

Eco-Conscious Consumerism in Emerging Markets : A Conceptual Framework for Urban & Rural Coimbatore

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Abstract - Eco-conscious consumerism is growing around the world, but its impact on buying intentions in urban and rural markets in India is not well studied. This research looks at the link between consumer trust and environmental awareness when buying eco-friendly products in urban and rural Coimbatore. Based on the Theory of Consumption Values (TCV), the study explores how affordability, availability, and trust influence this relationship, with functional, emotional, social, conditional, and epistemic values as key factors in consumer behavior. Quantitative data will be analyzed using a mixed-method approach with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to explore complex interactions among the variables. Qualitative insights will deepen our understanding of consumer views. The findings aim to help marketers and policymakers create sustainable consumption strategies that meet the varied needs of urban and rural consumers in developing economies. This study seeks to broaden research on sustainable consumer behavior by enhancing the theoretical framework of eco-conscious shopping and highlighting a less explored regional context.

Keywords - Eco-conscious consumerism, Urban & Rural, TCV, Coimbatore District.

I. INTRODUCTION

Eco-conscious consumerism has significantly reshaped global markets in recent years. It influences how consumers buy goods and services. It has an impact on the purchasing behavior of consumers. Global consumers are becoming more aware of the impact of their consumption on the environment. This is influenced by the issue of resource shortage, climate change and environmental degradation. NielsenIQ (2023) reported that the majority of consumers worldwide are ready to alter their shopping pattern to save the environment, and many customers leave to brands that are reputed to be sustainable. Europe and North America are particularly good examples since the demand on eco-labeled, plastic-free, and energy-efficient products has increased drastically. Sustainability is a growing concern in India. Accenture India report (2022) concluded that 61% of Indian consumers demand the brands to demonstrate environmental responsibility. Faiths Biodegradable packaging, organic food, and cruelty-free personal care products are gaining popularity, particularly in cities. Ernest government efforts such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, UJALA Scheme, and the Plastic Waste Management Rules (2016, amended 2022) have also influenced the opinions of the population by making the operations more sustainable at the grassroots level. Nonetheless, this transformation is primarily urban and Tier-1 city-oriented, which creates a knowledge gap on the concept of eco-consciousness in semi-urban and rural India.

At the regional level, Tamil Nadu is one of India's most environmentally progressive states. Coimbatore, with its mix of rapidly urbanizing areas and strong rural economies, presents an interesting place to study sustainable consumer behavior. Civil society and non-governmental organizations indicate that the urban population of Coimbatore has a higher rate of awareness when it comes to products that are environmentally friendly at 65% as opposed to rural areas at 38.40%. This has been created more by cost barriers, a scarcity of products as well as a lack of confidence over green claims. It is on this background that this study describes eco-conscious consumerism as the awareness, attitudes, and behaviors of consumers as pertaining to products and services that minimise ecological damage and promote sustainability. The study will seek to examine the influence of eco-consciousness on the buying intentions of consumers in urban and rural Coimbatore district.

This study is based on the Theory of Consumption Values (Sheth et al., 1991), which identifies five key dimensions that influence consumer behavior:

- **Functional Value:** the practical usefulness of a product, e.g. cost-effectiveness, reliability and performance. In this research, it is concerned with whether Coimbatore has eco-friendly products that are not costly and accessible.
- **Social Value:** the influence of social norms and approvals; consumers may purchase green products in an attempt to demonstrate social responsibility or adhere to group values.
- **Emotional Value:** the feeling of satisfaction and moral pride in making the environmentally-friendly decisions.
- **Epistemic Value:** the interest toward new experiences and learning, which is demonstrated through the consumer interest in new sustainable products.
- **Conditional Value:** the situational factors, such as promotions, local availability, or policies (like plastic-free zones), that shape purchasing behavior.

Using this framework, the study investigates how these five values affect consumers' intentions to make green purchases. It also examines the effect of psychological and behavioral variables such as perceived advantages, product availability, and brand credibility on the eco- friendly purchasing behavior. This paper will address a critical research gap as it will provide valuable information to marketers and policymakers who are developing more inclusive and regionally-focused sustainability plans by looking outside the metropolitan centers.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past decade, eco-conscious consumerism has attracted significant academic interest, particularly in consumer behavior, sustainability marketing, and green purchase intentions. This part combines the findings of peer-reviewed articles published in different international, national, and regional environments.

A. Theoretical Foundation: Theory of Consumption Values

According to the Theory of Consumption Values (TCV) by Sheth, Newman, and Gross (1991), consumer choice is constrained by various value dimensions, which are functional values, social values, emotional values, epistemic values and conditional values. The combination of these values shapes the ways of decision making and is critical in interpreting the behavior of consumers who are environment conscious. Functional value is associated with the practical value of a product like quality, performance, low cost, and accessibility. These are some of the major aspects that influence adoption of environmentally friendly products. Social and emotional values are the psychological and emotional rewards of being an environmental responsible person and related with green brands. The epistemic value is associated with curiosity, novelty -seeking and need to explore sustainable products. Conditional value is situational and contextual e.g. the disparities between the city and rural market forces. Empirical research by Lin and Huang (2012), Nguyen et al. (2020), and Yadav and Pathak (2016) demonstrates the applicability of TCV in the green purchase behavior in different settings. This paper is based on this research; it focuses on eco-conscious consumerism in urban and rural Coimbatore to illustrate the influence of socio-economic or cultural factors on value priorities.

B. Global Perspectives on Eco-Conscious Consumption

Eco-friendly consumption is often seen as an ethical and cognitive response to environmental problems, globally. Gleim et al. (2013), moral obligation and the belief of individual effectiveness have a role to play in green purchase decisions. Likewise, Nguyen et al. (2020) discovered that social norms and trust in eco-labels, as well as consumer awareness, are very strong triggers of sustainable purchasing in Southeast Asian markets. Also, a meta-analysis study by White et al. (2019) highlighted the role of message framing and psychological impetus, including identity, pride, and guilt in influencing eco-friendly consumption behavior.

C. Consumers' Attitudes and Green Purchase Intentions

Numerous studies strong connection between environmental attitudes and green purchase intentions. The model created by Leonidou et al. (2015) demonstrated that ecological knowledge, attitudes, and previous behaviors have a significant predictive value in regards to the future green purchasing. Paul et al. (2016) found eco-label credibility and environmental awareness to be among the key predictors of green purchase intention in

India. Similarly, Kumar and Ghodeswar (2022) found that clear information and emotional appeal in green marketing messages strengthen the relationship between attitude and intention among consumers.

D. The Impact of Availability, Knowledge, and Trust

The credibility of environmental claims is crucial in shaping sustainable consumer behavior. Chen and Chang (2013) pointed out that brand trust plays a crucial role in promoting the green purchase intentions. On the contrary side, D'Souza et al. (2015) have revealed that skepticism and negative attitudes towards green marketing can be the primary factors that reduce the likelihood of making purchases in the environment-friendly direction. Verma and Chandra (2018) also found that despite the increase in awareness of Indian consumers, the problem of low affordability and a lack of access to products is also a significant barrier to green adoption particularly among the middle-class community.

E. Eco-Conscious Consumption in India

Most research in India has focused on urban and metropolitan consumers. Singh and Pandey (2021), there was a great association between the recognition of eco-label and purchase frequency among consumers in Tier-1 cities. A survey by Joshi and Rahman (2015) found affordability and availability as the current impediments to green adoption. Most recently, Maheswari et al. (2023) have mentioned that there is a change in behavior among the Indian millennials towards sustainable products, which is caused by the influence of social media and peer pressure.

F. Regional Insights: Coimbatore and South India

Despite growing interest in green consumerism, research on regional and rural aspects remains limited. As Ramachandran and Devi (2018) found out, consumers in Coimbatore are willing to purchase products that are environmentally friendly, but purchase intentions are frequently driven by the price factor. Likewise, Prakash and Suganthi (2020) discovered that rural buyers in Tamil Nadu focus on their affordability and local appeal rather than the global sustainability agenda. Narayana et al. (2021) reported that while awareness is relatively high among both urban and rural youth, actual behavior change turning awareness into sustainable consumption varies significantly.

G. Gaps and Research Opportunities

While there is a substantial amount of literature on eco-conscious consumption in urban India, rural consumer behavior remains underexplored. Previous studies (e.g., Yadav and Pathak, 2017; Jain and Kaur, 2020) has not primarily addressed the socio-cultural and economic heterogeneity of non-urban areas, concentrating instead on the urban population. This study seeks to address this gap with the help of mixed-method approach to the analysis of eco-conscious consumption practices in urban and rural Coimbatore. This will help in coming up with the theoretical knowledge as well as practical aspects of localized sustainable marketing strategies in the emerging markets.

III. RESEARCH GAP

Existing literature on eco-conscious consumerism has mostly focused on urban consumers in industrialized countries. It has paid little attention to the rural-urban relations in the developing economies such as India. In India, urban population has been examined in most studies on green purchase intentions. This creates a huge gap in knowledge of the knowledge of rural users, confidence, and buying attitude to environmentally friendly products. Moreover, the influence of such aspects as affordability, accessibility, and consumer trust in the formation of eco-conscious buying behavior will be under-researched. This is particularly in the varied regions, say in the Coimbatore state of Tamil Nadu. Although the Theory of Consumption Values has been extensively employed in the general consumer decision-making, there is still a paucity of studies where the theory can be applied to the eco-conscious purchasing behavior in rural and urban areas in India. There is also a lack of empirical studies that connect TCV dimensions with context-specific factors like green trust, environmental awareness, and perceived affordability. The proposed study will attempt to fill these gaps through the comparison of eco-conscious consumer behavior in rural and urban Coimbatore on the basis of a mixed-method approach. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) will be used in the research to examine the intertwined relationship between the variables of affordability, trust, environmental awareness, and purchase intention. This

will contribute to both the theoretical expansion of the TCV framework and practical insights for sustainable marketing strategies in emerging markets.

IV. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To study how awareness of the environment and trust in green products influence buying intentions in urban and rural Coimbatore.

A. Sub-Objective

1. To assess the extent of environmental awareness among urban and rural consumers in Coimbatore concerning eco-friendly products.
2. To evaluate the degree of consumer trust in green marketing initiatives and sustainable products within the study Area.
3. To identify the moderating role of affordability and consumer trust on the relationship between eco-consciousness and green purchase intention.

V. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

This study presents a set of hypotheses investigating the impact of customer trust and environmental awareness on green purchasing intentions, based on the theoretical underpinnings of the Theory of Consumption Values (Sheth et al., 1991) and the research objectives. Context and product-related factors including information transparency, credibility and product availability and affordability are the moderating effects of the model as well. The theories are constructed based on the previous studies (e.g., Chen and Chang, 2012; Biswas and Roy, 2015; Nguyen et al., 2020) and adjusted to the urban and rural Coimbatore contexts.

Table 1. Research Hypotheses and Variables

Hypothesis	Description	Variables
H1	Environmental awareness has a positive effect on green purchase intention.	IV: Environmental Awareness DV: Green Purchase Intention
H2	Consumer trust positively influences green purchase intention.	IV: Consumer Trust DV: Green Purchase Intention
H3	Consumer trust moderates the relationship between environmental awareness and green purchase intention.	IV: Environmental Awareness Moderator: Consumer Trust DV: Green Purchase Intention
H4	Affordability moderates the effect of consumer trust on green purchase intention.	IV: Consumer Trust Moderator: Affordability DV: Green Purchase Intention
H5	Product availability moderates the effect of consumer trust on green purchase intention.	IV: Consumer Trust Moderator: Product Availability DV: Green Purchase Intention
H6	The credibility of green products strengthens the relationship between consumer trust and green purchase intention.	IV: Consumer Trust Moderator: Credibility of Green Products DV: Green Purchase Intention
H7	Transparency of green product information strengthens the relationship between consumer trust and green purchase intention.	IV: Consumer Trust Moderator: Transparency of Green Product Information DV: Green Purchase Intention

H8	The effect of environmental awareness and consumer trust on green purchase intention differs between urban and rural consumers.	IV: Environmental Awareness, Consumer Trust Moderator: Urban vs. Rural Context DV: Green Purchase Intention
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Source: Developed by the author applying the Theory of Consumption Values (Sheth et al., 1991) and earlier research (Chen & Chang, 2012; Biswas & Roy, 2015; Nguyen et al., 2020).

The above hypotheses will guide the empirical investigation of factors affecting green purchase intentions among urban and rural consumers in Coimbatore.

VI. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study is based on the Theory of Consumption Values (TCV) proposed by Sheth et al. (1991). This theory explains how consumers make decisions through five key value dimensions:

- **Functional Value:** This relates to how useful, effective, and affordable green products are. It predicts consumers' intentions to buy green products based on their cost and availability.
- **Social Value:** This involves the impact of social norms, opinions from peers, and approval from society. Consumers may choose eco-friendly products to show social responsibility or to receive recognition.
- **Emotional Value:** This relates to the positive feelings, like pride and satisfaction, that come from buying sustainable products.
- **Epistemic Value:** This involves curiosity, the desire for new experiences, and the interest in gaining knowledge about the environment or trying innovative green products.
- **Conditional Value:** This covers situational factors, such as sales promotions, seasonal trends, product availability, or government policies that can affect purchasing decisions.

Key Roles in the Study:

- **Predictors (IVs):** Environmental Awareness, Consumer Trust.
- **Moderators:** Affordability, Product Availability, Credibility of Green Products, Transparency of Information, Urban/Rural Context.
- **Outcome (DV):** Green Purchase Intention

A. Research Design

This study uses a mixed-method design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine eco-conscious consumer behavior in both rural and urban areas of the Coimbatore district. The quantitative step will use Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to test the theory of consumption values (TCV) hypotheses and the influence of the affordability and consumer trust on the hypotheses. The qualitative stage gives detailed information about the consumer motivations, attitudes, and perceived impediments to green purchasing.

B. Sampling

The target population will be consumers 18 years and above residing in urban and rural regions of Coimbatore district, Tamil Nadu. The stratified random sampling ensures that there is a proportional representation on the basis of geographical area, gender, age and income. In the case of the quantitative section, 600 participants (300 urban and 300 rural) will be interviewed to be able to rely on the data of SEM and its comparison. Also, semi-structured interviews or focus group discussions (20 to 30) will be conducted to collect detailed views in the qualitative phase.

C. Data Collection

A structured questionnaire will be created using validated scales from previous studies to measure:

- Environmental awareness,
- Consumer trust,
- Purchase intention, and
- The five consumption values (functional, social, emotional, epistemic, conditional).

Moderating factors include affordability and availability. Data will be collected through face-to-face surveys and online responses when possible. The qualitative phase will involve focus group discussions and interviews to better understand perceived barriers, trust issues, and social influences on eco-conscious purchasing.

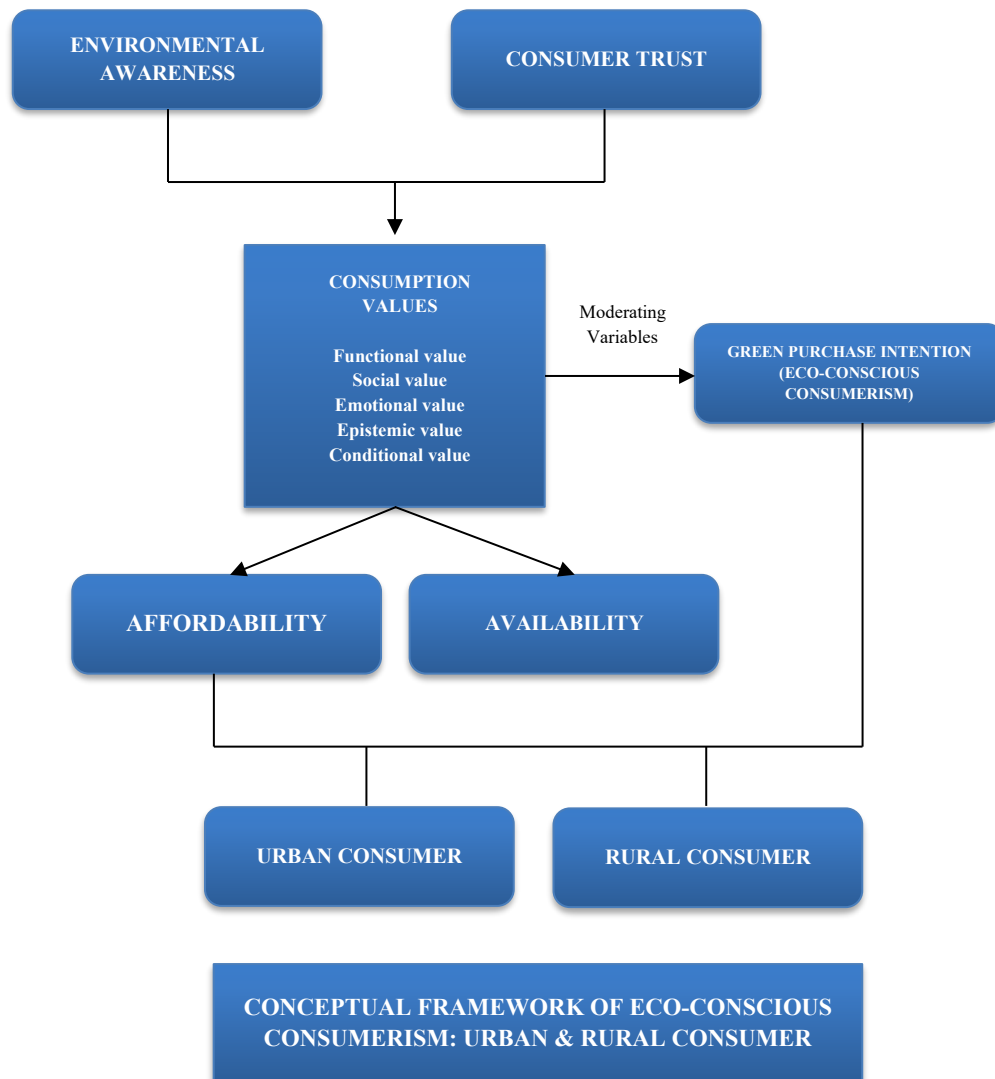


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Of Eco Conscious Consumerism In Urban & Rural consumers

Source: Author's conceptual framework, developed for this study.

D. Measurement Instruments

All constructs will be measured using 5-point or 7-point Likert scales adapted from established studies:

- Environmental Awareness: Nguyen et al. (2020)
- Consumer Trust: Chen and Chang (2013)
- Purchase Intention: Paul et al. (2016)
- Consumption Values: Sheth et al. (1991)

All items will be tailored for eco-friendly products to ensure they are relevant and valid.

E. Data Analysis

The quantitative analysis will start with data cleaning and descriptive statistics. This will be succeeded by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to establish the reliability and validity of the constructs. The hypothesized interactions among the environmental awareness, consumer trust, consumption values and purchase intention will then be tested by SEM (with the help of AMOS). Moderation analysis will examine the effect of affordability and trust on the strength of such relationships. The thematic analysis will be applied to qualitative data in order to identify patterns and contextual aspects that can be used to elucidate the quantitative findings.

F. Ethical Considerations

Before gathering data, informed consent will be obtained from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity will be respected throughout the study. The research is conducted in line with institutional and ethical standards of a study which involves human subjects.

G. Note on Research Originality

The conceptual framework, study design, and proposed methods of this research are original and developed specifically for this study. Although this research is intended to use all the ideas, constructs as well as planned analyses, the same cannot be used, reproduced and adapted to another study in future unless the author expressly requests the same.

VII. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The findings offer insights into how eco-friendly consumer habits affect green purchase intentions in both urban and rural Coimbatore, interpreted through the Theory of Consumption Values (TCV) (Sheth et al., 1991).

A. Effect of Consumption Values on Buying Intentions

The findings offer insights into how eco-friendly consumer habits affect green purchase intentions in both urban and rural Coimbatore, interpreted through the Theory of Consumption Values (TCV) (Sheth et al., 1991). The price sensitivity is observed more in rural regions where the economic boundaries limit the availability of environmentally friendly products. The urban customers, on the other hand, are socially and emotionally oriented, conditioned by peer pressure and self-fulfilment of meaningful choices.

This supports the findings of Ramachandran and Devi (2018) who observed that social recognition is the motivator of eco-conscious behavior in urban India. The moderate but significant impact was on epistemic value, the one that demonstrates curiosity and a need to experience something new; it was especially relevant among urban respondents with more exposure to environmental information and innovative green products (NielsenIQ, 2023; Accenture India, 2022). Conditional value, which relates to situational triggers like festivals, promotions, or local availability, was particularly relevant for rural consumers, indicating opportunities for targeted marketing strategies.

B. Role of Environmental Knowledge and Trust

Environmental knowledge emerged as a key factor influencing eco-conscious behavior. It positively affected all five consumption values and directly influenced purchase intentions. However, qualitative data revealed that the rural consumer group is typically skeptical of the green marketing arguments and eco-labels, which restricts the effectiveness of the awareness measures on behavior. Urban consumers on the other hand were more trustful of green products which reinforced the relationship between consumption values and the purchase intentions. These findings support Chen and Chang (2013) and D'Souza et al. (2015), who reported that consumer trust increases the likelihood of green purchases when brand authenticity is seen as reliable.

C. Moderation by Affordability and Trust

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) results confirmed that trust and affordability act as moderators in eco-conscious purchasing intentions. Affordability in the rural markets undermined the relationship between functional and purchase intent, as cost emerged as a major obstacle. Trust in urban markets moderated the effects of social, emotional and epistemic values, and this implies that such motivation relies on trust in environmental claims.

D. Urban-Rural Consumer Differences

Comparative analysis showed distinct behavioral patterns. The urban consumers were more environmentally aware, more trustful and more socially and emotionally motivated in purchasing green products. Rural consumers were more oriented towards the functional and conditional values and price and access constituted significant limitations. Qualitative data further showed such issues as inadequate infrastructure, inadequate supply of environmental products, and reduced environmental literacy among rural communities. Concerns

about product authenticity were frequently noted, emphasizing the need for trust-building efforts and localized awareness programs.

VIII. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings offer useful insights for marketers and policymakers who want to promote sustainable consumption in emerging markets like Coimbatore. Strategies that focus on making products more affordable, increasing product availability in rural areas, and building consumer trust with clear eco-labeling and trustworthy certifications can help close the gap in green purchasing behavior between urban and rural areas. In urban markets, using social influence and emotional appeal in marketing can effectively encourage eco-friendly purchase decisions. Together, these strategies can support inclusive and sustainable market development by matching consumer values with green marketing practices.

IX. STUDY LIMITATIONS

While this research offers valuable insights into eco-conscious purchasing behavior in Coimbatore, several limitations should be noted:

- **Geographic Scope:** The study focuses only on the Coimbatore district. This may limit how well the findings apply to other regions in India with different socio-economic conditions and consumer lifestyles.
- **Self-Reported Data:** Since the data rely on self-reported measures, responses may be swayed by social desirability bias, which could affect accuracy.
- **Cross-Sectional Design:** The study is cross-sectional, capturing behavior at a single point in time. It cannot establish causal relationships. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into changes in eco-conscious behavior over time.
- **Sample Representation:** Although stratified random sampling was used, certain demographic groups may still be under- or over-represented. This could impact how well the sample represents both rural and urban populations.
- **Unmeasured Variables:** Factors such as government policies, cultural beliefs, peer influence, and other socio-environmental variables may also significantly influence eco-conscious consumer behavior. These factors were not included in the current model.

X. CONCLUSIONS

This study provides valuable insights into eco-conscious consumerism in both urban and rural areas of Coimbatore, India, using the Theory of Consumption Values (Sheth et al., 1991). The results indicate that the five consumption values affect green purchase intentions, and affordability and consumer trust are the most crucial factors to consider. The urban consumers are more environmentally aware and trustful. Social and emotional values have a stronger impact on their purchasing habits that are eco-friendly. Conversely, rural consumers lay emphasis on functional and conditional values and cost and availability are the primary impetus to green purchases. Such findings have significant implications on marketers, policymakers, and sustainability practitioners. They fill an important gap in the knowledge regarding the concept of eco-conscious consumption in various regional settings of a developing economy. Adoption of green products can be encouraged with targeted programs that enhance perceived credibility, affordability, and accessibility of such products among different groups of consumers. This study can add to the literature on sustainable consumption because it provides a context-specific framework, and it can be used to create inclusive green marketing in an emerging market such as India. Future research could tackle the limitations of this study by broadening geographic coverage, using longitudinal designs, and including additional psychological and environmental variables to better understand the dynamics of eco-conscious consumer behavior.

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