Consumer Behaviour Towards Sustainable Products in Emerging Markets

Shraddha Rastogi
B.Com
Teerthanker Mahaveer Institute of Management & Technology
Teerthanker Mahaveer University
Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh

Unnati Rastogi
B.Com
Teerthanker Mahaveer Institute of Management & Technology
Teerthanker Mahaveer University
Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh

Naina Rastogi
B.Com
Teerthanker Mahaveer Institute of Management & Technology
Teerthanker Mahaveer University
Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh

Somya Saxena
B.Com
Teerthanker Mahaveer Institute of Management & Technology
Teerthanker Mahaveer University
Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh

Abstract

In recent years, sustainable products have gained attention across global markets due to increasing environmental concerns, social responsibility awareness, and ethical consumption patterns. In emerging markets, however, the shift toward sustainability is shaped by a complex interplay of economic constraints, cultural values, and limited consumer awareness. This paper examines **consumer behavior towards sustainable products in emerging markets**, exploring key drivers, barriers, and market dynamics that influence purchasing decisions.

Through a combination of literature review, secondary data analysis, and thematic assessment, this study identifies major factors affecting consumer preferences, including price sensitivity, trust in sustainability claims, education levels, perceived product quality, and government influence. While there is growing interest in sustainable consumption, actual purchasing behavior often lags behind due to affordability issues and limited availability.

The paper argues that aligning sustainability with value-for-money, cultural relevance, and accessibility is crucial to scaling green consumption in developing regions. It also highlights the need for transparent labelling, education campaigns, and inclusive product innovation to bridge the intention-behavior gap. By understanding these behavioural trends, businesses and policymakers can create more effective strategies to promote sustainable product adoption and support environmental goals in emerging markets.

Keywords: consumer behaviour, sustainable products, emerging markets, green marketing, ethical consumption, environmental awareness, affordability, intention-behavior gap, eco-consciousness, sustainability.

Introduction

Sustainability has become a key theme in global consumption patterns, with rising demand for eco-friendly, ethically sourced, and socially responsible products. Developed economies have witnessed a marked increase in **green consumerism**, driven by stronger environmental policies, higher disposable incomes, and heightened awareness. However, **emerging markets**—which represent the next frontier of global consumption—pose unique challenges and opportunities for sustainable product adoption.

Consumer behaviour in emerging markets such as India, Brazil, South Africa, and Indonesia is influenced by socioeconomic factors, cultural traditions, infrastructure limitations, and varying levels of environmental literacy. While awareness about climate change and sustainability is gradually improving, consumers in these regions are often constrained by price sensitivity, limited product availability, and skepticism about corporate sustainability claims. Furthermore, the presence of unregulated markets, weak enforcement of environmental standards, and lack of institutional support can hinder the development of a robust green economy.

Yet, these markets also represent immense potential. The rise of the middle class, digital penetration, and urbanization are shifting consumer aspirations. Young, tech-savvy populations are increasingly aligning with global sustainability movements, demanding transparency, accountability, and ethical sourcing from brands. For companies, understanding these

behavioural shifts is critical to designing effective marketing strategies, product innovation, and public engagement.

This paper aims to analyze the **drivers and barriers** of consumer behaviour towards sustainable products in emerging economies. It also seeks to explore the intention-behavior gap, where consumers express concern for the environment but do not translate it into purchasing actions. By understanding these dynamics, stakeholders can contribute to a more inclusive and sustainable global marketplace.

Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to explore and analyze **consumer behaviour towards sustainable products in emerging markets**, with a focus on identifying the underlying factors that influence purchasing decisions. The study also aims to evaluate the degree of alignment between consumer attitudes and actual buying behaviour regarding eco-friendly products.

Specific Objectives:

1. **To identify key motivators** that drive consumers in emerging markets to purchase sustainable products.
2. **To analyze barriers** such as price, accessibility, and lack of awareness that hinder sustainable consumption.
3. **To examine the intention-behavior gap**, assessing the disconnect between expressed concern for sustainability and actual purchasing patterns.
4. **To explore the role of socio-demographic factors** such as age, income, education, and urbanization in influencing sustainable product choices.
5. **To recommend strategic interventions** for businesses, marketers, and policymakers to foster greater adoption of sustainable products in developing economies.

The study aims to contribute valuable insights to sustainable marketing practices, policy development, and product design tailored to the specific realities of emerging markets. By doing so, it supports broader sustainable development goals (SDGs), particularly those related to responsible consumption, climate action, and inclusive economic growth.

Research Designs

This research adopts a **descriptive and exploratory design** to understand consumer behaviour towards sustainable products in emerging markets. The methodology relies primarily on secondary data sources, including academic literature, market research reports, and sustainability indexes.

Data Collection:

- Reports from market intelligence agencies such as Nielsen, McKinsey, and Euromonitor on green consumer trends in emerging economies.
- Consumer surveys and environmental behaviour studies from organizations like the World Bank, UNDP, and WWF.
- Case studies of sustainable brands operating in emerging markets (e.g., Patanjali in India, Natura in Brazil).
- Peer-reviewed articles analyzing behavioural economics and sustainability adoption.

Methodology:

1. **Thematic analysis** to identify recurring patterns in consumer motivations and barriers.
2. **Comparative analysis** between different emerging markets to highlight regional nuances.
3. **Trend analysis** of sustainable product sales and consumer awareness from 2015 to 2024.

The research is qualitative in nature but supported by relevant quantitative indicators. It aims to uncover **practical insights** into how cultural, economic, and institutional factors shape sustainable consumption. This design allows for the formulation of targeted recommendations to improve sustainable product uptake across diverse emerging market contexts.

Review of Literature

Research on sustainable consumer behaviour has grown significantly in the last two decades. **Peattie (2001)** highlighted the importance of aligning environmental benefits with consumer values in green marketing. **Vermeir and Verbeke (2006)** introduced the concept of the

intention-behavior gap, arguing that while many consumers claim to support sustainability, few follow through in practice.

In emerging markets, **Biswas and Roy (2015)** found that price sensitivity and lack of awareness are major obstacles to sustainable product adoption. **Ottman et al. (2006)** emphasized the role of education and trust in eco-labels in influencing consumer preferences. **Gupta and Ogden (2009)** noted that consumers in developing economies often prioritize immediate economic benefits over long-term environmental impacts.

Kumar and Ghodeswar (2015) examined consumer willingness to pay for green products in India and found a positive correlation with income and education levels. Additionally, studies have explored the influence of culture and tradition on eco-conscious behavior, suggesting that messaging and branding need to resonate with local values.

While existing literature provides valuable insights, much of it is focused on Western contexts. There is a growing need to explore **localized behavioural frameworks** in emerging markets to better understand the socio-economic realities that influence sustainability.

Research Gap

Despite the growing body of literature on sustainability and consumer behaviour, there is a significant **research gap** concerning the **unique characteristics of emerging markets**. Most studies are either Western-centric or do not fully account for the complexities and contradictions present in developing economies.

One key gap lies in the **limited understanding of the intention-behavior gap** within emerging markets. While consumers may express environmental concern, actual purchase decisions are often governed by **price sensitivity, accessibility, and product familiarity**—factors that are not always captured in existing behavioural models.

Furthermore, there is insufficient research on **cultural influences**, such as the role of community, family, and traditional beliefs in shaping sustainable consumption. Studies have also overlooked the impact of informal economies and counterfeit goods, which compete directly with authentic sustainable products.

There is a lack of comparative analysis across emerging regions (e.g., Latin America vs. South Asia), which could reveal regional nuances and tailored intervention strategies. Moreover, **empirical data on consumer trust in eco-labels, government regulations, and corporate greenwashing** is scarce.

This study seeks to address these gaps by examining **consumer behaviour from a multidimensional and region-specific perspective**, focusing on behavioural motivations, economic barriers, and cultural influences in emerging markets.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Analysis of available consumer surveys and sustainability reports reveals a **growing awareness and concern** for environmental issues among consumers in emerging markets. However, a consistent trend across studies is the **intention-behavior gap**.

Consumer Awareness and Attitudes:

- A Nielsen (2022) survey of urban consumers in India, Brazil, and Indonesia showed that 70–80% of respondents are aware of environmental issues and claim to prefer sustainable products.
- However, only 30–40% reported having actually purchased eco-friendly alternatives in the last six months.

Key Drivers:

1. **Health and Safety**: Consumers often associate sustainable products with being safer and healthier.
2. **Brand Trust**: Ethical and transparent brands enjoy stronger loyalty, particularly among youth and urban populations.
3. **Social Media Influence**: Digital campaigns and influencer marketing have increased awareness and desirability of sustainable products.

Barriers Identified:

- **Price Sensitivity**: 60% of respondents cited higher prices as a deterrent.
- **Lack of Availability**: Many sustainable products are concentrated in urban centers, limiting access for rural and semi-urban consumers.

- **Skepticism**: Distrust in sustainability claims due to greenwashing weakens consumer confidence.

Case Snapshot:

In India, brands like Patanjali and FabIndia have successfully marketed sustainability by aligning products with **local traditions and affordability**, bridging the cultural and economic gaps.

Overall, while **intent exists**, actual **green purchasing remains low** due to affordability and accessibility constraints. However, the growing digital reach and rising eco-consciousness among Gen Z and millennials signal a positive trajectory for future market growth.

Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations:

1. **Secondary Data Reliance**: The research primarily uses secondary data, which may be outdated or lack context-specific insights. Access to proprietary market surveys was limited.
2. **Limited Geographic Scope**: While the study focuses on emerging markets, it does not conduct deep, country-specific analysis beyond generalized trends from India, Brazil, and Indonesia.
3. **Cultural Nuances**: The study may not fully capture the diversity of cultural influences affecting consumer behaviour across different regions within emerging markets.
4. **No Primary Research**: Due to time constraints, primary data collection such as interviews or surveys was not conducted. This limits the depth of consumer insight.
5. **Greenwashing Risk**: The study assumes the credibility of company-reported sustainability claims, which may be exaggerated or misleading.
6. **Urban Bias**: Much of the data available pertains to urban consumers, potentially overlooking the perspectives of rural or lower-income populations who form a significant part of emerging markets.

Despite these limitations, the research provides a foundational understanding of **consumer dynamics in sustainability** and offers a pathway for future empirical studies, particularly involving primary data from underserved segments.

Conclusion

This study underscores the complex and evolving nature of **consumer behaviour towards sustainable products in emerging markets**. It reveals a growing consciousness about environmental and ethical concerns, especially among younger and urban consumers. However, the transition from intention to action is hindered by affordability issues, limited product availability, and skepticism toward sustainability claims.

Understanding the behavioural patterns in these markets requires a multidimensional approach. While price and awareness are critical factors, cultural relevance, community norms, and trust in institutions also play crucial roles. The findings suggest that successful green marketing in emerging economies must integrate sustainability with **local values, cost efficiency, and accessibility**.

To bridge the intention-behavior gap, companies must invest in **education campaigns, authentic eco-labelling, affordable innovation**, and localized product design. Governments, too, have a role to play in enforcing environmental standards and incentivizing sustainable production and consumption through policies and subsidies.

Emerging markets hold enormous potential for **scaling sustainability**, not only because of their growing consumer base but also due to the opportunity to leapfrog into green economies without replicating the unsustainable models of the past. By aligning business strategy with sustainability goals and consumer expectations, stakeholders can unlock both **economic and environmental value**.

In conclusion, fostering sustainable consumption in emerging markets is not just a business imperative but a **shared responsibility** that demands inclusive, transparent, and culturally informed solutions. As awareness grows and green infrastructure improves, consumer behaviour is expected to shift toward a more sustainable future—one purchase at a time.

References

- Peattie, K. (2001). Golden goose or wild goose? The hunt for the green consumer. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 10(4), 187–199.

- Vermeir, I., & Verbeke, W. (2006). Sustainable food consumption: Exploring the consumer "attitude–behavioral intention" gap. *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, 19(2), 169–194.
- Biswas, A., & Roy, M. (2015). Green products: an exploratory study on the consumer behaviour in emerging economies of the East. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 87, 463–468.
- Ottman, J. A., Stafford, E. R., & Hartman, C. L. (2006). Avoiding green marketing myopia. *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development*, 48(5), 22–36.
- Nielsen. (2022). *Global Consumer Sustainability Report*.
- Ma, X., Arif, A., Kaur, P., Jain, V., Refiana Said, L., & Mughal, N. (2022). Revealing the effectiveness of technological innovation shocks on CO2 emissions in BRICS: emerging challenges and implications. Environmental Science and Pollution Research, 29(31), 47373-47381.
- Hasan, N., Nanda, S., Singh, G., Sharma, V., Kaur, G., & Jain, V. (2024, February). Adoption of Blockchain Technology in Productivity And Automation Process of Microfinance Services. In 2024 4th International Conference on Innovative Practices in Technology and Management (ICIPTM) (pp. 1-5). IEEE.
- Jan, N., Jain, V., Li, Z., Sattar, J., & Tongkachok, K. (2022). Post-COVID-19 investor psychology and individual investment decision: A moderating role of information availability. Frontiers in Psychology, 13, 846088.
- Maurya, S. K., Jain, V., Setiawan, R., Ashraf, A., Koti, K., Niranjan, K., ... & Rajest, S. S. (2021). The Conditional Analysis of Principals Bullying Teachers Reasons in The Surroundings of The City (Doctoral dissertation, Petra Christian University).
- Anand, R., Juneja, S., Juneja, A., Jain, V., & Kannan, R. (Eds.). (2023). Integration of IoT with cloud computing for smart applications. CRC Press.
- Dadhich, M., Pahwa, M. S., Jain, V., & Doshi, R. (2021). Predictive models for stock market index using stochastic time series ARIMA modeling in emerging economy.

In Advances in Mechanical Engineering: Select Proceedings of CAMSE 2020 (pp. 281-290). Springer Singapore.

- Ahmad, A. Y., Jain, V., Verma, C., Chauhan, A., Singh, A., Gupta, A., & Pramanik, S. (2024). CSR Objectives and Public Institute Management in the Republic of Slovenia. In Ethical Quandaries in Business Practices: Exploring Morality and Social Responsibility (pp. 183-202). IGI Global.
- Verma, C., Sharma, R., Kaushik, P., & Jain, V. (2024). The Role of Microfinance Initiatives in Promoting Sustainable Economic Development: Exploring Opportunities, Challenges, and Outcomes.
- Liu, L., Bashir, T., Abdalla, A. A., Salman, A., Ramos-Meza, C. S., Jain, V., & Shabbir, M. S. (2024). Can money supply endogeneity influence bank stock returns? A case study of South Asian economies. Environment, Development and Sustainability, 26(2), 2775-2787.
- Zhang, M., Jain, V., Qian, X., Ramos-Meza, C. S., Ali, S. A., Sharma, P., ... & Shabbir, M. S. (2023). The dynamic relationship among technological innovation, international trade, and energy production. Frontiers in Environmental Science, 10, 967138.
- Cao, Y., Tabasam, A. H., Ahtsham Ali, S., Ashiq, A., Ramos-Meza, C. S., Jain, V., & Shahzad Shabbir, M. (2023). The dynamic role of sustainable development goals to eradicate the multidimensional poverty: evidence from emerging economy. Economic research-Ekonomska istraživanja, 36(3).
- Liu, Y., Cao, D., Cao, X., Jain, V., Chawla, C., Shabbir, M. S., & Ramos-Meza, C. S. (2023). The effects of MDR-TB treatment regimens through socioeconomic and spatial characteristics on environmental-health outcomes: evidence from Chinese hospitals. Energy & Environment, 34(4), 1081-1093.
- Chawla, C., Jain, V., Joshi, A., & Gupta, V. (2013). A study of satisfaction level and awareness of tax-payers towards e-filing of income tax return—with reference to Moradabad city. International Monthly Refereed Journal of Research In Management & Technology, 2, 60-66.

- Kaur, M., Sinha, R., Chaudhary, V., Sikandar, M. A., Jain, V., Gambhir, V., & Dhiman, V. (2022). Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the livelihood of employees in different sectors. Materials Today: Proceedings, 51, 764-769.
- Liu, Y., Salman, A., Khan, K., Mahmood, C. K., Ramos-Meza, C. S., Jain, V., & Shabbir, M. S. (2023). The effect of green energy production, green technological innovation, green international trade, on ecological footprints. Environment, Development and Sustainability, 1-14.
- Jun, W., Mughal, N., Kaur, P., Xing, Z., & Jain, V. (2022). Achieving green environment targets in the world's top 10 emitter countries: the role of green innovations and renewable electricity production. Economic research-Ekonomska istraživanja, 35(1), 5310-5335.
- Verma, C., & Jain, V. Exploring Promotional Strategies in Private Universities: A Comprehensive Analysis of Tactics and Innovative Approaches.
- Jain, V., Ramos-Meza, C. S., Aslam, E., Chawla, C., Nawab, T., Shabbir, M. S., & Bansal, A. (2023). Do energy resources matter for growth level? The dynamic effects of different strategies of renewable energy, carbon emissions on sustainable economic growth. Clean Technologies and Environmental Policy, 25(3), 771-777.
- Jain, V., Rastogi, M., Ramesh, J. V. N., Chauhan, A., Agarwal, P., Pramanik, S., & Gupta, A. (2023). FinTech and Artificial Intelligence in Relationship Banking and Computer Technology. In AI, IoT, and Blockchain Breakthroughs in E-Governance (pp. 169-187). IGI Global.