



THE GREENDEX: A GREEN INDEX

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Abstract

Greendex is a recent measure of consumer awareness towards environment introduced. The first series of this new measure was released jointly by the National Geographic Society and a global polling-firm GlobeScan on May8,2008. The Greendex is the first of its kind in the sense that it tries to measure the environmental awareness at the individual level. The basic idea behind construction of the Grendex is that the consumption pattern of a consumer reveals her consciousness regarding environmental pollution caused by human activities.

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I. Introduction

A new measure of consumer awareness towards environment has been introduced very recently. The first series of this new measure, called the Greendex, was released jointly by the National Geographic Society and a global polling-firm GlobeScan on May8,2008. The Greendex is the first of its kind in the sense that it tries to measure the environmental awareness at the individual level. Prior environment- related indices like Environmental Sustainability Index or Ecological Footprint were all macro-level indices. The Greendex is the first micro-level index relating environment.

II. The Index

The basic idea behind construction of the Grendex is that the consumption pattern of a consumer reveals her consciousness regarding environmental pollution caused by human activities. For example, if a consumer used to use private transport rather than public transport her behavior reveals that she is ignorant of environmental pollution caused by fossil-fuel burning.

A world-wide survey was conducted during the first half of the year 2008 among 14,000 consumers in 14 countries, namely Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, India, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Spain and the United States to derive the first series of the Greendex.

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One thousand people in each country were supplied online a set of questions that measured their behavior in the areas of housing, transportation, energy consumption and consumption of food and other goods. A panel of 27 international experts in global sustainability identified these four areas of consumption. According to them, consumption data on these areas help us to know how far environmentally sustainable are the consumption.

To grasp the idea how data, for example, on housing can give us information on environmental awareness of the consumer we may look into the pattern of questions set regarding expenditure on housing. The questions set regarding housing are like how many rooms in total are there in your home, which of the following features like home heating, air conditioning, hot running water etc. your primary residence has, whether your home is centrally air conditioned etc.

In a similar fashion questions set regarding expenditure on transportation requires information on the mode of transportation used by the respondent, the mileage covered by the respondent with her own vehicle, if at all.

The set of questions regarding energy consumption includes whether the consumer in question uses energy-saving electronic gadgets, whether her electric supply is from any renewable sources etc.

Finally regarding food consumption habit the interviewee were asked whether she is used to consume locally-produced or imported food, whether she prefers packaged food, whether she uses bottled water etc.

The survey made on the basis of such a set of questions gave us a stunning result. The consumers of the developing countries are more environment conscious than their counterparts in the developed world. For example, Indian and Brazilian consumers rank first in the list, whereas those of Americans stand last. The Greendex score for the Indian and Brazilian consumers is 60. They are followed by the Chinese (56.1), the Mexicans (54.3), the Hungarians (53.2) and the Russians (52.4). The British, the German and the Australian each have a Greendex score of 50.2. They are again followed by the Spaniards (50.0), the Japanese (49.1), the Canadians (48.5), and the French (48.7). The U.S. consumers have the lowest Greendex score at 44.9.

Though primarily the result seems to be very stunning it would no longer appear to be so if we go through the other revelations of the survey report. According to this report people in developing countries are more likely to live in smaller residences; prefer green products and own relatively few appliances or expensive electronic devices; walk, cycle, or use public transportation, and choose to live close to their most common destination. On the other hand, consumers in developed countries prefer to live in larger homes with air-conditioning facilities; generally own more cars, drive alone most frequently and use public transport infrequently; seldom buy environmentally friendly products.

From these revelations we can, probably safely, draw that consumers in developing world consume eco-friendly manner out of compulsions only. Yes, it is true, at least partially. The report itself tells us that consumers in developing countries are seen to be consuming more eco-unfriendly manner as soon as their income grows up and they desire to have the same living standards as those in the wealthiest countries.

III. Conclusion

Our conclusion will seem to be more realistic if we look at the scores, how consumers of different countries achieved that. For example, Indian consumers fared well on transportation and food, but unimpressive in housing. Clearly this is because in India we are provided with miserable transportation facilities by the government. The consumer has no role but to accept it. Similarly in case of food, either the availability of packaged imported food is less in our country or wherever available the consumer can't afford it because of high price. This means that some kind of inability is always inherent in consumer's decision to buy eco-friendly products. Obviously this trend does not reflect some or other kind of environment-consciousness in any way.

If you are an activist of green movement could you find any ray of hope?