Green marketing strategies. This may be because in these three semesters students have courses related to the environment conservation, sustainable strategies and Green marketing (Design Workshop in fourth semester, Entrepreneurship and Sustainability in sixth semester and Social Responsibility of Organizations in eighth semester).

Finally, students that work (part-time or full-time) have more Green Marketing knowledge, as we obtained $p = .005$ with a strong level of confidence of 99%. We link this result to the semester result as we conclude that clearly if you work you

know more. This may be because the students apply the subjects they study and get work experience.

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant difference between salary, gender, semester and work in the influence that Green Marketing strategies have on young consumers.

When we evaluated respondents' salary, we got $p = .492$, which mean that there was no significant relation between their income and how often they consider eco-friendly production. Sixty-seven students (35.26%), no matter their salary, occasionally consider this factor when purchasing a product. Though, when evaluating their gender, the observed counts were different enough for the relation to be significant ($p = .004$). The significant difference we achieved, matches Govender and Govender [9] results about the influence of eco-friendly packaging, which we previously described in the Introduction. Sentimental strategies, such as eco-friendly production, influence more the purchase behavior of female rather than male consumers. In our study, as seen in Table 3, the difference was also significantly higher in females; 71.42% of the 70 students who considered eco-friendly production, were females and just 28.57% were males.

TABLE 3: CHI-SQUARE TEST FOR GENDER AND INFLUENCE OF GREEN MARKETING STRATEGIES

	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Gender						
Female	**0**	**26**	**36**	**31**	**19**	**112**
Expected Count	3.5	27.7	39.5	23.6	17.7	112.0
Male	**6**	**21**	**31**	**9**	**11**	**78**
Expected Count	2.5	19.3	27.5	16.4	12.3	78.0
TOTAL	**6**	**47**	**67**	**40**	**30**	**190**
Expected Count Total	6.0	47.0	67.0	40.0	30.0	190.0

The last two variables, semester and work, did not present a statistic difference. The p-value for semester was $p = .606$ and for work was $p = .202$. However, in absolute numbers, fourth, sixth and eighth semester had more students who consider ecological production of an item. There were 18 students in fourth semester, also 18 in sixth semester and 20 in eighth semester, which are more than those who consider it in other semesters.

IV. DISCUSSION

Responsible and sustainable consumption is something that many companies seek but few of them actually achieve in their consumers. Throughout the years, Green Marketing strategies have contributed to the creation of that consumption behavior by influencing consumers to buy green products. This was clearly demonstrated, as part of previous market studies, by Govender and Govender [10] whose study focused on proving the existence of a significant difference between men and women towards their green purchasing behavior. Even though we obtained a similar result related to gender, we want to give a solution, also based on our other variables.

Given the achieved findings, we propose new measures to be implemented within the Marketing plan of companies and marketers in Mexico. First, it is essential to raise the awareness and knowledge of Green Marketing strategies as most of the

respondents barely knew them, even though they study Marketing. This meant that the few promotions for green products that do exist in Mexico have not really been noticed.

Moreover, based on the significant difference found between genders regarding ecological production; the results indicated that there are fewer men than women who are influenced by this aspect when buying a product, so this gives companies the opportunity to focus on attracting more male consumers. The solution for this result is based on the gender-identity study made by Brough et al. [16], in which they establish that men are less likely to be eco-friendly because this lifestyle is cognitively associated with femininity. Also adding, that many proenvironmental advertising uses font styles and colors that are more feminine than masculine; and many Green Marketing efforts target areas in which women tend to be more involved than men. Therefore, relying on their and our findings, we suggest making a market study specifically for young male consumers to develop new innovative campaigns, e.g. the creation of special green products with limited editions that include themes that interest them or improve the design of packaging and labels for one that really catches their attention, while still using recyclable materials in their making.

On the other hand, since 72.10% of respondents considered green products as more expensive than regular products, we also find it necessary to create a value proposition to justify and decrease their higher prices. Although, there was no difference between their salary and most of them were willing to pay more for these products, lower prices would increase their willingness to change their purchasing behavior. Therefore, we recommend both problems to be solved simultaneously. Our solution includes changing a company´s promotion strategies and production process for a more ecological and innovative one. By using recyclable materials in the manufacture of their products, they can reduce costs and, consequently, obtain lower prices. Lim et al. [17] present a similar solution by proposing the use of discounts to solve the misunderstanding that purchasing green products means being charged premium or higher prices.

Study limitations

The findings in this study are subject to some potential limitations that could be addressed in future research. Since the study was only applied to certain students in Marketing study program, the first limitation concerns the sample size. Therefore, in the future, the analysis can be extended to other students form different study programs, which would allow us to work with a bigger sample and obtain several results.

Second, due to the limited access to data, the research involved surveying only students from La Salle University. So, the study can be applied to a wider number of organizations, such as other colleges or companies in Mexico.

V. CONCLUSION

In this article, we analyzed the influence of Green Marketing strategies on the consumption behavior of young Mexican consumers, when trying to promote the purchase of green products. Using the Chi-Square test, respondents demonstrated a lack of knowledge regarding Green Marketing strategies, their knowledge was influenced by their salary, whether they worked or not and semester. The results also show that young Mexican consumers, especially women, can be influenced by

companies that use Green Marketing strategies to buy green products. However, companies in Mexico need to improve the way they apply those strategies, as well as offer lower prices for those products. They must change the way their articles are being produced and concentrate more on young male consumers when promoting them.

Our research helps to understand the difficult situation faced by companies in Mexico, especially when they try to apply Green Marketing strategies and promote green products consumption. The importance of the research lies in the fact that it is still an issue that is poorly developed in Latin America and Mexico, and it is necessary to change the consumption behavior of the population, to a more responsible and sustainable one. Nevertheless, our study was limited to certain young consumers and students. Thus, a wider age range would be considered for further investigations. This would allow us to analyze another sector of the population, have greater results and obtain a more detailed national study.

Along with this, the research could now be done, focusing on certain companies in Mexico and studying the effectiveness that a more ecological production process known as circular production, like the one we suggested, would have.

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