

Sustainability and Consumer Choices: Unveiling the Drivers of Eco-Friendly Purchases

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Abstract

Sustainability has become a key concept through which modern-day consumption patterns are analyzed. In a developing country like India, where consumption patterns are rapidly evolving, it is essential to examine the factors influencing consumer choices regarding sustainable products. As environmental concerns rise and eco-friendly options expand, understanding these factors becomes crucial for consumer behavior research. This study explores the determinants of sustainable product purchases through primary research using a detailed survey questionnaire in the Indian market. The findings show that sustainability is the most significant factor, followed by cost and consumer awareness, highlighting a growing inclination towards sustainable consumption among consumers. Analysis of different factor combinations further supports these results, with sustainability, awareness, and cost emerging as the most influential, while factors such as influence play a relatively minor role. This research contributes to understanding consumer priorities in developing markets by providing useful insights for firms based on primary survey data, supporting firms in shaping sustainable products that resonate more effectively with consumer values and expectations.

Keywords: Sustainability, Environment, Consumer behavior,

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JEL Classifications: Q56, D12, M3

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1. Introduction

Sustainability and consumer behavior have been at the center of issues related to responsible consumption, indicating a significant shift in values and behaviors from traditional consumption norms toward patterns shaped by ethical considerations and environmental consciousness. Green purchases have been scaling up, with increasing awareness redefining consumers' purchasing behaviors and trends. Alongside, increasing concerns about society and nature have triggered a new set of ideas, including "sustainable development," underscoring a reduction in negative impacts while encouraging society to adapt to innovation and eco-compliance for sustainable behaviors and green consumption (Sobhanifard and Hashemi, 2022; Ab Wahab, 2021; Ajibike et al., 2021). In fact, the purchasing behaviors of consumers, along with usage, have been influenced by information accessed through personal information or third-party sources, indicating a significant influence on decision-making behaviors (Ungureanu et al., 2023). Despite the growing emphasis on sustainability in consumption practices and increasing visibility of eco-friendly products in the marketplace, consumers' actual adoption of such products remains inconsistent and context-specific. As noted by Hlaba and Shava (2025), while in particular younger consumers and middle-income consumers express positive intentions toward eco-friendly purchases, their contribution to green product consumption remains relatively constrained. This discrepancy between consumers stated intentions and actual purchasing behavior underscores the need for a deeper examination of factors shaping sustainable market decisions.

Signifying the transformative impact of this emerging trend in market behavior, there emerges a contemporary need to understand the rationale of sustainable market decisions. Accordingly, the present study focuses on examining how consumers' sustainability-oriented expectations and the growing integration of ecological considerations into everyday consumption influence eco-friendly purchasing patterns. Specifically, it seeks to identify the key determinants of sustainable purchasing behavior and to assess the extent to which these determinants shape consumers' purchase intentions toward eco-friendly products in the Indian market. By analyzing these relationships, the study aims to contribute empirical insights into the drivers of eco-friendly product adoption among Indian consumers.

For the purpose of maintaining lucidity in the progression of the discourse, the next portion of this paper reviews the existing literature relevant to sustainable consumer behavior, followed by a discussion of the methodology in terms of how this paper has been structured. Thereafter, the paper outlines the depiction of the data collected to facilitate the comprehension of the trends that have emerged from this survey. Eventually, the conclusions shall be drawn to enhance the comprehension of the trends in behavior that have been discerned from this analysis. Conclusions shall be drawn at the end of this paper.

2. Literature review

The existing section follows a literature survey providing valuable insights from previous research regarding this topic. Unravelling the behavior of sustainable consumers discloses the psychology that drives consumers to adopt green products. This includes aspects like attitudes, emotions, goals, and product characteristics that drive consumers to adopt environmentally friendly products (Trudel, 2019). Furthermore, the impact and influence of consumers' involvement, confidence, benefit acceptance, product availability, and societal pressure have been proven (Hael et al., 2024) to powerfully promote sustainable and ethical buying behavior. Additionally, the efficiency of green labels on products and packages seems to vary depending on the consumers' general attitude and personal involvement in environmentally friendly buying behavior. However, an important aspect of green marketing practice was noted by Rydin (2019) that consumers earning a moderate income tend to better avail green products. This signifies that green practices entirely rely on the consumers' personal choice and the overall institutional, societal, and financial structure. However, it has been revealed (Widayat et al., 2021) that awareness plays an important role in shaping intentions to act because it affects, depending on the community's societal pressure, the overall institutional structure. As a consequence, during the past decade, growing green awareness among consumers has encouraged marketers to fully adopt the use of green marketing approaches. This, in fact, symbolizes the increasing trend of green awareness in the marketplace (Bashokoh & Esmaeili, 2025; Quach et al., 2022; Ahmed et al., 2023). Consumers considerably contribute to the overall sustainability by resorting to environmentally friendly behavior. This, in fact, involves consumers' increasing tendency to go beyond the moderate benefits of immediate advantage, instead tending to adopt desirable behavior that proves helpful for the environment (Han, 2021). Collectively, these studies identify multiple psychological, social, and market-driven influences on sustainable consumption, motivating the present research to investigate how such factors jointly affect the adaptation of eco-friendly products among Indian consumers.

3. Data and Methodology

The present study is based on the primary survey conducted across various parts of India to examine consumer preference for eco-friendly products and to identify the factors behind such purchase decisions. Since purchasing behavior is influenced by psychological and behavioral characteristics, direct response offered the most reliable insights. The opportunity to access this population allowed us to collect first-hand data and analyze consumer behavior in the Indian context.

A structured questionnaire was used, which had both demographic details of the respondents, like gender, age, and educational background, as well as questions on

consumer behavior. Certain questions were designed to have frequency-based options (Always, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Never) to probe into their pattern of purchase, while others were multiple-response questions in order to ascertain their motivating factors. Additionally, one open-ended question was also incorporated to get further suggestions. This approach helped in collecting both measurable patterns and individual perspectives. The total number of respondents recorded was 422; however, the number of responses reported for individual categories differs due to non-mandatory responses in the survey.

4. Results and Inferences

The following section presents the key survey findings through a tabular representation. The whole data is attached in the appendix section.

4.1. Gender Distribution of Respondents:

Gender	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Female	258	64
Male	142	35
Others	2	0.5
Total	402	100

Out of 402 respondents, 64 % were females, 35% were males, and 0.5% selected others.

4.2. Age Distribution of Respondents:

Age	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
17 or below	34	8
18-30	296	72
31-40	29	7
41-50	31	8
51-60	11	3
61 and above	9	2
Total	410	100

Out of 410 respondents, the majority are from the age group 18-30 years, 8% are from each 17 or below and 41-50 years. 7 % are from the 31-40 age bracket, followed by the age group 51-60, counting 3%, and lastly, 2% are 61 years or above.

Each percentage reported reflects the proportion of respondents expressing a particular preference, and in this study, those reflect the values, motivations, and trade-offs shaping eco-friendly consumption. The data collected highlight these preferences across various aspects of eco-friendly purchasing behavior, revealing not only how often consumers engage with sustainable products but also the factors that influence their choices.

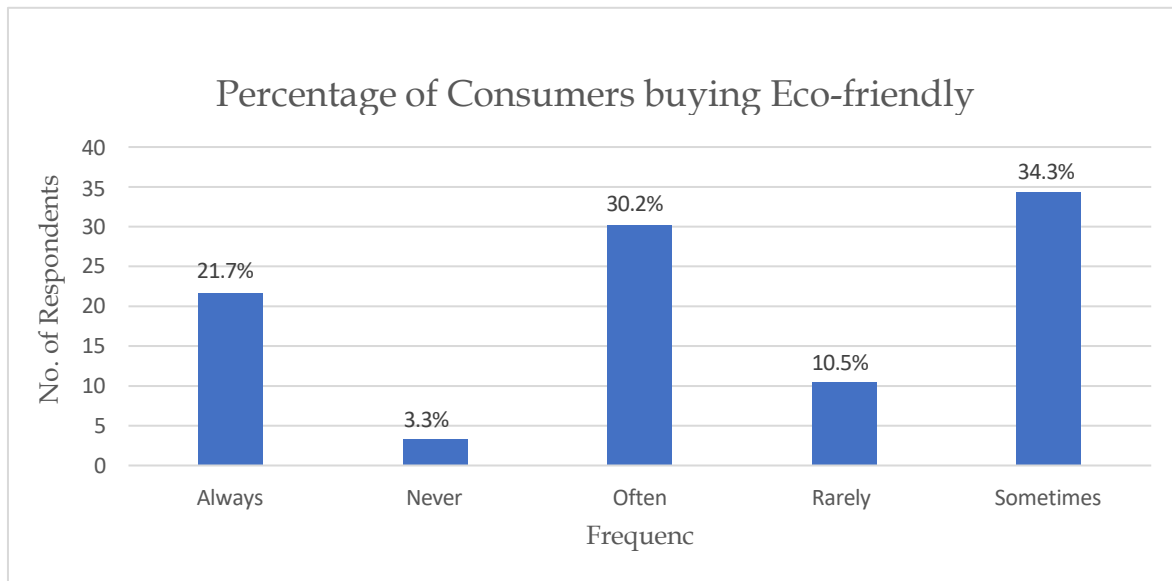
Figure 1: Consumer Purchase Trends for Eco-Friendly Products

Figure 1 represents how the respondents consider sustainability in their buying decisions. Of the 420 respondents, the largest number, 34.3%, reported that they sometimes consume environmentally friendly products, followed by 30.2% who chose 'Often.' Others answered 'Always' at 21.7%, 'Rarely' at 10.5%, while 3.3% said 'Never.'

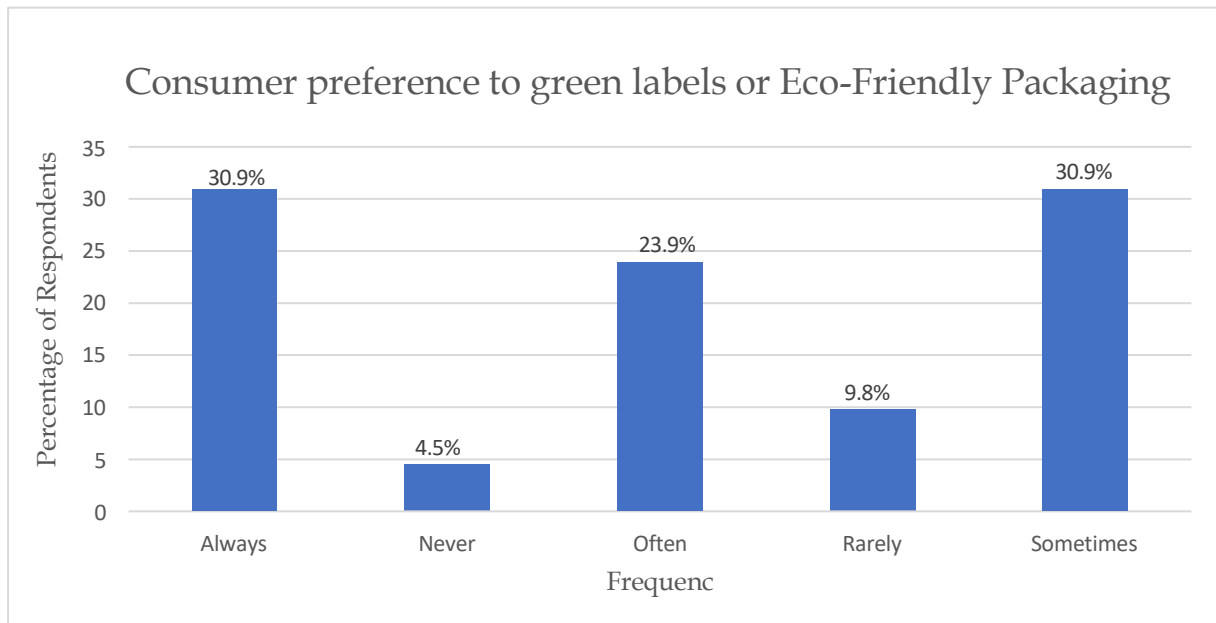
From a psychological viewpoint, this data indicates a combination of motivations, values, and external forces. The biggest bar, customers who purchase 'Sometimes' (34.3%), may be attributed to the fact that, although customers are aware of the sustainability of the products, they are constrained by factors such as budget, availability, and ease of access and use. The customers who purchase 'often' (30.2%) and 'always' (21.7%) categories may be a result of customers valuing and considering ecological issues related to sustainable consumption practices more seriously. The smaller 'Rarely' (10.5%) and 'Never' (3.3%) groups could be a result of a lack of awareness, disbelief in related advertising, and related external forces.

For a comprehensive understanding of these sets of data, we shall now move on to discuss another significant finding of these data in order to present a more vivid picture, exploring what factors promote these eco-friendly transactions.

Figure 2: Significance of Eco-Friendly Labels and Green Packaging to Consumers

Within recent years, eco-friendly packaging has become a common presence in the market, reflecting its growing integration into mainstream product offerings. According to a statement made by Huang (Huang, Li, and Kim, 2024), green labelling of products, also known as environmental labelling, refers to a process where labels and certifications on products are utilized to share information about a particular product's ecological impact on the environment, which may include emissions, energy efficiency, and sustainable use of resources. They not only share

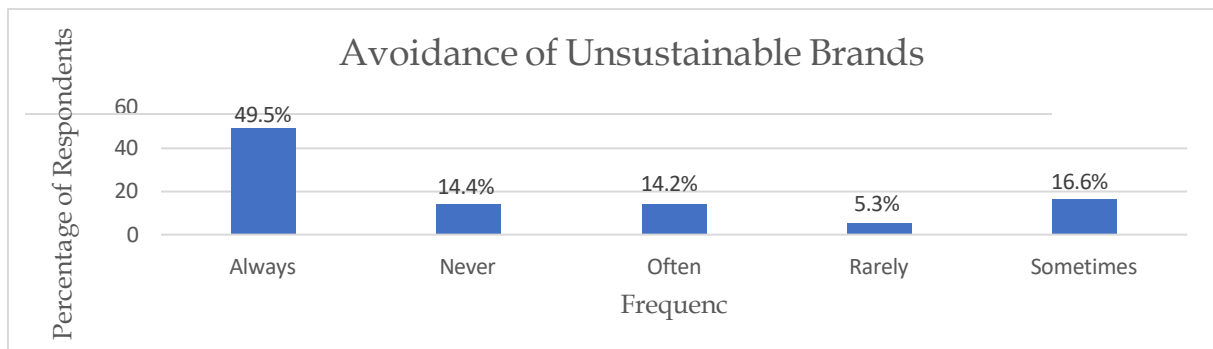
information but also represent a rationalization of concerns by members of society regarding issues of emissions and resource sustainability. Here is a graph demonstrating consumer reaction to these labels.



Results from Figure 2 evidently show that green packaging matters to the choices made by consumers, although the level of preference differs. Data from green labelling (N=418) shows that 30.9% of the respondents always take it into account, while 30.9% sometimes do. Additionally, 23.9% often take green labelling into account, while 9.8% and 4.5% rarely and never take.

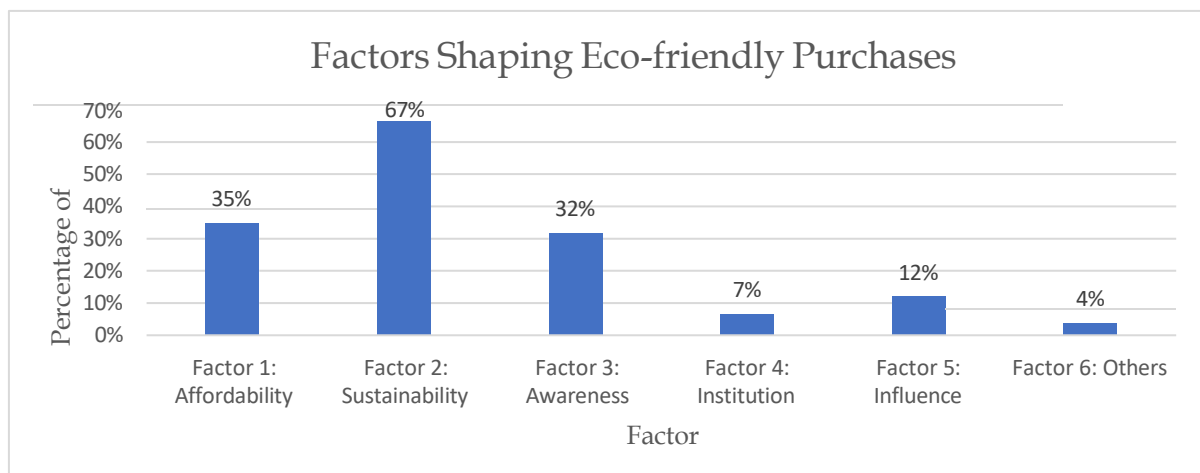
The existence of a large number of consumers in the 'Always' (30.9%) and 'Often' (23.9%) categories indicates that there has been concerted concern for the environment. It may also indicate that sustainability has become a determining criterion for a rapidly increasing number of consumers. The 'Sometimes' category (30.9%), which has a large number of consumers, indicates that there could be a conditional concern for the environment.

A small number of respondents answered 'Rarely' (9.8%) or 'Never' (4.5%) on who prefers eco-friendly packing; this implies that outright dismissal of the concept of sustainability is no longer the case. The overall outcome seems to indicate that mainstreaming of green preferences is on the way. The finding simply reinforces previous studies that environmental labelling promotes overall customer intentions to buy environmentally labelled products (Huang et al., 2024).

Figure 3: Behavioral Trends in Avoiding Unsustainable Brands

Analysis of the findings in Figure 3 shows that a substantial number of consumers generally tend to avoid those companies that negatively impact the environment. 'Always' was the choice of 49.5% of the consumers when it comes to avoiding companies that negatively impact the environment. 'Sometimes' was the choice of 16.6% of the total consumers. 'Never' was selected by 14.4%, while 'Often' was selected by 14.2% of the total consumers. Only 5.3% of the total consumers selected the choice option 'Rarely'.

These behavioral differences underscore the importance of identifying the underlying drivers that influence environmentally responsible purchasing decisions and are examined in depth in the next section.

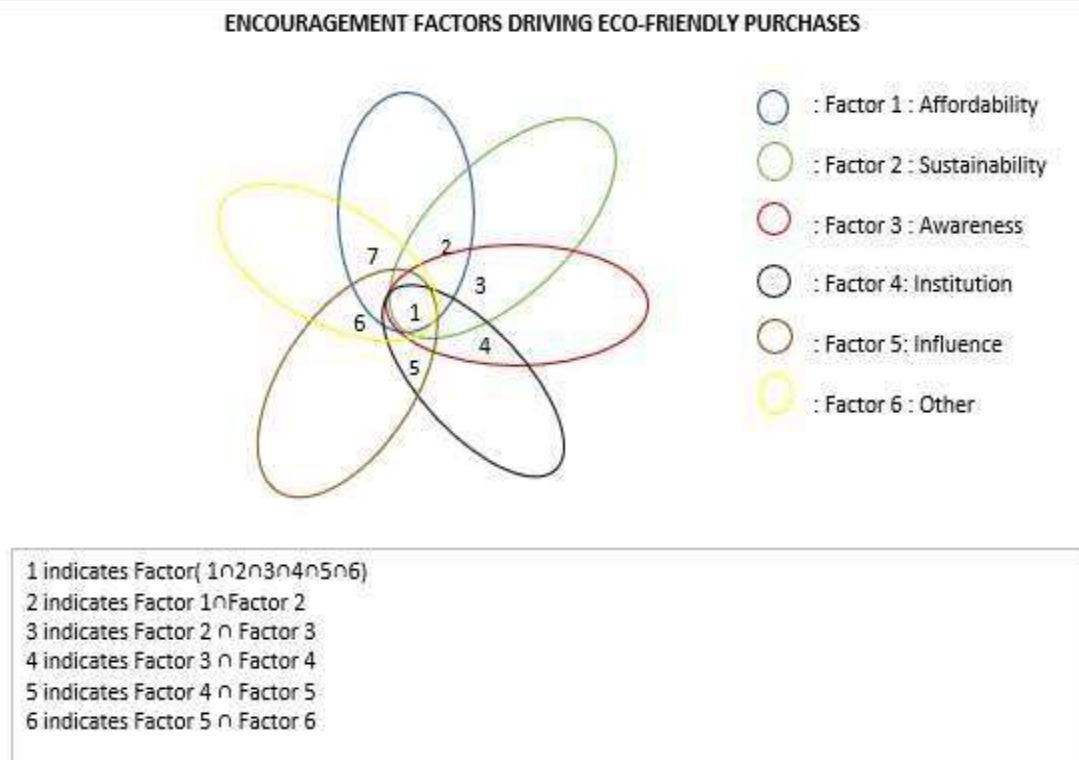
Figure 4: Factors Influencing Eco-friendly Purchases

In the personal factors surrounding the purchasing of eco-friendly goods, Sustainability was found to be mostly chosen, with 276 out of 415 participants, or 67%, followed by Affordability with 145 participants, or 35%, and Awareness with 132 participants, or 32%. The other factors, namely Influence, Institution, and Others, were significantly lower at 12%, 7%, and 4%, respectively, with 50, 27, and 16 respondents, respectively.

Regarding combinations involving two factors that allow a more nuanced

understanding of the determinants' joint influence on the green purchase decision, the topmost combination was Sustainability and Awareness, with a total of 98 participants (24%). Along with it, the next important combination was Affordability and Sustainability, with a total of 63 participants (15.18%). Combinations such as Awareness and Institution and Institution and Influence comprised only 3% and 2%, respectively, and no one selected all factors.

Figure 5: Encouragement Factors Driving Eco-Friendly Purchases



Among the personal considerations that impact the purchase of eco-friendly products (Figure 4), Sustainability shares the top position with 67% of the respondents stating that the environmentally positive impact of the product encourages their purchase. This identifies an increasing intrinsic need among consumers to do something positive for the well-being of the environment. A growing change has been noticed among consumers, turning their focus away from self-centered buying. Affordability, at the second position, sees 35% of the respondents.

Recognition of product benefits motivates 32% of respondents, indicating that informed understanding can encourage ethical consumption. In comparison, institutional promotion, social influence, and other external drivers exhibit relatively lower influence, accounting for 7%, 12%, and 4%, respectively. This suggests that personal evaluation of product benefits plays a more prominent role than external motivational cues in shaping consumer behavior.

To analyze the data in the context of combinations (Figure No.5), there are several patterns that are of interest when considering the decisions that consumers take. The

combination of sustainability and awareness (24%) illustrates that people with awareness are highly influenced by environmental values. The fact that awareness seems to support people's decisions to act on their values and make the right purchasing decisions with respect to the environment and sustainable production is an interesting point. The fact that there are people who are influenced by affordability and sustainability (15.18%) further supports the fact that people want to do the right thing, which can be environmentally sound, but only within the framework of affordability. The relatively lower effectiveness of other factor combinations may be attributed to influences beyond the variables examined in this study, such as limited responsiveness to institutional or external cues that were not captured within the study framework.

5. Conclusion

The exploration of sustainability and consumer choice finally uncovers how environmental consciousness is redefining the very notion of modern consumption. Eco-friendly behavior reflects conscious intention and practical action, showing that sustainable consumption is layered, deliberate, and meaningful. In this regard, it's easy to see how knowledge, ethical concern, and personal priorities interact, shaping choices beyond immediate convenience. These patterns highlight the many, sometimes overlapping, motivations guiding consumers, exposing complex, intertwined dynamics of sustainable behavior. Literature evidences that changes in social outlook, economic capacity, and environmental consciousness influence how consumer make their purchasing decisions (Purcărea et al., 2022). This evidence shows how structural and contextual factors influence sustainable consumption. In addition, it is further influenced by attitude, emotion, and personal priority, reflecting dimensions of psychology behind consumers' eco-friendly decisions (Trudel, 2019).

Drawing from the primary survey conducted pan-India, the study depicted genuine insights shaped by real experiences of consumers and their fine purchase motivations, offering a realistic understanding of how individuals navigate sustainable choices within diverse contexts. The findings bring out the fact that sustainability remains the most influential driver. Thus, it reflects genuine environmental concern that continues to guide everyday decisions. Affordability is second in rank, which depicts how ethical intentions are oftentimes at the mercy of practical negations that come into play during real purchasing. Awareness has also been highlighted as one of the major factors that outline the behaviors; thus, it is expected that a knowledgeable consumer would apply ecological values in daily life, recognize them, value them, and act upon them appropriately.

Key combinations, such as sustainability combined with awareness or affordability, reveal that environmentally conscious decisions deepen when personal values, knowledge, and feasibility align. In contrast, external factors such as social influence

or institutional promotion impinge, but only relatively lightly. These findings together outline principles leading to eco-friendly consumer behavior and set the stage for larger reflections on sustainable decision-making. Results, therefore, are aligned with Islam and Khan (2024), where it has been affirmed that consumers' cost, value perception, and environmental awareness influence their green purchasing decisions significantly. Zeynalova and Namazova (2022) also identified price as one of the important factors that convinced consumers to consider green purchases. At the same time, previous research suggests that price is not the only barrier; perceived product quality, convenience, and brand loyalty continue to affect consumers in making a choice for eco-friendly alternatives. This gives further insight into the behavioral tendencies that the present study has portrayed. However, the distinctive feature of this research is that it rests exclusively on primary data collected from Indian consumers, thereby offering insightfully real purchasing behavior within the Indian context.

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10. Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

1. Email ID

2. Phone

3. Gender

- Male
- Female
- Other

4. Age

- 17 or below

- 18 to 30
- 31 to 40
- 41 to 50
- 51 to 60
- 61 and above

5. Educational Qualification

- Secondary
- Higher Secondary
- Diploma
- Graduation
- Post Graduation
- PhD
- Professional Degree

6. Do you buy things made from eco-friendly or recycled materials?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

7. Do you look for eco-friendly labels or green packaging while shopping? (e.g., recyclable, biodegradable, plastic-free)

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

8. If a company is known for harming the environment (like deforestation or pollution), would you avoid buying from them?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

9. What encourages you (or would encourage you) the most to buy eco-friendly products?

- It fits my budget (affordable)
- It's good for the environment (biodegradable/sustainable)
- I am aware of its benefits (learned through ads, social media, or campaigns)
- My school/college/workplace promotes it
- My family/friends use such products

Other

Please

Specify

10. Any suggestions or ideas on how people can be encouraged to shop more consciously and choose eco-friendly products?