

Analysing the Impact of ESG Practices on Consumer Behaviour: The Mediating Role of CSR in the Green Cosmetics Sector in India

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to develop a structural relational model that examines how environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices influence consumer behavior, with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) acting as a mediating variable. The study specifically explores this dynamic in the context of green cosmetic products, an emerging sector in India driven by environmentally and ethically conscious consumers. Data was gathered from consumers in Dehradun, with the intention to draw broader implications for the pan-India market. The study employed STATISTICA 10 and LISREL for statistical and structural modeling analysis. Findings indicate that ESG practices significantly shape CSR strategies, which in turn positively influence consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. Among the ESG components, environmental practices showed the strongest direct and mediated influence. The study emphasizes the role of CSR as a strategic bridge between corporate ESG performance and consumer engagement, suggesting that firms must clearly communicate and integrate their ESG commitments to influence consumer behavior effectively.

Keywords: Consumer Behaviour, Corporate social responsibility , ESG goals , ESG practices

1. Introduction

In the contemporary Indian business landscape, there is a growing consensus on the critical importance of integrating ethical, sustainable, and transparent practices into core strategic decisions. This shift in business thinking stems from a broader recognition of environmental

vulnerabilities, social equity, and the governance mechanisms that influence both institutional credibility and consumer trust. Specifically, in urban centers like Dehradun, which is witnessing a rising tide of environmentally conscious consumers, the integration of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles into business operations is becoming not only a moral imperative but also a strategic necessity.

As India undergoes a transition toward sustainability-driven development, businesses are increasingly expected to align their operations with responsible environmental and social practices. This transformation can be attributed to a combination of organizational responsibility, evolving consumer values, cultural norms, and increasing awareness regarding environmental degradation and ethical consumerism. Governmental policies and regulatory frameworks have further catalyzed this movement by institutionalizing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and introducing ESG-based disclosure guidelines for listed companies. The Ministry of Corporate Affairs in India made it mandatory for qualifying companies to report CSR initiatives under Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013, which laid the groundwork for deeper engagement with sustainability practices.

In Dehradun, known for its rich ecological heritage and educational ecosystem, consumer awareness regarding sustainable and ethical consumption is growing, particularly in the cosmetic industry. There is a notable rise in the demand for green cosmetic products—products that are environmentally friendly, cruelty-free, ethically sourced, and safe for human use. This trend reflects a significant shift in consumer behavior, where purchase decisions are increasingly influenced by companies' environmental actions, social engagements, and governance practices.

Consumers in this region are not merely passive buyers; they are informed participants who expect businesses to demonstrate ethical behavior, environmental stewardship, and social inclusivity. This shift signifies a departure from conventional business models toward purpose-driven strategies that place CSR and ESG at the core of organizational identity. The evolving consumer mindset, especially among younger demographics in Tier-2 cities like Dehradun, mirrors broader global trends where ethical and sustainable consumption is becoming a norm rather than a niche.

While CSR has historically served as a foundational pillar for corporate ethics and stakeholder engagement in India, ESG introduces a more quantifiable, performance-based approach that allows stakeholders—including consumers—to evaluate companies based on their environmental impact, social responsibility, and governance effectiveness. Though closely related, CSR and ESG differ in their scope and application; CSR is often value-driven and internally motivated, whereas ESG is metrics-driven and externally assessed. Importantly, CSR can serve as a strategic mediator, translating ESG principles into actionable initiatives that resonate with consumers, particularly in sectors like green cosmetics where brand trust and transparency are paramount. The Indian government and regulatory bodies, such as the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), have further emphasized ESG disclosures through Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reports (BRSR), reflecting the shift toward responsible business conduct. In parallel, consumers are increasingly using this information to make purchasing decisions aligned with their personal values—focusing not only on product benefits but also on corporate ethics.

This study is rooted in the local context of Dehradun and extends its relevance to a pan-India perspective. It investigates the relationship between consumer behavior, ESG practices, and CSR initiatives within the green cosmetic industry. Unlike earlier research based in Taiwan and Indonesia, this study draws on insights from Indian consumers to examine how ethical awareness and purchase intentions shape corporate actions. Specifically, it explores how consumer behavior influences ESG outcomes through the mediating role of CSR—a gap underexplored in existing literature, especially in emerging markets like India. Ultimately, this research addresses the growing demand for sustainable and ethical business models, offering strategic insights into how companies can align their ESG and CSR efforts with evolving consumer expectations around transparency, accountability, and environmental responsibility.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Environmental Practices and Consumer Behaviour

Environmental sustainability has increasingly become a strategic imperative for organizations aiming to align with ethically conscious consumers. In industries like cosmetics, where product origin and production transparency matter, environmental practices such as eco-friendly

sourcing, biodegradable packaging, and reduced emissions can significantly influence consumer attitudes and behaviours (Joshi & Rahman, 2015). These practices not only respond to ecological concerns but also function as a competitive differentiator in a saturated market.

Research indicates that consumers exhibit stronger purchase intentions toward brands that demonstrate environmentally responsible behaviour, particularly when such efforts are visible and credible (Nguyen et al., 2020). In the green cosmetics sector, consumers often associate eco-friendly practices with product safety, ethical standards, and long-term personal and environmental benefits (Paul & Rana, 2012). In emerging markets like India, where environmental consciousness is growing steadily, such associations can powerfully shape consumer expectations and loyalty (Saxena & Khandelwal, 2012).

However, the effectiveness of environmental initiatives often hinges on how these practices are framed and communicated. This is where Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) plays a vital role. CSR not only serves as a communication channel but also strengthens consumer trust by legitimizing environmental claims and connecting them to broader societal goals (Martínez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013). CSR initiatives that highlight environmental stewardship tend to increase consumer confidence, especially when they are consistent and transparent (Kumar & Christodouloupoulou, 2014).

In the context of Dehradun—a city known for its ecological sensitivity—consumers are particularly responsive to brands that demonstrate genuine environmental concern. When such environmental practices are embedded within CSR frameworks, they are perceived as more authentic and impactful, thereby strengthening consumer purchase intentions.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Corporate environmental practices have a positive influence on consumer behavior toward green cosmetic products, and this relationship is mediated by the organization's CSR activities.

2.2 Social Practices and Consumer Behaviour

Social practices refer to a firm's initiatives toward human rights, labour standards, fair trade, community development, and employee welfare. These practices significantly affect how consumers perceive a brand's ethical credibility and influence their behavioural responses, especially in sectors like green cosmetics that are closely tied to personal well-being and ethical

sourcing (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). Modern consumers increasingly prefer brands that not only provide quality products but also uphold social justice and community-oriented values. In particular, when companies demonstrate fair labour practices, support gender equality, or invest in local community upliftment, they tend to garner favourable responses from socially aware consumers (Mohr & Webb, 2005). Socially responsible practices enhance emotional and psychological associations with brands, reinforcing positive attitudes that can lead to increased customer loyalty and purchase intention (Chatterjee, 2009). In a country like India—diverse, socially dynamic, and increasingly vocal about equity and justice—such practices resonate strongly, especially with the younger demographic that values brand activism and inclusivity.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives serve as the conduit through which these social efforts are institutionalized and communicated to the public. A brand that transparently embeds social practices within its CSR strategy often gains higher trustworthiness and consumer respect (Fatma, Rahman, & Khan, 2015). CSR acts as a platform that not only validates these practices but also connects them with broader consumer values, amplifying their impact on purchase intention and brand loyalty (He & Li, 2011). In the Dehradun context—where educational institutions, NGOs, and socially active communities thrive—consumers tend to be especially responsive to businesses that contribute to inclusive growth and community well-being. Social initiatives, when perceived as authentic and well-integrated into CSR programs, increase the likelihood of green cosmetic brands being chosen by ethically inclined consumers.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Corporate social practices have a positive influence on consumer behavior toward green cosmetic products, and this relationship is mediated by the organization's CSR activities.

2.3 Governance Practices and Consumer Behavior

Governance practices encompass a company's internal systems, ethical leadership, board structure, transparency, compliance, and accountability mechanisms. These practices determine how responsibly and transparently a company is managed—attributes that are increasingly valued by socially conscious consumers (Aguilera et al., 2007). Effective governance instils trust, signalling to consumers that the brand operates with integrity and is less likely to engage in exploitative or greenwashing behaviours. Good governance serves as a

foundation for sustainable corporate behaviour. It assures stakeholders that environmental and social efforts are backed by genuine institutional commitment rather than being superficial marketing tactics (Jo & Harjoto, 2011). In the Indian context—where consumer trust can be fragile due to frequent corporate scandals or misinformation—strong governance mechanisms can differentiate authentic brands from opportunistic ones.

For green cosmetic brands, governance is especially important. Consumers are becoming increasingly aware of ingredient transparency, ethical sourcing, animal testing policies, and data privacy in digital marketing. Governance indicators such as ethical advertising, fair disclosure, responsible innovation, and grievance redressal mechanisms contribute to shaping a positive brand image and purchase confidence (Michelon & Parbonetti, 2012). Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) acts as a vehicle for translating these governance values into consumer-facing narratives. Transparent CSR disclosures, third-party certifications, stakeholder engagement reports, and adherence to governance codes build legitimacy and influence consumer behavior positively (Brammer & Pavelin, 2006). Through CSR, governance practices become more visible and impactful in shaping customer trust and behavioral intention.

In a region like Dehradun, where a large educated population is sensitive to green and ethical claims, brands with transparent governance practices—when mediated through credible CSR—are more likely to earn consumer loyalty and trust.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Corporate governance practices have a positive influence on consumer behavior toward green cosmetic products, and this relationship is mediated by the organization's CSR activities.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study follows a quantitative research design aimed at exploring the relationship between Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) practices, Consumer Behavior, and the mediating role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) within the context of green cosmetic products. The research is designed to test a structural model that examines how ESG practices impact consumer purchase intentions, with CSR acting as a mediating variable. The primary

focus is on consumers in Uttarakhand, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas like Dehradun, Haridwar, Nainital, and Haldwani, with broader implications for the Indian market. By employing a quantitative approach, this study intends to provide empirical insights into the evolving dynamics of sustainability and consumer behavior in the Indian green cosmetics market.

3.2 Target Population and Sampling

The population for this study consists of consumers from Uttarakhand, a region chosen for its growing awareness and consumption of eco-friendly and sustainable products. The study focuses on the residents of Dehradun, Haridwar, Nainital, and Haldwani, as these districts represent a mix of urban and semi-urban consumers who are becoming increasingly conscious of environmental and social issues. To ensure a representative sample, 500 respondents were selected using stratified random sampling. Stratification was based on factors such as age, gender, income, and education level, ensuring that the sample accurately represents the diverse demographic segments of the region. This method ensures that the findings are generalizable to the broader population, with implications for green cosmetic consumption across India.

3.3 Data Collection Method

Primary data for this research were collected through a structured questionnaire, which was distributed both online (via Google Forms) and offline (paper-based surveys) to ensure accessibility for a wide range of participants. The questionnaire included items designed to measure key variables: Environmental Practices, Social Practices, Governance Practices, CSR Initiatives, and Consumer Behavior (including brand trust, attitudes, and purchase intentions). The questions were based on validated scales drawn from prior research and adapted to fit the context of green cosmetics. A pilot study was initially conducted with 30 respondents from Dehradun to test the clarity and reliability of the questionnaire, with necessary refinements made based on feedback. The data collection took place over a period of two months, from January to March 2025, ensuring a sufficient sample size for statistical analysis.

3.4 Research Instruments

The research instruments used to measure the constructs were drawn from established scales in the literature. The Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) practices were measured

using scales adapted from the works of Fatemi et al. (2018) and Michelon & Parbonetti (2012). CSR Initiatives were measured using Carroll's (1991) model of Corporate Social Responsibility and the scale developed by Brammer & Pavelin (2006), which captures various aspects of a company's social responsibility initiatives. To assess Consumer Behavior, items were adapted from Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior, particularly focusing on purchase intention, as well as Chaudhuri & Holbrook's (2001) model of brand trust. A 5-point Likert scale was employed for each item, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), to gauge respondents' attitudes and behaviors towards green cosmetic products.

3.5 Analytical Tools

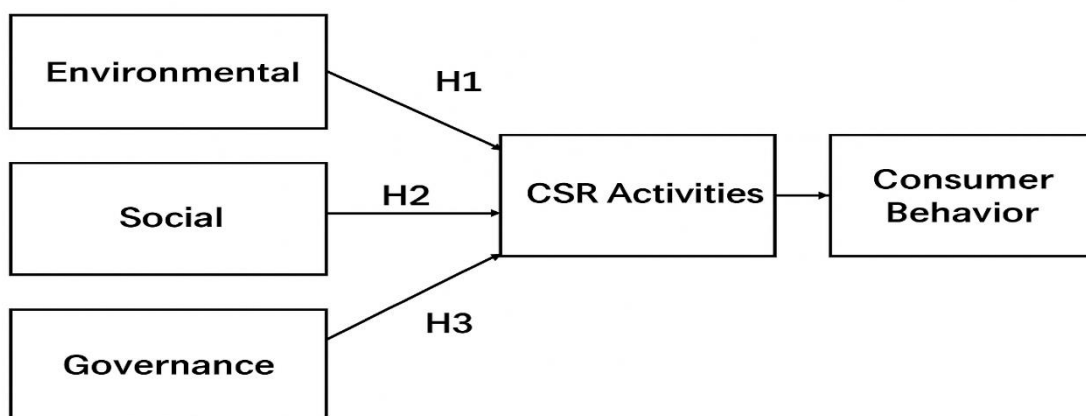
The collected data were analyzed using SPSS 26.0 for descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, and correlation testing. To test the hypothesized relationships and examine the mediating effect of CSR, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were performed using AMOS 24.0 and LISREL 10.2. CFA was first used to confirm the validity of the measurement model by assessing the factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR) values. Following that, SEM was employed to examine the structural relationships between the ESG practices, CSR, and consumer behavior. This approach allows for the testing of direct and indirect effects, ensuring that the study's hypotheses were rigorously evaluated.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

The reliability of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with values exceeding 0.70 for all constructs, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. To ensure validity, both construct validity and discriminant validity were tested. Construct validity was confirmed through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), which demonstrated that the measurement model fits the data well. Discriminant validity was established through the use of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR) metrics, ensuring that the constructs were distinct from one another. Additionally, content validity was ensured through expert reviews and feedback during the pilot testing phase, confirming that the questionnaire appropriately captured the variables of interest.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

This research adhered to ethical standards throughout the data collection process. All participants were informed about the nature of the study and their right to confidentiality and anonymity. Informed consent was obtained from each respondent prior to participation, ensuring that they were aware of the purpose of the study and their ability to withdraw at any time without penalty. The data were anonymized to protect the privacy of respondents, and no personally identifiable information was collected. The research was conducted in full compliance with ethical guidelines set by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Uttarakhand University, ensuring that all participants were treated with respect and dignity.



4. Results and Analysis

To evaluate the proposed structural model, the data from 500 respondents in Uttarakhand was analyzed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) through LISREL 10. This section presents the measurement model validation, structural path analysis, and mediation analysis.

4.1 Measurement Model: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to validate the measurement model and assess the reliability and construct validity of the key variables: Environmental Practices, Social Practices, Governance Practices (ESG), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and Consumer Behavior (CB). The standardized factor loadings for all items exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.60, ranging from 0.67 to 0.88, indicating strong item reliability across all constructs. Furthermore, the Composite Reliability (CR) scores for each construct surpassed

the recommended benchmark of 0.70, with Environmental Practices at 0.84, Social Practices at 0.81, Governance Practices at 0.78, CSR at 0.85, and Consumer Behavior at 0.88. These values confirm internal consistency and reliability of the scales used. In addition, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs were above the threshold of 0.50, confirming convergent validity and indicating that each construct adequately explains the variance of its indicators. The overall model fit was evaluated using multiple indices, all of which demonstrated a good fit with the data: Chi-square/df = 2.87 (acceptable if less than 3), RMSEA = 0.061 (acceptable if less than 0.08), GFI = 0.92, AGFI = 0.89, NFI = 0.91, and CFI = 0.94. These results collectively confirm that the measurement model was both reliable and valid, making it appropriate for further analysis through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

4.2 Structural Model: SEM Path Analysis

The structural model was analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the hypothesized relationships among the constructs. The results of the SEM path analysis revealed that Environmental Practices had a strong and statistically significant positive influence on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), with a standardized path coefficient of $\beta = 0.47$ ($p < 0.01$). This suggests that proactive environmental initiatives, such as the use of eco-friendly ingredients and efforts to reduce carbon emissions, significantly enhance consumers' perceptions of a company's CSR engagement. Similarly, Social Practices were found to have a significant positive impact on CSR ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that initiatives like fair labor practices, community development programs, and inclusive workplace policies contribute positively to CSR performance.

Governance Practices, which include transparency, ethical decision-making, and adherence to regulatory norms, also showed a significant but more moderate relationship with CSR ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < 0.05$). These results confirm that governance elements, though less pronounced than environmental and social aspects, still play an important role in shaping CSR outcomes. Furthermore, the model revealed that CSR had a strong and significant effect on Consumer Behavior toward green cosmetic products, with a path coefficient of $\beta = 0.58$ ($p < 0.01$). This underscores the vital role CSR plays in influencing consumer attitudes and purchase intentions, suggesting that ethically driven business practices resonate well with environmentally and socially conscious consumers.

The structural model demonstrated a good overall fit, with model fit indices within acceptable ranges: Chi-square/df = 2.65, RMSEA = 0.059, CFI = 0.95, NFI = 0.93, and GFI = 0.91. These results confirm that the structural model is robust and supports the proposed relationships among ESG factors, CSR, and consumer behavior.

4.3 Mediation Analysis: CSR as Mediator

To test the mediating role of CSR between ESG (independent variables) and Consumer Behavior (dependent variable), the **Sobel Test** was employed.

Path	Indirect Effect via CSR	Sobel Test Statistic	p-value	Mediation Type
Environmental → CB	0.273	4.85	< 0.01	Partial
Social → CB	0.239	4.52	< 0.01	Partial
Governance → CB	0.209	3.96	< 0.01	Partial

The results show that CSR partially mediates the relationship between all three ESG components and consumer behavior. While the ESG variables directly influence CSR, which in turn influences consumer behavior, there is also evidence of a smaller direct path from ESG to consumer behavior, indicating partial mediation.

Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Supported	Significance
H1	Environmental → CSR → CB	Yes	p < 0.01
H2	Social → CSR → CB	Yes	p < 0.01
H3	Governance → CSR → CB	Yes	p < 0.01

5. Discussion and Implications

This study provides clear evidence that ESG practices significantly shape consumer behavior toward green cosmetic products, with CSR acting as a crucial mediator. The findings from Uttarakhand, particularly Dehradun, highlight a strong regional consciousness around environmental and social responsibility, which companies must tap into. Environmental practices showed the strongest influence on CSR, suggesting that consumers increasingly value eco-friendly operations like sustainable sourcing and reduced carbon emissions. This is especially relevant in ecologically sensitive regions, where green consciousness is high.

Social practices, including fair labor policies and community involvement, also positively impacted CSR perception. In culturally rooted areas like Uttarakhand, such initiatives resonate well with local consumers and build brand trust. Though governance practices had a moderate effect, their significance indicates that ethical leadership and transparency still matter in shaping CSR outcomes and public trust.

Most importantly, CSR strongly influenced consumer behavior, confirming that responsible business conduct can directly shape purchasing decisions. Consumers are more likely to engage with brands that not only claim ethical values but demonstrate them through visible, consistent CSR initiatives. From a strategic perspective, companies in the green cosmetic space must integrate and communicate their ESG commitments through robust CSR actions. Localized CSR—aligned with regional values—can be a powerful tool for strengthening brand loyalty and market positioning. Policymakers, in turn, should encourage greater transparency in ESG reporting and offer incentives for ethical business practices.

This research adds to the growing discourse on sustainability-driven consumerism and offers actionable insights for brands aiming to align profitability with purpose.

This study underscores the pivotal role of ESG practices in influencing consumer behavior toward green cosmetic products, with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) serving as a significant mediating factor. The results from 500 respondents in Uttarakhand, particularly Dehradun, reveal that environmentally sustainable actions, socially responsible initiatives, and ethical governance each positively impact CSR, which in turn strongly drives consumer preferences and purchase intentions. Among these, environmental practices emerged as the most influential, reflecting the region's heightened ecological awareness. Social practices also resonated strongly with consumers, highlighting the importance of community engagement and

ethical labor. Governance practices, though slightly less impactful, still contributed meaningfully to CSR perception. Overall, the study suggests that consumers reward transparency, sustainability, and accountability, emphasizing the need for companies to move beyond surface-level branding and embed CSR into their operational DNA. For green cosmetic brands, this means integrating ESG principles into core strategies and aligning CSR efforts with local values to build trust, loyalty, and long-term competitive advantage.

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