



A STUDY ON THE ATTITUDES AND BUYING BEHAVIOR OF AIR TRAVELERS IN CONTRIBUTING TO A SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

Aviation is a very significant part of our growing economy, which provides for the movement of individuals and commodities all through the world, thereby facilitating the growth of the economy. There are airlines and aircraft manufacturers that source and provide more sustainable products and there are those that will do so in the near future. The airlines, aircraft manufacturers, fuel industry and consumers must either enter the pathway to sustainable development or are soon getting out of business. The principle initiative of this paper is to present evidence on the consumer's lack of awareness and the existence of knowledge gap that influences the consumer's buying behavior when making decisions about air travel and the issue of sustainability in the aviation industry. The aim is to understand what are the various factors that drives a consumer to a more environmentally mindful purchase and also to witness the reason for their purchase behavior not matching the actual height of concerns that the individual are showing for the wellbeing of the environment in the aviation industry.

KEYWORDS: Sustainable Environment, Consumer Attitudes, Airline travel.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is at present a well-recognized expression, and one that is impacting all sectors of society and industry. Many sectors are recognizing the significance of sustainability in terms of concern for the environment, economic development, health and vitality at present and also for the future outlook.

Over many years the aviation industry has made much advancement to recognize and address the various environmental impacts. In spite of this improvement, there is a compelling and imperative call for addressing the various environmental effects of the aviation industry. In this 21st century, growth in air travel has severely affected the environment locally through noise, air and water pollution, climate change and damage to wildlife, heritage and landscapes. More extensively, all the aircraft emission coming from the aircraft engines are contributing to global warming. This growth has heightened concerns amongst the environmental interest groups and the surrounding communities about the unfavorable consequence on the environment; moreover lack of knowledge and public awareness about the negative consequences is another contributing factor to the growing concern of environment sustainability where there is an immense gap between sustainability knowledge and the buying behavior of the consumer. Another major impact is that of resource depletion or more precisely fuel depletion where the fuel consumption by the aircrafts is substantially increasing. Environmental impacts are the fundamental constraint on the aviation business in the 21st century for which this industry is often been portrayed as the sustainability villains. Waits, Townsend, et al. (2004). Due to these varying factors and the increasing value which is placed on environmental quality, there are increasing constraints on the mobility, vitality of the economy and safety of the country.

METHODOLOGY

With considerable reference to all research methods, this research paper has gathered data by employing both an inductive as well as a deductive approach of research. Using the inductive approach, this research has made use of information obtainable through secondary data sources based on current knowledge acquired through online published literatures and other sources including books. One of the books used as a guide for this research is 'Towards Sustainable Aviation' by Paul Upham. In contrast, the deductive approach has made use of primary information which will mainly consist of the data gained through the questionnaires which was distributed amongst the consumers in order to analyze their knowledge and awareness about environment sustainability. A major segment of primary information will be derived from the critical examination of the questionnaire presented to a sample of passengers who travel. This survey is conducted to locate the deficiency of the consumer's knowledge regarding the consumers are willing to contribute to a sustainable environment by means of employing the various sustainability practices cited by the aviation industry.

This research will also make analyses of both quantitative and qualitative collection tools. The questionnaires were distributed amongst three segments of consumer's in Dubai (during April 2012 to July 2012) namely: Europeans, Asians and the Arab population to identify the difference in their attitudes and knowledge towards sustainability.

RESPONDENT PROFILE

A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed amongst three consumer segments based on demographics namely the Europeans, Asians, and the Arab Nationals, at the Dubai Airport. This process of segmentation enabled the

researcher to explore the extent of ethical consumers in the society with different demographics. Moreover, it was ensured that the participants that qualified to answer these questionnaires were frequent air travelers. These set of questionnaires were distributed to those who belong to the age group of 20 and above to ensure the accessibility of genuine answers for the purpose of conducting fine research. Moreover filling out the surveys enabled in face to face conversation which facilitated access to various respondents' opinions. Some of the discussions were also recorded and were transcribed later for the purpose of understanding comprehensively. This discussion indicated the various attitudes, personality traits and interests that affect the overall behavior of the respective consumer.

The Primary Consumer Awareness Study

Consumer awareness of sustainable aviation is very much overshadowed by safety and quality of service provided. Airline companies, aircraft manufacturers, oil and gas companies and governmental agency have been focusing on the sustainability imperative; yet still they are falling short and losing the sight of the main intention when they tackle this matter. Some of the companies tend to focus too narrowly and some of them tend to focus too broad which often is confusing the consumers and the respective stakeholder of the main purpose due to which they fail in achieving the level of sustainability.

Unfortunately, there is definitely lack of consumer awareness regarding sustainability and therefore prompt actions and involvement is necessitated in order to reverse the individuals anti sustainable behavior and also educating them on the long term advantages of sustainability travelling becomes a priority. In general, there have been many attempts made by several organizations to move towards a greener environment but yet there is universal lack of regularity and uniformity in the attempts made.

Hence an attempt has been through this paper get an improved understanding of sustainable consumer behavior and the knowledge gap of the consumers by drawing information from the results of the various existing research and thereby to create a inclusive overview and understanding using the questionnaires. For the purpose of this research, the term ethical consumer has been adopted which intends to describe the consumer as the one who is influenced by various environmental or social factors during their purchase decision.

Findings

After analyzing the questionnaires, this survey evidence indicated the existence of a knowledge gap in consumers with regard to the consumption of air travel. On a very general basis, many of the participants agreed to be unaware and non attentive to environmental impacts and many had objections for changing their buying behavior just for the sake of the environment. This survey indicates that time, price and convenience is what mainly are the leading drivers affecting their purchase decision. Although the respondents acknowledged that they could be an ethical consumer, their willingness to act was low where they are reluctant to make changes to their lifestyle just for environment sake. It will be interesting to highlight the following two variables that existed largely amongst the Asian and the Arab National population.

Attitude and Behavior Gap

Amongst the Asian and the Arab National segments, almost all the respondents are concerned about the environmental impact but yet however more than 90% of the respondents do not consider these impacts when travelling. Their attitude is mainly influenced by their values and beliefs and their habits and routines. And secondly their behavior is influenced by their own personal capabilities which include their financial position and their skills and knowledge. Along with the costs and taxes that the consumers will have to incur for playing a role in sustaining the environment, this is one of the variables for which many respondents agreed that they are not willing to change their way of living.

Knowledge and Behavior Gap

When it comes to awareness of sustainability issues European consumers are in the lead. They are familiar with the trends and the consequences and are increasingly more aware of their own roles and their ability to bring about change. Awareness and choice are the most powerful levers for increasing sales of green products which do not exist in majority of the Arab and the Asian population. Out of the 100 Arab respondents, 90% agree to the fact that they did not possess enough knowledge regarding this issue. However amongst the 100 Asian respondents, 60% of the respondents seemed to have partial knowledge about the issue but hardly took the initiative to modify their behavior for the environment. It was identified that their willingness to pay for a green air travel product is largely dependent on the perceived benefits. It is clear that the market can be opened up through raising awareness and offering an alternative to consumers.

Value Action Gap

Value action gap represents the inconsistency between the information and the belief the individuals possess and the actions that they seem to be undertaking. Precisely, being aware of the environmental impacts and having knowledge does not necessarily indicate that the individual will be adopting sustainable consumption. The various need and opportunity of the consumer is also one of the factors that shape the individuals motivation to consume. These needs are driven by factors related to abilities like financial stability that will allow the individual to fulfill their need. Moreover, the culture, economy, the demography are also the factors that limit an individuals behavior. Therefore, it is not only the perceived need of a consumer but also the opportunities available driven by their abilities that affects the overall consumer behavior.

CONSUMER INFLUENTIAL ELEMENTS

Motivation

Many of the European respondents who had a concern for climate change were aware of the carbon footprint and the carbon related consequences of flying, and hence were motivated in restraining themselves to fly. Many of European respondents are willing to pay an expense for implementing strategies that benefit the environment. Of the 100 European respondents, 55% alleged to pay more for an environmental friendly product to preserve the environment for future generation, 25% chose to be motivated only if the product is saving time and money in

the long run and 20% voted for if the product offers healthy lifestyle. On the other hand, the Asian and the Arab Nationals population did not seem to be motivated to reduce their air travel consumption where many of the respondents felt that they flew very infrequently. Their travel experience is mainly motivated by personal preference. More than 80% of the respondents belonging to this segment were not much concerned environmentally. In these two segments, 35% claimed that they would be motivated to pay more for an environmental friendly product if it is offering a healthy lifestyle. While 45% claimed that they will be motivated if the product is worth saving money in the long run and the remaining 20% voted for preserving the environment for the future generation.

Level of Interest and Knowledge

All the European respondents seemed to have strong environmental values and were very much involved in sustaining the environment. Moreover, 86% of these respondents intended to recycle the waste items. They believed that flying has resulted in negative environmental consequences and indicated that this has affected their propensity to fly. Moreover, 90% of the respondents were aware of the term sustainable development and all the participants showed interest in contributing to environmental sustainability. With the Asian respondents, their attitude towards these eco features were in general very positive but only 50% were aware of these environmental friendly features that the airlines offer. For most of the respondents, the main concern was as to how their purchase is effecting their own personal situation rather than thinking about the environment. The Arab respondents were least bothered and least aware in contrast to the other segments. Quality, convenience and safety are what matters to them the most where they barely consider participating in any environmental protection and social activities. From both these segment groups, 65% were aware of the term sustainable development but however only 55% showed interest in contributing towards sustaining the environment. And in these segments, only 35% of the respondents intended to recycle the waste items where majority stated the reason being lack of access to recycling facilities.

Purchase Decision

While respondents indicated they intended on considering the environmental impacts of air travel, however, a comparatively weak link appeared to exist between intentions and actual purchase decisions. Although many of the participants had preference for product with environmentally friendly features, brand, price and quality were ranked to be more essential and largely considered when making their actual purchase decision. Price, quality

of service, convenience and safety factors accounted for a large per cent influencing the buying behavior. 55% of the total respondents ranked price as the top most factor influencing their purchase decision. Whereas all the respondents ranked environmental friendliness factor as the least most important factor influencing their buying behaviour. When buying, majority of the population did not check if the airline or the airports are following an environmentally compatible process, or if the aircraft carries any eco friendly features. 62% of the total respondents said that they were not willing to pay additional fees on tickets to reduce the impact on the environment. Despite the concern for the environment, these respondents are very focused on the consequences of tax imposition and incremented ticket fees on their individual situation that affects the purchase decisions.

Consumers Attitude and Perception

Many of the respondents consider that the environmental claims made by the airlines are nothing but a clever source of marketing technique. 70% of the total respondents do not trust the environmental claims made by the airlines saying that it is more like a promotional advert just intended to augment their market prominence amongst the consumers. 68% of the total respondents deem that the airlines are green washing them by deceitfully positioning their product as environmental friendly and using such methods as a marketing tactic. Moreover, 65% of the respondents also stated that they are not as yet willing to pay any carbon tax if made mandatory by any airline.

Habits and Routines

Changing habits and the general routine is a very strong barrier to change the behaviour. In the survey, it was found out that 64% of the Asian and the Arab National respondents are not willing to change their behaviour for sustainable consumption. General routine often prevents consumers from implementing changes in their consumption patterns. Their habit and everyday routine are related with other concerns like time, friends and financial resources which are of more value to them than sustainable consumption. Another barrier is also the costs involved in undertaking a sustainable activity. Similar to habits aspect, the costs involved is a subjective concept and many consumers believe that the sustainable products are quite costly whereupon 72% of the total respondents claimed that they are willing to implement an environmentally friendly strategy or purchase a product only if it is economically viable for them and not expensive.

Furthermore, after the survey was conducted, following were the major noticeable characteristics of the European versus the Asian and the Arab Nationals Respondents:

Table 1

Characteristics	Europeans	Asians	Arab Nationals
Awareness about the Environment	More aware	Some were aware but inactive	Unawareness and lack of knowledge
Concern for the Environment	More interested and active	Not very concerned	Least bothered and least involved
Cultural Value	Altruistic	Selfish	Hedonistic
Costs	Willing to incur additional costs	Sensitive to high costs involved	Not hesitant to pay extra costs
Environment Sustainability	More optimistic	Unenthusiastic	Insensitive

DISCUSSION

The biggest issue is that the consumers are not willing to trade-off product functionality for a sustainable product. With face to face discussion with some participants it was identified that the consumers are willing to pay a premium for the social attributes but however are not willing to sacrifice the functionality of the respective product. Consumers are choosing rather a superior product with a superior performance in terms of functions because for these consumers it is a moral option and by choosing so will reduce their feeling of guiltiness and distress. Many of the consumers agree to the fact that their preference of sustainable products is enthused by altruistic goals whilst their choice for the functional characteristics and quality are more inspired by their own personal goals. The consumers are not willing to forgo a reasonable level of the products functional quality or character. Therefore, we find many consumers are opting for superior performance over the sustainable option.

When the survey data was analyzed, it was discovered that more than 60% of the respondents were aware of the impact of the actions on the environment. 78% of the respondents were claiming that pollution and climate changes are the two major environmental issues that affect the quality of their life. However, it was also observed that majority of the respondents were largely concerned about all those things that impact their daily lives but were not prepared to do anything about it themselves.. However 87% of the European respondents claimed that they are worried and thereby are prepared to act towards the betterment of the environment. 62% of the Asian population claimed that they are willing to act for the environment but their decision is however driven by factors like access to facilities, availability of time, money or knowledge. And more shockingly, 83% of the Arab Nationals population claimed that they do not undertake any activity for protecting the environment. One of the participants also mentioned that if the society as a whole does not behave in an environmental friendly way then why they should initiate a sustainable approach of living. It was observed that if certain groups or enterprises are not giving a lead, then the individual consumers do not believe in adopting their own sustainable actions. It was mentioned that they do not see the result of their own action because the others polluters are not acting in a similar manner.

After the questionnaire was analyzed, many factors that prevent the individual consumer from undertaking a sustainable action were observed. As a result, following states the major obstructions for sustainable consumption:

- Deficient information and knowledge
- Finding it difficult to alter their routine and habit
- Considering that the environmental friendly purchase and action is quite costly for them
- No trust in the producer and organization who promote sustainability

In case of the Arab Nationals and the Asian respondents, deficiency in information and unawareness had proven to be a important barrier. They claimed that they are not willing to undergo a change in their habit and routine for

the purpose of sustainable consumption. However an important one to be considered is the level of perceived consumer effectiveness. 64% of the total participants claimed that no great value is being added for their sustainable action as according to them it hardly makes a difference. 76% of the participants do not trust the companies who promote sustainability where the respondents believed that it is a marketing approach, and not a genuine apprehension about environment. This also could be the fault of the companies who fail in communicating their actions to the customers. Thereby, campaign and comprehensive details must be shared with the customers and the society to accept the particular actions as a norm in order to alter their view and routine. Observably, not sufficient information is accessible for the consumer, and the major reason being lack of sufficient communication between the producer and the consumer which constitutes to be a major barrier.

CONCLUSION

The main intention of this research was to examine the various attitudes of the air travelers or the consumers to sustainable consumption and to find out the major barriers and aspects that are influencing their purchase behavior and their consumption pattern.

After the thorough analysis of the data, it can be concluded that majority of the participants are largely concerned about the future impacts that unsustainable utilization could create, but this study proves that only majority of the Europeans are the ones who actually consume sustainably in contrast to the Asian and Arab Nationals population, the reason being more awareness and knowledge amongst the foreigners than in comparison to the Asian and the Arab Nationals. The Europeans seem to be more involved, interested, and active as well encouraged to consuming sustainably, whereas the Asians and the Arab Nationals seemed less educated, not much interested, more self-indulgent and not willing to spend more on environmental purchases.

To summarize the major factors that are preventing the consumers from a sustainable purchase decision is largely lack of information, difficulty in changing their daily routine, the higher costs involved, and lack of trust in the companies assuming it as their marketing trick. With the positive intentions of the individuals, it was apparent that sustainable consumption and development is a required future goal but on the other hand the producers must design and market sustainability with careful planning to be financially feasible and acceptable.

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