Consumer Ecological Concern
and Adaptive Behavior

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the inevitability of environmental orientation of business is well recognized. However, there are differing views about what it can do for the business enterprise from the profit point of view. While some experts consider the environmental orientation as a business opportunity, others consider it as a necessary cost for survival of the business enterprise. Whatever may be the cost/profit considerations, there is no disagreement about the need for environmental orientation on the part of the business enterprise. This has led to research efforts aimed at investigating the consumer acceptance and/or preference for non-polluting products, the effect of information on the consumer characteristics which differentiate the socially conscious consumers.

Several recent developments make it clear that the business environment in the seventies would be characterized by legal and social pressures aimed at imparting greater social relevance to business operations. To impart such social relevance to the business enterprise in general and to the marketing function in particular, Philip Kotler proposes a new marketing concept. According to him: “The societal marketing concept calls for a customer orientation backed by integrated marketing aimed at generating customer satisfaction and long run consumer welfare as the key to attaining long-run profitable volume.” One aspect of this social relevance phenomena is the shifting emphasis from quantity of products to the quality of our environment. One need hardly look at the growing literature and legislation related to the environmental protection to realize its critical significance to future business operations. In this context Eugene Kelley observes:

“Environmental deterioration is the social issue which will probably receive the greatest amount of business involvement. Business responsibilities toward improving the environment will become more
important because a variety of ecological and social forces are stimulating a long term national commitment to environmental protection. Firms could be subject to appraisals of their environmental performance and their contributions to social change. Such an environmental audit of corporate performance may become a common practice by the late 1970s.7

Business is both blamed for the environmental problems and pressurized for solving the same. Business is or will be subjected to legal and social pressures aimed at solving the environmental problems. These present and future pressures necessitate the business to innovate in production and marketing activities so as to be able to offer legally and socially acceptable products and services in the market place. Thus according to Philip Kotler again: "The product opportunity is therefore to formulate some alterations of the product that add salutary qualities without diminishing any or too many of the pleasing qualities." 8

However, for both purposes of innovating and marketing, management needs information. It is axiomatic to state that in today's highly competitive business environment, successful management needs to make marketing information the basis for implementing any innovations. The societal concern with environmental problems and the consequent legal and social pressures on business might require the latter to market non-polluting goods and services in increasing numbers in the near future. Such non-polluting products and services need to be marketed with all the associated marketing problems. Some pertinent questions on which the management may have to collect market information will be as follows: What types of non-polluting products will be acceptable to the consumers? Would the consumers show strong preference for buying such new products? Are there distinct differences with regard to accepting and adapting the new products among the groups of consumers? What factors influence these differences? How credible are the non-pollution claims of business enterprises with the consumers? Would the consumers be willing to pay a premium price if necessary? Would the consumers be willing to undergo some inconveniences in the usage and maintenance of new products? Answers to these and similar types of questions dealing with the product, pricing, promotion, packaging and distribution aspects would become necessary for future marketing management. Such market information would be relevant not only at the time of implementing various types of marketing innovations but also for purposes of timing the innovation itself.

Despite legal and social pressures a shift to pollution-free products and