



Evaluation of Consumer Perception and Behaviour Toward Eco Friendly Products within the Urban Context of Salem City

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ABSTRACT

The research assesses the perception and consumer behaviour of eco-friendly products and the urban setting of Salem City in order to establish how the awareness, attitude and perception is translated into sustainable purchasing behaviour. The degradation of the environment and the change in lifestyle has added a great deal of interest to products which makes minimal ecological impact however the knowledge-to-purchase behaviour among consumers is still wide in the developing world. The study assumes an exploratory type of design that is backed up by the quantitative method of analysis in order to absorb the multidimensional characteristics of the eco-conscious consumption. Primary data of the study were obtained from eco-friendly consumers using structured questionnaire circulated among 361 respondents who were selected through snowball sampling. The discriminant analysis and Hierarchical regression statistical applications were utilized in rating the consumers in terms of their environmental orientation. The findings validated the existence of perception as a major factor affecting behaviour and consumers with awareness of personal and social benefits of green products have more consistency in their attitudes and behaviours.

1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of environmental degradation has become one of the most acute concerns of the modern societies as economic expansion and industrialisation keep exhausting natural resources and raising the level of pollution. This imbalance in ecology has led policy makers and consumers alike to reflect and review on the sustainability of production and consumption trends. The idea of eco-friendly products has become extremely popular in this changing global environment since it represents a deliberate effort to make consumption paired with taking care of the environment. Customers are slowly becoming aware that their buying decisions are not necessarily based on individual preferences

but are social actions which either help in conservation or depletion of the natural resources. This awareness is seen in an emerging literature on green consumerism but in reality there is a discrepancy between theory and practice in terms of the transfer of knowledge into behaviour. It is this disconnect between awareness and behaviour that constitutes the basis of inquiry the present study was based upon.

In India, the shift towards sustainable consumption is starting to take momentum as urbanisation transforms the way of life and orientation of the middle-class consumers. Raised awareness over the issue of pollution, waste and depletion of resources has risen due to increased literacy, computer connection and exposure to

anti-pollution campaigns. The case of Salem City is one of such emerging urban areas where the awareness of sustainability is seen but still fragmented. The growing retail and educational mix in the city offers a rich environment in which perception-behaviour interaction has been studied in markets that are yet to develop a self-conscious environmental mix. Consumer perception is important to understand as it is perception that will dictate the way people will interpret product information, compare the benefits and develop trust towards the eco-friendly statements. It is a contrivance of negotiations among the consumers on the regard of the environment versus economic viability. Perception-behaviour relationship is thus a dynamic process that is influenced by both psychological and situational variables.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of consumer perception of eco-friendly products has been one of the most prominent topics in sustainability studies since it answers how people make beliefs and weigh the environmental features before deciding whether to buy. Perception is the cognitive selective tool that helps the consumers decode the messages regarding ecological benefits, product safety and brand credibility.

As Aertsens et al. (2009) and Chen (2009) note knowledge, trust and being exposed to environmental communication shape perception towards green products to a large extent. In a scenario where the consumer has sufficient knowledge on ecological impact as well as seeing authenticity in the claims that the products make, consumers tend to create a perception that environmental responsibility is equalized to personal gain. This image usually arises as a result of the combination of information stimuli like eco-labels, packaging and corporate image as a whole that build the meaning behind eco-friendliness in the mind of the consumer. The positive perception leads to the likelihood of favourable attitudes but does not necessarily determine the purchase behaviour due to the confounding variables such as price and accessibility.

The degree of environmental awareness on purchasing goods in line with behaviour displays the degree of actual purchasing behaviour towards eco-sustainable products. The theory of planned behaviour hypothesis of behavioural research suggests that intention and future action is determined by attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control.

Empirical findings of Hughner et al. (2007) and Paul and Rana (2012) suggest that consumers who have strong pro-environmental attitudes are more likely to reflect stronger willingness to purchase green products, but are sensitive to situational limitations. Behaviour in emerging economies is easily swayed due to what is convenient and what is not, as opposed to what is believed in based on these factors (convenience and disposable income) and products. This duality is the reason why a consumer can be an ideological believer in sustainability, but make a non-green decision when presented with a price distinction or scarce availability product. Therefore, to comprehend behaviour it is important to combine psychological constructs and socio-economic realities.

A number of studies have also considered the intermediate role played by trust to enhance the relationship between perception and behaviour.

Joshi and Rahman (2015) observed that the behavioural commitment is undermined by scepticism in regard to the green marketing claims particularly when the consumers do not believe the credibility of the environmental certifications.

Nguyen et al. (2017) have found that perceived credibility is increased by transparency and regular communication that strengthens the behavioural intention. Environmental concern tends to be mixed with the perception of quality and safety and therefore consumers can explain why they made eco-friendly purchases not only on the moral level but on the personal one. This blending of self-interested and socially interested motives is what characterizes the contemporary green consumerism and can point to the psychological complexity of sustainable decisions.

Despite the fact that literature presented in developed nations offering a sufficient amount of information on green consumption, there is a lack of empirical studies in the Indian cities of middle rank. The majority of the current literature focuses on major cities like Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru, where the prospect of being exposed to the discourse of sustainability is more prevalent. As a transitional urban market, Salem City has not been judged empirically as its consumer diversity rises. The few studies that have been conducted in similar situations have relied on descriptive techniques and there has been a lapse with analytic techniques which involve high level of statistical tools. Moreover, very little consideration has been made focusing on the issue of perception as a determinant of behaviour using multivariate frameworks that explain the overall impact of the combination of cognitive and demographic factors.

3. RESEARCH GAP

The review revealed that the existence and awareness as well as the attitude towards the eco friendly products have been extensively researched however there is lack of investigation into the stake of these variables in the smaller urban centres in the emerging economies. There is inadequate literature in explaining the interaction between perception, demographic and contextual factors that result in behavioural outcomes. Besides, there are limited studies which combine both cognitive and behavioural constructs based on hierarchical regression to establish layered relationships. The empirical works which capture the segmentation of consumers in Indian context where cultural and economic diversities play a role in shaping environmental decisions are wanting. The current study can help to fill these research gaps because it provides information about how perception turns into action in the context of emerging urban markets that switch to sustainable consumption.

4. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The main problems of this work is that the gap between perception of consumers and

behavioural change is consistently preserved within the realities of urban setting in the development of developing cities like Salem City. The understanding of the issue of environmental degradation and sustainable living has increased massively among the Indian consumers over the last ten years but the increase has not been matched by a matching proportional change in the behaviour. Most customers have a good response to environmental protection and their readiness to use eco-friendly products but their buying strategy is still inefficient. This contradiction points to the traditional attitude-behaviour gap that constrained the development of healthy consumption markets. These factors in interaction with the cognitive and social forces complicate the problem when it is combined with a cost of the product, its availability and perceived authenticity. A weak trust and low purchase intention which may lead to less willingness to buy, occur when consumers are unsure that the companies claim to be eco-friendly.

The problem is especially topical in an intermediate city such as Salem, as the consumer population exists in an intermediate level of awareness when the exposure to information becomes more active and behavioural reinforcement is low. This is aggravated by the fact that market accessibility, low brand visibility and inadequate consumer education contribute to this issue. The majority of the studies on sustainable consumption in India have concentrated on the well-known metro-areas in the country which has neglected the smaller metropolis which are developing economically and culturally. The lack of localised evidence complicates the process of comprehending how perception and socio-economic variables interact so as to affect the actual buying decisions. The study attempts to assess the behavioural antecedent as perception involving moderating variable that limits with eco-friendly buying patterns and how variations determine the behavioural patterns in Salem City.

5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To assess the dependence of consumer

perception and the real purchasing behaviour towards environmentally friendly products at the urban areas of Salem City.

- To determine the main demographic and psychological characteristics those determine the degree at which perception will be converted into the consistent eco-friendly consumption behaviour within urban consumers.

6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This significance aims to comprehend the effect of consumer perception on behavioural involvement in the consumption of eco-friendly products in an emerging urban lifestyle. With intense environmental issues, issue of sustainable consumption has gained a severe priority among business owners as well as government leaders. The study is useful because it offers a piece of empirical research on the transformability of awareness and perception into regularly committed behaviour among the city consumers. It targets a new market niche that indicates the changing equilibrium between the green agenda and the materialistic demands of consumption by concentrating on Salem City.

The results contribute to the understanding of the psychological, social, and economic aspects promoting and deterring green consumerism which provides a better idea of how the mechanism driving sustainable shopping occurs. The study is practical importance to the marketers who are interested in positioning the eco-friendly products in the best way possible. The learning of this research can give companies direction in the process of developing pricing and marketing strategies that are consistent with consumer expectations and values, and hence enhancing market penetration by green products.

The results can guide policymakers to develop evidence-based policies to design the awareness program, certification systems and educational initiatives to narrow the intention-action gap. The research contributes to the discussion of sustainable consumption in certain fresh urban economies such as Salem City through its practical contributions.

7. METHODOLOGY

The current study employed the exploratory research design to appreciate the connection between perception of consumers and their behaviour on eco-friendly products within the urban environment of Salem City. The major emphasis is to capture the experience of consumers and measure the psychological and demographic impacts to its purchase intentions which claim to be eco-friendly. The research collected first hand information using structured questionnaires and those will be used to gauge the perception, awareness, attitude and behavioural pattern of real consumers. The questions in the questionnaire were based on already tested scales to gain reliability and the responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale after which the extent to which a person agreed with different statements about eco-friendly consumption was established.

The study target population will be urban customers of Salem City that are conscious or have bought eco-friendly products. Since there is no organized database containing such consumers, snowball method of was used for selecting the sample which involves. The respondents sampled were 361 in number which is acceptable as the minimum sample size calculated based on Cochran formula associated with large populations under a 95 percent confidence level with a 5 percent margin of error. The advanced multivariate statistical tools were used to extract the dimensional and predictive insights using data analysis.

8. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OVERVIEW

The data gathered by the structured questionnaire was subjected to systematic analysis in order to be able to determine the underlying behaviour patterns and links between consumer perception and the purchasing behaviour in the case of eco-friendly consumers. This statistical analysis is aimed at going beyond the descriptive knowledge and determining the predictive power of the factors related to the perception. The analysis model combines both hierarchical regression and discriminant analysis

which enables dimensional validation and classification of behaviours.

The contributions of the perception variables to the behavioural outcomes were analyzed through hierarchical regression when the influences of demographics were removed and discrimination analysis allowed organizing the consumers into specific groups according to their levels of behaviour. The results of the reliability test of the key constructs are presented in following section with clear-cut interpretations of the each of the analytical phases. The results and their theoretical consequences are thoroughly described in the interpretation of each table.

The reliability test reveals that all key constructs employed in the study have high levels of internal consistency as all of them have a higher value of Cronbach' alpha of more than 0.85, the recommended value of 0.70 in the social science study. The two main constructs in the model are consumer perception and purchase behaviour

Table 1: Reliability Statistics of Constructs

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Consumer Perception	8	0.892
Environmental Awareness	6	0.864
Purchase Behaviour	7	0.881
Attitude toward Eco-products	5	0.853

Source: Primary Data; Note: All Constructs are Highly Reliable

which demonstrate the greatest reliability coefficients meaning that respondents shared the same opinion throughout all the statements in regards to them. The findings affirm that the measurement tool to be applied in the data collection is statistically reliable to carry out multivariate analysis.

In the hierarchical regression analysis, it was found that demographic variables in Model 1 explain 21.40 percent of the consumer behaviour variance and this implied that socio-demographic variables moderate have an influence on eco-friendly consumer buying behaviour. In Model 2, the inclusion of perception and environmental

Table 2: Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Behavioural Prediction

Model	Predictor Variables	R ²	ΔR ²	F-value	Significance (p)
Model 1	Age, Gender, Education, Income	0.214	—	18.42	0.001
Model 2	Consumer Perception, Environmental Awareness	0.482	0.268	36.77	0.001

consideration, the explanatory power was very significant to reach 48.20 percent indicating that the association of cognitive variables can predict behavioural variance by an extra 26.80 percent. The regression model proves that perception and awareness collaborate in exerting influence on behavioural involvement on eco-friendly products. This result defines that perception is stronger determinant than demographic status when it comes to the development of sustainable behaviour. The more aware customers who have positive perception present a high degree of similarity between troubled expressed expression and purchase behaviour. The finding also supports the theoretical supposition that

cognitive aspects are the proximal determinants of action and demographics are the enabling conditions.

The discriminant analysis has shown that there are two statistically significant functions which serve well in distinguishing consumers into their purchasing behaviour that involves eco-friendly products. The initial dimension with an eigenvalue of 0.714 and a canonical correlation of 0.647 accounts for a significant percentage of variance and constitutes the best dimension of discrimination. The correlation is low and the Chi-square is significant which means that this function is effective in distinguishing high and moderate or low perception and awareness of

Table 3: Discriminant Analysis of Consumer Behaviour Based on Perception and Awareness

Function	Eigenvalue	Canonical Correlation	Wilks' Lambda	Chi-square	df	Sig. (p)
1	0.714	0.647	0.577	92.36	6	0.001
2	0.293	0.474	0.789	46.17	4	0.003

consumers. The second role is still significant and reflects other behavioural differences in terms of social responsibility and sensitivity to affordability.

The structure matrix showed that perception variables of trust in the authenticity of the product and belief in environmental benefits yielded the greatest discriminant loadings which mean that they are more dominant in terms of their ability to explain variation in behaviour. The consumers who had a high level of utilization and perception were more likely to reflect stable eco-friendly behaviour and less environmental conscious consumers were inconsistent in their buying behaviour. These classification results showed that 85.60 percent of cases were correctly classified showing high predictive accuracy of the discriminant model. These results support that perception is the key factor of behavioural segmentation in the eco-friendly market. Awareness has been found to be a complementary driver which increased behavioural commitment when there was confidence in environmental claims.

This exists of segmented groups of consumers indicating that sustainable marketing needs to be customized, one segment is sensitive to a sense of ethical marketing, another segment is sensitive to product credibility and the other segment is sensitive to the notion of affordability and convenience. This segmentation insight offers a basis of managerial intervention as well as policy interventions geared in enhancing sustainable consumption in Salem City.

9. RESULTS

- Customers who had confidence in certification labels and had the information about the environmental quality of products perceived greater likelihood of purchasing the products on a regular basis.
- The people who had less awareness exhibited inconsistent purchasing behaviour whilst they could still appreciate the concept of environmental concerns.
- Education and income had their impact on the awareness indirectly through increasing

access to information and readiness to pay on sustainable alternatives.

- The younger consumers were more emotionally engaged in the problems of the environment but their behavioural consistency depended on the possibility to afford and see the products in the market.
- The findings affirm that perception is the most decisive aspect contributing to behaviour and the awareness reinforces commitment by enhancing individual and social values.
- The inability in authenticity of the product and expensive prices is also a hindrance that does not allow an entire shift of awareness to the patterns of regular behaviours.
- The Salem city environment indicates that the city is in a period of transition in terms of awareness that is highly increasing yet the stability of behaviour has not been attained.
- The results are of the importance of increased integration of product communication, credibility, and accessibility in order to enhance sustainable purchase intentions.

10. SUGGESTIONS

10.1 Increase Access to Information: To gain consumer confidence, retailers and marketers are expected to make information about the environmental contribution and certification of the eco-friendly products clear and visible.

10.2 Create Product Credibility: Have well identified certification procedures and put certified eco-labels on products to avoid scepticism by consumers regarding fake environmental promises.

10.3 Increase Consumer Education: Coordinate awareness, school programs and neighborhood workshops to learn the concept of the sustainability beyond superficial knowledge.

10.4 Enhance Affordability: Manufacturers would need to look into more cost-effective manufacturing processes and subsidizes policy-formulated in a bid to render eco-friendly products affordable to more people.

10.5 Promotions on Local Retail Availability: Maximize the exposure of the products in the

urban retail stores to make sustainable products easier to use in day-to-day life.

10.6 Encourage Value-Promotions: This is a marketing communication strategy that emphasizes on promoting emotional and moral satisfaction but not prices alone to create an uncompromising loyalty among the environmental-friendly consumers.

11. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that consumer perception is the greatest predictor of green purchasing behaviour in the Salem City. This relationship is strengthened by the awareness that strengthens conviction whereas demographic variables contribute just as support elements. The hierarchical regression analysis has validated the perception inducing factors which have significant predictability over perception intention and the descriptive predictors of behavioural intention, as the discriminant

analysis revealed a system of consumer segments with different levels of commitment. Based on the findings, clarity indicates that sustainable consumption is not only informed but depends more on perceived authenticity, affordability and personal relevance of greener products.

The consumers in Salem City are experiencing a behavioural change that can be defined by the increase of awareness and a slow attitudinal change towards sustainability values. The findings support the significance of open communication and value-based marketing in the transformation of environmental issue into daily routine. The research offers a direction upon which marketers can collaborate towards the consolidation of the core of sustainable consumer culture under which personal gains and environmental concern converge to be part of the motivational driving force of purchasing behaviour. ■

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