

Customer's Perception towards Buying Eco-Friendly Diversified Jute Products: An Empirical Investigation in Dhaka City, Bangladesh

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Abstract

The aim of study is to explore the perceptions of customers in purchasing decision of eco-friendly Jute diversified products. This study was followed by sequential mixed methods; quantitative (positivistic) and qualitative methods to explore factors of buying decisions for eco-jute products. A convenience sampling technique was followed. A total of 200 respondents were surveyed at Dhaka city. Ten in-depth interviews also were conducted to find out more details information about participants perception and behaviors. Eco-friendly jute diversified products are shopping bags, laundry bags, shoulder bag, purses, school bags, floor mats, seminar bags and decorative items etc. This industry will have its demand in spite of substitutes artificial fiber based products such as plastic or polythine. This study will help entrepreneurs to design marketing strategies for sustaining in the competitive business world. Green marketing should be practiced for jute diversified products due to its eco-friendliness. The finding of this study is: customers have positive attitudes to jute diversified products but necessary initiatives should be taken to make customer's satisfaction. Hence, the understanding consumers buying factors or consumer behavior are very significant to entrepreneurs for successful green marketing. For sustainable jute diversified industry, green marketing, more research, and branding are required.

Keywords: Consumer behavior, Diversified Jute products, Environment, Eco-friendly products, Green Marketing.

Introduction:

The business opportunities explored by the harnessing and processing of natural fibers hold the commitment of huge growth, especially consumers are increasingly interested in choosing 'environmentally friendly' products. General consensus is that "green" refers to, in some ways, to environmentally-preferable attributes of a product, service, and technology. Beyond the assumption that the term "green" indicates environmentally preferable attributes. It does not preserve highly toxic compounds and no contribution to highly toxic by-products during the manufacturing process. The features should be contained including durability, recycled content, reusable, using natural or renewable resources, used local resources. The producers also employ "sustainable harvesting" practices, be easily reused, and be biodegradable (Amatruda 2010). The use of natural fiber is more sustainable than synthetic fiber or artificial fiber because natural fibers use natural resources compare to synthetic and fiber extracted from plants which are annually cultivatable. Annual replacements make these renewable resources. For this reason, natural fiber is bio-degradable, disposable and use these creates non toxic environment. So, natural fiber ensures sustainability and eco-compatibility (Roul, C, 2009). Moreover, 2009 has been declared the "International Year for Natural Fibers" by FAO to bring a spotlight on this issue. Jute is one of the cash crops and natural fiber after cotton. Jute fiber is comparatively second ranked natural cellulosic fiber in the global marketplace and it is raising attraction to people than petroleum based fiber (Das, et.al. 2012). Generally jute goods are two types such as traditional and diversified jute products. Last couple of decades, Bangladesh dominated and earned foreign exchange by producing traditional goods such as hessian cloth and bags/ sacks, twine, yarn and carpet backing cloth (CBC). When synthetic and plastic came to the market jute traditional products lost their market position. But lack of proper initiatives in both policy and research jute cannot be revived its position. Some scholars have tried to use jute in different ways with their own initiatives, besides Bangladesh Jute Research Institute (BJRI) and Jute Diversification Promotion Centre (JDPC) are working on jute diversification. (World Bank) "Jute and jute goods constitute 39% of Bangladesh agricultural exports and in 2012/13 it was 3.8 percent of all export. Within the overall jute sector, low value added and traditional products account for more than 99 % exports; thus diversified jute products currently represent less than 1% percent of jute sector export."

In order to overcome the declining market of conventional products, new technologies and products has been evolved by using jute in the production of value added products and diversified products. By this way new industry has emerged and it is called jute diversified industry. This industry focuses innovative jute products. Jute diversified industry is emerging and rising industry in Bangladesh. There is no universal definition on jute diversified products. Eco-jute diversified products means products are made from natural jute fiber, yarn or fabrics. It is recycled materials, reusable, designed for longtime use, causing little or no environmental impact and produced by eco-consciousness enterprises. Jute can be used for different purposes. Broadly, eco-friendly jute diversified products means these products are manufactured by using jute fiber, yarn, or fabrics partly or wholly.

Basically jute diversified products indicates “value added products” or “innovative products”. These products are aesthetic and very exceptional than traditional jute products. Vries (2007) “The use of jute in new, alternative and non traditional ways that add value to final product are generally termed jute diversified products (JDPs)” We mean simply products that claim to offer an environmental benefit.” (TerraChoice 2010). Molla et al. (2014) mentioned in their research “Products other than traditional one having high value addition can be defined as DJPs Abdullah (2008)” and they also agreed diversified jute products means new products of jute which is alternative and non-traditional use of jute. According to Jute Diversification Promotion Centre (JDPC) “All fiber, yarn and fabrics-based jute products of high value addition excepting traditional hessian, sacking, carpet backing cloth and yarn of six count and above yarn will be termed as jute diversified products.” Diversified jute products uses multipurpose. For sustainable and revive the jute sector, everyday several products have been developing and adding in jute products family. The range of JDPs including ladies bag, summer/beach bag, fancy bag, executive bag, school bags, purse, pouch, wallet, file, decorative products, sataranji, wall/floor mats, table mats, runner, place mat, sikka, wall hanging, toys, grocery bags /souvenir, seminar bags, notebook, pen stand, paper & pulp (jute paper, jute –silk blended paper, jute board, garments tag, visiting card, greetings card & note book), jewellery and jewellery box and office items etc. Almost jute diversified products are manufactured by Micro, small and medium enterprises in Bangladesh (Booklet, JDPC)

Moreover, Bangladesh produces best quality raw jute in the world and she has core competency in raw jute production due to agro-ecological comparative advantages. World Bank study observed, Bangladesh has the huge potential and broadens scope in producing diversified jute products in world jute sector. On the side of coin, India the first mover advantage in producing diversified jute fashion products compared to Bangladesh. Though, India collects raw jute from Bangladesh (World Bank). Diversified jute industry can be revived and regain the lost the golden fiber. Entrepreneurs need to understand the buying behavior of diversified jute products and formulating effective green marketing strategies and practices according to their purchase behavioral factors.

Finally, it is true that green business and green marketing can play significant role for curbing climate change impacts around the world. Consumer preferences are going green, presenting new opportunities for Bangladeshi jute enterprises to sell sustainable products in local and overseas market. The numbers of consumers are growing to buy eco-friendly jute diversified products. But still the market size is very limited though 160 million populations are living in Bangladesh. In spite of important and prospective industry, number of customers and market size are not satisfactory. The researchers is not much aware this type of research on this products. So for formulating effective marketing policies and strategies, the understanding of buying behavior and standards toward eco-friendly diversified jute products is essential.

The objectives of this research are:

- a) To identify the demographic factors of eco-friendly diversified jute products consumers
- b) To investigate knowledge and awareness of customers on eco-friendly jute and diversified jute products.
- c) To explore the perception of customers towards buying eco-friendly jute diversified products.
- d) To identify the important barriers resisting free flow of the eco-friendly diversified jute products in the market.
- e) To recommend guidelines for formulating marketing strategies to enhance sales and customers satisfaction of eco-friendly diversified jute products.

Literature Review

Several researchers agreed that environment-friendly or green or eco-friendly products become popular at the global marketplace. In the inception of the twenty -first century is marked by an exponential growth of consumer’s ecological awareness due to the association of consumer’s negative impacts by several environmental problems such as global warming and pollution (Luzio& Lamke, 2013). Follows and Jobber (2000) agreed that marketing managers has emphasized consumer’s criteria and introducing products which are environment-friendly or green. Murphy et.al (2010) mentioned that green consumer’s attitudes are not only influenced by economic recession. For understanding the buying behavior are required that demographic factors, perception towards price, quality, trust, raw materials, information and availability of the products. Attitudes and willingness of buying eco-friendly products are greatly influenced different factors such as ecoliteracy, interpersonal influence and value perceived, (Cheah & Phau 2009). Another researcher also showed that buying behavior of green consumer depends on environmental values and beliefs, environmental regulations and knowledge (Smith, 2013). Consumers also impressed by green marketing practice like eco-label, eco-brand, and environmental advertisement (Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007). Vazifehdoust, H., et.al. (2013) found in his research that attitude is explained by consumers’ environmental concern, quality of green products, green advertising and green labeling. Ramkumar & Soundarajan (2014) found that pro-environmental concerns and consumer’s awareness affect green purchase decision but higher price are discouraged to customers preferences. Until recently, the literature provided that most studies are lack of product category specificity and failure to address environmentally friendly jute diversified products.

Methodology: This study was followed sequential mixed methods; quantitative (positivistic) and qualitative methods to explore factors of buying decisions for eco-jute products. The study was considered as population to all consumers at Dhaka city which is the capital of Bangladesh. The study was followed convenience sampling technique and data was collected from two fairs such as Dhaka International Trade Fair, three days fair at Bangabondu International Conference Center (BICC) and Different show rooms of jute products at Dhaka city like ARONG (Mugbazzar, Asad Gate), Doel Catter of Dhaka University through structured questionnaire during January-March 2016. The interview was conducted among two hundred respondents. The perception of diversified jute buyers was measured through a 5 point Likert Scale- Scores on the scale items varied from a low of 1 (Strongly disagree) to a high of 5 (Strongly Agree), with disagree, neutral, and agree as interval points. The survey scale was measured of ten items of buying perception variables. Hence, buying perception (BP) score of a respondent may vary from 5 to 50 where 50 indicates higher perception of customers and 5 indicates lower perception of customers. Finally, BP index was prepared by multiplying the cell frequency and their corresponding weight and adding them in the following way-

$$BP = \sum(SDX1) + \sum(DX2) + \sum(NX3) + \sum(AX4) + \sum(SAX5)$$

Hence, BP score of an item may ranges from $200X1$ to $200X5$ i.e 200 to 1000

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the demographic and other factors. The study also conducted ten in-depth interviews and respondents were selected purposively from several groups. Respondents were asked different questions regarding marking mix issues (Products: raw materials of products, quality of product, design etc, Price: price condition, comments on price, promotional and availability of the products etc.), besides problems and suggestions also were asked regarding eco-jute diversified products.

Results and Discussions

The information of the table-1 shows that the majority of the respondents (64%) were middle aged (31-40 years), 18.5% respondents were (below 30 years), and the remaining were old age (Above 41 years). Women respondents of the survey were majority about 63.5%. Mostly respondents are service holder (49.5%). Most of the customers were completed graduation and average monthly income belongs to around 43700 BDT.

Table 1 Socio-Economic Profile of Sample Customers

Socio-economic factors	frequency	%	Range	M	SD
Age(in full years)					
Below 30	37	18.5			
31-40	128	64	20-57	36.15	6.813
41 Above	35	17.5			
Gender					
Female	127	63.5	-	-	-
Male	73	36.5			
Education					
Primary	11	5.5			
Secondary	11	5.5			
Higher Secondary	48	24	0-18	14.02	4.120
Honours	71	35.5			
Masters	59	29.5			
Occupation					
Service Holder	99	49.5			
Business	31	15.5	-	-	-
Housewife	58	29.0			
Students	12	6			
Marital Status					
Married	184	92.0	-	-	-
Single	16	8			
Monthly Income (000' BDT)					
No income	69	34.5			
Below 20000	42	21.0			
20001-40000	36	18.0	3-8	4.37	1.208
40001 Above	53	26.5			

Source: Field Survey

Table 2 Information Received on jute diversified products

Source of Information	Number (Multiple Response)
1 Relatives/Friends/Peers	60 (30%)
2 Mass Media (Electronic and print)	15 (7.5%)
3 Government advertisement or gazette	5 (2.5%)
4 Trade fair/ Exhibition	170 (85%)
5 Show room	140 (70%)
6 Social Media	65 (32.5%)

Source: Field Survey

The above table 2 shows the maximum customer received information about diversified jute products by trade fair and show rooms. About 65 respondents also are received information about jute products from social media. During the in depth interview, Majority also said that they received from trade fair. One respondent said that “Actually I have learned about jute goods only from trade fair and sometimes show room like ARONG (Participant-1) Another Respondent said “I want to buy environment friendly product like jute products but I am almost in ignorance about the availability of such product. I have not found nearby any shopping mall from my residence” ((Participant-3) “I think people do not know about diversified jute products though this is our local product” (Participant-8). From the above discussion, it is proved that customers have limited access to know about jute diversified goods. Customers are also significantly influenced by Information sources.

Table 3 Knowledge on jute and diversified jute goods

Issues	Yes	No
Jute is good than synthetic or plastic and it is an alternative products of plastic	135 (67.5%)	45 (22.5%)
Bangladesh produces good quality jute in the world	150 (75%)	50 (25%)
Jute goods has no impact to make environment safe for future generations	75 (37.5%)	125(62.5%)
Less polluting products (less harmful for environment)	80(40%)	120(60%)
100% raw materials collected from local market	120(60%)	80(40%)
Jute MSMEs contribute in poverty reduction	155(77.5%)	30(22.5%)
jute goods purchase/use has no relation or impact on sustainable agriculture	85(42.5%)	115(57.5%)

Source: Field Survey

Table-3 shows 67.5% customers know that jute is better than plastic products and 75% also know that Bangladesh produces good quality jute. Furthermore, 60% customers do not know the environmental impact of jute good. During in-depth interview one respondent told “When I was student in High school, we taught English or Bengali essay like ‘Golden Fiber of Bangladesh’ But now we do not get more information on jute. But frequently, I observe that financial losses of government jute mills, financial crisis of jute mills and labor strike at jute mills, though our country produces best quality of jute” (Participant-3). Another respondent said “You see our next generation does not have much scope to know about jute and jute industry” (Participant-2). “Plastic is very dangerous for ours environment, you see All drainage of Dhaka city are filled by artificial plastic bags and plastic bottles etc. Every year we have been suffering over water flow on the road. But government does not take any effective steps to control banned plastic and I also think people do not know more about the benefits of jute products and its materials for our economy and environment (Participant-4). Many customers are still unaware about jute issues and jute products.

Table 4 Buyers perception toward diversified jute products

Perception Dimension	SD	D	N	A	SA	PI	RANK
Safety of the environment	32	49	52	36	31	585	4
quality(softness, greenness)	31	63	64	34	8	525	8
Disposable	17	56	68	45	14	583	5
Jute products are reusable	30	50	64	35	21	567	6
Attractive Design	15	37	77	49	22	626	2
price reasonable	28	59	63	36	14	549	7
Available of diversified products	32	72	50	38	8	518	9
Jute products are fashionable	35	47	50	31	37	588	3
Satisfied on jute products (Local Materials)	28	30	40	50	52	668	1
High Promotional support and government support	80	50	35	20	15	440	10

Source: Field Survey

The above table shows (table-4) that customers are satisfied on jute products because these products are made by local materials (rank-1). The respondents also think that these products are attractive design (rank-2). Besides, customers have lower perception about price, quality and promotional awareness. One respondent said

that still customers say this is “sala” or “salar bosta” but gradually people perception is changing towards **positive**, so it takes time to make jute products popular to people” (Participant-7). Customers still have negative and misconception about jute products.

Table 5 Purchase of type of diversified jute products

Types of products	Number of Respondents (Multiple response)
Ladies Jute Bag	112 (56%)
File cover/ Office items	60(30%)
Shoes/slippers	35(17.5%)
Mats (table or floor)	70(35%)
Jewelry/Purses	30 (15%)
Student Bag/ Executive Bag	75 (37.5)
Mobile/Coin Bag	60(30%)
Tissue box	35(17.5%)
Other jute items	80(40%)

Source: Field Survey

Table 5 shows purchase of types of diversified jute products. Majority respondents have bought subsequently ladies bags (56%), floor or table mats (35%) and student bags (37.5%). It is found a good number of participants who like very much lunch carrier/bags. “I bought jute launch bag and it is very fashionable, some of my colleagues also bought this jute bags for carrying their meal to office and it is growing up” (Participant-5). “Recently, very innovative product like laptop bag and ipad bags are available at market and producer also try to make jute products with innovative design but customers are not adequate as producer’s expectation” (Participant-9). “Some customers are not satisfied on current products because the products are limited. Some products are the more or less same in terms of color or quality of fabrics and design” (Participant-10). “We can buy different colors and designs bags though these are synthetic or artificial at cheap rate but a few months last I am using jute products because I like it” (Participant-2). Number of diversified products also limited to customers.

Table 6 Purchase frequency of Diversified Jute Products

Frequency	Number of Respondents
Monthly	10(5%)
4/5 times in a year	10(5%)
More than 3 times	50(25%)
Once a year	90(45%)
First time	40(20%)

Source: Field Survey

Table -6 shows the frequency of purchase jute diversified products by sample respondents. Among them majority of the respondents buy once a year 45% while 20% customer buys the first time. So it is true that every year number of customers is increasing. Only 5% customers purchase jute products per month. Jute products are not available in shopping malls. “Sometimes I want to buy jute made products but others products except this are available in the shop near to my residence that is why my purchase intention does not continue” (Participant-5). “This is my first time at trade fair and I have a plan to buy it because I like green product though this is expensive” (Participant-1).

Problems facing by Buyers

Table 7 Problems in purchasing green diversified jute products

Problem	Multiple response
1 Price is relatively high	145(72.5%)
2 Lack of availability of diversified jute goods and shops	155(77.5%)
3 Lack of awareness	80(40%)
4 Limited color and design	70(35%)
5 Lack of use green accessories in diversified product (button, jeppers, etc)	30(15%)
6 Lack of trust on quality	135(67.5%)

Source: Field Survey

Table-7 shows that 77.5% customers said jute products and shops are not available. Besides, 72.5% respondents said the price of jute goods relatively high and 15% also identified green accessories as a problem of jute diversified products. Most of the respondents said that price is relatively high. “Sometime we have no idea about price, so we pay according to sellers demand. I think bargaining scope is very much lower than other products. I do not know what materials are used in making these products” (Participant-4). “I have no found eco-label on product by reliable authority. That’s why I m doubtful about this, It is very difficult to judge” (Participant-3). “I think innovative products are not available at the market” (Participant 1), It is found true one entrepreneur said “If I make and show it other just copy and produce this product, same design, “I think no control or monitory

arrangement in copy other products (Participant-9). Advertisement is limited for these products. "I have not seen any advertisement on these products" (Participant-2). External synthetic products are available at market. "I have seen many products like Thai, china and Indian products which are available at market and people get these synthetic and artificial products at low price, majority customer do not judge whether it is jute made or synthetic. (Participant-10). Limited knowledge on ecolitarcy and jute products of sales staffs. "As a customer, I have seen that sales men do not explain materials of jute goods and benefits of the jute products, they give usual answer about products (Participant-6)

Recommendations: From the above analysis and discussion, the following suggestions are:

1. The marketers of jute diversified industry should formulate effective marketing strategies for enhancing customer's knowledge and awareness on jute eco status.
2. Entrepreneurs or producers should identify the target market by psychographic segmentation and taking right strategies and implementing those at right time. Particularly, producers should focus environmental compliance as well as charges lower price for jute diversified products.
3. Entrepreneurs can practice online shopping through website, social media: face-book, Wechat, QQ etc.
4. Government should encourage current businessmen of different shopping malls to sell jute diversified products. Government also can declare motivational programs for jute products sellers like charges lower income tax and government fees. This strategy also can be applied for jute diversified users.
5. Government could help to entrepreneurs to make a linkage with potential customers or future generation. For this purpose, they can arrange exhibition at school, college and university and seminar/workshop on environmental benefits of jute diversified products. Sometimes government can make documentary or short film on eco-jute products and it's environmental benefits. Finally, they can broadcast these records through electronic and print media.
6. Particularly, government should encourage all government, semi-government, autonomous organizations and institutions to be corporate customer of diversified jute products. It is large market in the domestic market. Every offices use seminar bags, gift items, executive's bags and several bags, decorative and stationary items, so they can easily buy and use green products in replace of artificial or plastic bags or gifts. Recently, many government and corporate are using jute made green products.
7. Government should take favorable jute diversification products policy and establish jute diversification products development design institute.
8. Government should arrange more trade fairs, exhibitions, road shows, and establish permanent showroom at tourist spots or massive gathering places in the country. Besides, government can use foreign missions for promoting those products in abroad.
9. Academicians, researchers, and policy makers should come forward to researching and finding the way out of the sustainable development of very potential jute industry. More research is required to find out the customer expectations and issues.
10. Accreditation council should be developed to certify the quality and compliance issue .It would be very much effective to build up the trust and faith of customers toward jute diversified products. Customers are very much conscious about the materials, design and quality. Ultimately, it will be also helpful to entrepreneurs to develop their competence and competitiveness which is very essential to compete with other substitute products. It also creates an opportunities to make customer loyalty home and abroad.
11. Government and NGOs should focus to promote and develop market of this green industry and products home and abroad. Particularly, SMEs are involved in producing these green product and they are creating economic and social value. They are creating shared value throughout the value chain by producing green products. So government and NGOs have the scope to promote and facilitate them.
12. Eco-labeling is important; government should be taken all necessary institutional supports. For standardization, it should be followed ISO 14020 and ISO 14024 principles and procedures. Entrepreneurs also should be practiced eco-labeling for jute diversified products.

Conclusion

Purchasing eco-products are becoming an imperative to keep the earth alive and support the people to sustain. Researchers found that diversified jute industry can help in reducing climate change threats in the globe. Right now, customers are willing to pay more prices for the products which are environmental friendly like jute. But they are not ready to compromise the quality of the product where this product eco-products. So entrepreneurs or marketers should consider the customers perception or attitude while making products and marketing, it will create complete advantage and win-win situation for the entrepreneurs and customers. Finally, it is realized that customers have good trend to buy eco-jute goods and in response of this marketers need to address all issues regarding green marketing practices to make customer happy and satisfaction. Customers are always king and this is very much true for green consumers and eco- products.

Limitations and Future Research Direction

Due to limited time and resource constraints, the research has only conducted in Dhaka City. It only covers the capital city of Bangladesh. For this reason, the findings of the study may not be representative of whole Bangladesh. That is why, by considering these drawbacks, it is recommended that further researchers will focus onto variables influencing purchase of green jute diversified products in large demographic area with huge respondents. This study only considers few variables, so future research future studies can also be conducted on several variables. Finally, the development and speeding up of eco-friendly diversified jute industries are required more research for finding out sustainable strategies and solutions.

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Annex

Demographic Profile of In-depth Interview Respondents

Name	Category of the respondent	Gender	Age	Occupation	Place of Interview
Participant 1	Customer	Female	35	Service	International Trade Fair, Dhaka
Participant 2	Customer	Female	26	Student	University of Dhaka
Participant 3	Customer	Male	46	Business	International Trade Fair, Dhaka
Participant 4	Customer	Female	55	Teaching	ARONG
Participant 5	Customer	Male	35	Service	BICC, Dhaka
Participant 6	Corporate Customer	Male	40	Government Officials	International Trade Fair, Dhaka
Participant 7	Staff	Male	25	Service	International Trade Fair, Dhaka
Participant 8	Staff	Female	22	Service	International Trade Fair, Dhaka
Participant 9	Entrepreneur	Male	37	Entrepreneur	International Trade Fair, Dhaka
Participant 10	Entrepreneur	Female	33	Entrepreneur	International Trade Fair, Dhaka