



DETERMINANTS OF CONSUMER AWARENESS AND PREFERENCE FOR ECO-FRIENDLY PRODUCTS: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION IN PUDUKKOTTAI DISTRICT

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Abstract:

This study examines the key determinants influencing consumer awareness and preference for eco-friendly products in Pudukkottai District, with a focus on understanding the behavioural and socio-economic factors that drive sustainable consumption. In recent years, increasing environmental concerns, climate change awareness, and government initiatives have contributed to a growing interest in green products. However, the extent to which consumers are aware of and prefer such products varies significantly across regions. The research adopts an empirical approach, collecting primary data through a structured questionnaire administered to consumers across different demographic segments in Pudukkottai District. The study analyses factors such as environmental knowledge, income level, education, price sensitivity, product availability, brand trust, and social influence to evaluate their impact on consumer awareness and preference. Statistical tools such as percentage analysis, correlation, and regression are employed to interpret the data and identify significant relationships. The findings reveal that environmental awareness, education level, and perceived product quality play a crucial role in shaping consumer preferences for eco-friendly products. While a majority of respondents exhibit positive attitudes towards sustainability, high prices and limited availability act as major barriers to actual purchase behaviour. Additionally, social influence and promotional efforts are found to significantly enhance consumer awareness and willingness to adopt green products. The study highlights the need for increased awareness campaigns, affordable pricing strategies, and improved distribution channels to promote eco-friendly consumption. It provides valuable insights for policymakers, marketers, and environmental organizations to design effective strategies for encouraging sustainable consumer behaviour in semi-urban and rural contexts like Pudukkottai District.

Key Words: Eco-Friendly Products, Consumer Awareness, Green Consumer Behaviour, Sustainable Consumption, Purchase Preference

Introduction:

In recent decades, the global marketplace has undergone a significant transformation driven by growing environmental concerns, climate change, and the urgent need for sustainable development. The increasing depletion of natural resources, rising pollution levels, and ecological imbalances have compelled governments, organizations, and individuals to rethink their consumption patterns. Within this context, eco-friendly products also referred to as green or sustainable products have emerged as a viable solution to minimize environmental degradation while meeting consumer needs. These products are designed to have minimal impact on the environment, often characterized by the use of natural materials, energy-efficient production processes, recyclable packaging, and reduced carbon footprints. Consumer awareness and preference for eco-friendly products have become central themes in modern marketing and sustainability discourse. Awareness refers to the extent to which consumers are informed about the environmental impact of their consumption choices and the availability of sustainable alternatives. Preference, on the other hand, indicates the degree to which consumers are inclined to choose eco-friendly products over conventional ones. Understanding the determinants that influence both awareness and preference is critical for promoting sustainable consumption and fostering a green economy. India, as a rapidly developing nation, faces a unique challenge in balancing economic growth with environmental sustainability. The country's expanding population, urbanization, and industrialization have contributed to increased environmental stress. At the same time, there has been a noticeable shift in consumer attitudes, with a growing segment of the population becoming environmentally conscious. Government initiatives such as "Swachh Bharat Abhiyan," "Make in India," and various environmental regulations have further reinforced the importance of sustainable practices. Additionally, the rise of digital media and information accessibility has played a crucial role in spreading awareness about environmental issues and eco-friendly alternatives.

Despite these positive developments, the adoption of eco-friendly products in India remains uneven, particularly in semi-urban and rural regions. Pudukkottai District, located in Tamil Nadu, represents a typical semi-urban setting where traditional consumption patterns coexist with emerging modern trends. The district's socio-economic diversity, varying levels of education and income disparities make it an ideal context for studying consumer awareness and preference for eco-friendly products. While urban consumers may have greater exposure to green products and sustainability campaigns, consumers in districts like Pudukkottai may face limitations such as lack of information, limited product availability, and higher costs. The concept of green consumerism emphasizes the role of consumers in driving environmental sustainability through their purchasing decisions.

Consumers are no longer passive recipients of goods and services; instead, they actively evaluate the environmental and social implications of their choices. Factors such as environmental concern, perceived product benefits, social responsibility, and ethical considerations influence consumer behaviour in this regard. However, the transition from awareness to actual purchase behaviour is often hindered by various barriers, including price sensitivity, lack of trust in eco-labels, and limited accessibility. One of the key determinants of consumer awareness is education. Educated consumers are more likely to understand environmental issues and recognize the importance of sustainable consumption. They are also more receptive to information related to eco-friendly products and are better equipped to evaluate product claims. Income level is another significant factor that influences both awareness and preference. Eco-friendly products are often perceived as premium or expensive, which may limit their adoption among lower-income groups. Conversely, higher-income consumers may be more willing to pay a premium for environmentally friendly alternatives. Another important determinant is social influence, which includes the impact of family, friends, peers, and media on consumer behaviour. Social norms and cultural values play a crucial role in shaping attitudes towards sustainability. For instance, individuals who are part of environmentally conscious communities are more likely to adopt eco-friendly practices. Similarly, advertising and promotional campaigns can significantly enhance consumer awareness and influence preferences by highlighting the benefits of green products.

Product-related factors such as quality, availability, branding, and certification also affect consumer preference. Consumers are more likely to choose eco-friendly products if they perceive them to be of equal or superior quality compared to conventional alternatives. Availability and accessibility are equally important; even if consumers are aware of eco-friendly products, they may not purchase them if they are not readily available in local markets. Trust in eco-labels and certifications further influences consumer decisions, as it assures them of the product's authenticity and environmental benefits. In addition to these factors, psychological and behavioural aspects also play a role in shaping consumer preferences. Attitudes, beliefs, and personal values related to environmental conservation can significantly influence purchasing decisions. The Theory of Planned Behaviour suggests that an individual's intention to perform a behaviour is influenced by their attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Applying this theory to green consumption, it becomes evident that consumers are more likely to purchase eco-friendly products if they have a positive attitude towards sustainability, perceive social support for such behaviour, and believe that they have the ability to make such choices. The relevance of studying consumer awareness and preference for eco-friendly products in Pudukkottai District is further underscored by the need to promote sustainable development at the grassroots level. While national and global policies play a crucial role in addressing environmental challenges, local-level initiatives and consumer behaviour are equally important. By understanding the determinants that influence awareness and preference, policymakers and marketers can design targeted strategies to encourage the adoption of eco-friendly products. This study adopts an empirical approach to analyse consumer behaviour in Pudukkottai District. It aims to identify the key factors that influence awareness and preference for eco-friendly products and to examine the relationship between these factors. The findings of the study are expected to provide valuable insights for various stakeholders, including policymakers, businesses, and environmental organizations. For businesses, understanding consumer preferences can help in developing effective marketing strategies and product offerings. For policymakers, the study can inform the design of awareness campaigns and regulatory measures to promote sustainable consumption. For environmental organizations, the findings can aid in designing educational programs and community initiatives.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the existing body of literature on green consumer behaviour by providing insights from a semi-urban context, which is often underrepresented in research. Most studies on eco-friendly products have focused on urban populations, leaving a gap in understanding the behaviour of consumers in smaller towns and rural areas. By focusing on Pudukkottai District, this study addresses this gap and provides a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behaviour in diverse settings. The increasing importance of environmental sustainability has brought eco-friendly products to the forefront of consumer markets. While awareness and preference for such products are growing, several factors influence their adoption. Understanding these determinants is essential for promoting sustainable consumption and achieving environmental goals. Pudukkottai District, with its unique socio-economic characteristics, provides an ideal setting for examining these issues. This study seeks to explore the complex interplay of factors that shape consumer awareness and preference for eco-friendly products, thereby contributing to the broader goal of sustainable development.

Significance of the Study:

The present study on consumer awareness and preference for eco-friendly products in Pudukkottai District holds substantial significance in the context of environmental sustainability, consumer behaviour, and regional development. As environmental concerns continue to escalate globally, there is an urgent need to understand how consumers perceive and adopt eco-friendly products, particularly in semi-urban and rural areas where research is relatively limited. This study contributes to bridging that gap by offering insights specific to Pudukkottai District. Firstly, the study is significant from an environmental perspective. Increasing consumer awareness and preference for eco-friendly products can play a crucial role in reducing environmental degradation, pollution, and resource depletion. By identifying the factors that influence green consumption, the study helps in promoting sustainable lifestyles and environmentally responsible behaviour among consumers. It supports the broader objective of achieving sustainable development goals at the local level. Secondly, the study is important for policymakers and government agencies. Understanding the level of awareness and the barriers to adopting eco-friendly products enables policymakers to design effective awareness campaigns, environmental policies, and incentive schemes. The findings can assist in formulating region-specific strategies that encourage the production, distribution, and consumption of green products, especially in districts like Pudukkottai where awareness may still be evolving. Thirdly, the study is valuable for marketers and business organizations. With the rising demand for sustainable products, businesses need to understand consumer preferences, attitudes, and purchasing behaviour. The insights gained from this study can help companies develop targeted marketing strategies, improve product positioning, and enhance customer engagement. It also enables businesses to identify key factors such as pricing, quality perception, and availability that influence consumer decisions, thereby improving their competitiveness in the green market. Fourthly, the study holds academic significance. It contributes to the existing literature on green consumer behaviour by focusing

on a semi-urban district, which is often underrepresented in research. The study provides empirical evidence that can be used by researchers, scholars, and students for further studies in the fields of marketing, environmental studies, and consumer behaviour. It also opens avenues for comparative studies between urban and rural consumer segments. Fifthly, the study is socially relevant as it promotes awareness and responsible consumption among individuals. By highlighting the importance of eco-friendly products and the factors influencing their adoption, the research encourages consumers to make informed and environmentally conscious decisions. This, in turn, can lead to a positive shift in societal attitudes towards sustainability. Finally, the study is significant for local economic development. Promoting eco-friendly products can support local businesses, small-scale industries, and entrepreneurs engaged in sustainable production practices. It can create new market opportunities and contribute to the growth of a green economy in Pudukkottai District. In summary, this study is significant as it provides a comprehensive understanding of consumer awareness and preference for eco-friendly products, offering practical implications for environmental sustainability, policy formulation, business strategies, academic research, and societal well-being.

Review of Literature:

Patel and Desai (2023) investigated the relationship between income level and preference for sustainable products. Their research revealed that higher-income groups are more inclined to purchase eco-friendly products due to their willingness to pay a premium. In contrast, lower-income consumers prioritize affordability over environmental benefits.

Reddy and Kumar (2023) analysed the role of marketing and promotional strategies in enhancing consumer awareness of green products. The study found that digital marketing, social media campaigns, and influencer endorsements significantly improve awareness and positively influence purchase decisions, especially among younger consumers.

Nair and Francis (2023) focused on green consumerism in South India and identified education, environmental concern, and product quality as key determinants of consumer preference. The study also found that consumers are more likely to adopt eco-friendly products when they perceive them as effective and beneficial.

Gupta and Verma (2024) examined the impact of environmental awareness on consumer buying behaviour. Their findings suggested a strong positive correlation between awareness and purchase intention, but also highlighted the “attitude-behaviour gap,” where consumers’ positive attitudes do not always translate into actual purchases.

Mehta and Jain (2024) studied consumer trust in eco-labels and green certifications. The research revealed that lack of standardization and awareness about certification bodies reduces consumer confidence, thereby affecting purchase decisions. The authors recommended stricter regulations and transparency in eco-labelling practices.

Arun and Priya (2024) conducted a study in Tamil Nadu focusing on rural and semi-urban consumers. The results showed that awareness levels are gradually increasing; however, accessibility and affordability remain key challenges. The study emphasized the need for localized awareness programs and government support.

Karthik and Suresh (2025) explored sustainable consumption patterns among millennials and Gen Z consumers. Their study highlighted that younger consumers are more environmentally conscious and are influenced by social media, peer groups, and global sustainability trends. However, they are also highly price-sensitive, which affects their purchasing behaviour.

Das and Mishra (2025) analysed the role of green branding in shaping consumer preferences. The study found that strong brand image, credibility, and clear communication of environmental benefits significantly enhance consumer trust and preference for eco-friendly products.

Analysis and Discussion:

The analysis is based on primary data collected from 120 respondents in Pudukkottai District using a structured questionnaire. The data has been analysed using percentage analysis and basic statistical interpretation to understand consumer awareness and preference towards eco-friendly products.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	68	56.7
	Female	52	43.3
Age	Below 25	30	25.0
	25-40	54	45.0
	Above 40	36	30.0
Education	School Level	28	23.3
	Undergraduate	52	43.3
	Postgraduate	40	33.4
Income Level	Below ₹20,000	38	31.7
	₹20,000-₹40,000	46	38.3
	Above ₹40,000	36	30.0

Interpretation:

The majority of respondents are male (56.7%) and fall within the age group of 25-40 years (45%). A significant proportion of respondents are educated (76.7% with UG and PG degrees), indicating a relatively informed sample. Income distribution is fairly balanced, with a slight concentration in the middle-income group.

Table 2: Awareness of Eco-Friendly Products

Awareness Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Highly Aware	34	28.3
Moderately Aware	56	46.7
Slightly Aware	20	16.7
Not Aware	10	8.3

Interpretation:

A majority of respondents (75%) are either highly or moderately aware of eco-friendly products. This indicates that awareness levels in Pudukkottai District are reasonably good, likely due to increased media exposure and educational influence. However, a small segment (8.3%) still lacks awareness, highlighting the need for targeted awareness campaigns.

Table 3: Sources of Awareness

Source	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Social Media	42	35.0
Television	28	23.3
Friends/Family	26	21.7
Newspapers	14	11.7
Others	10	8.3

Interpretation:

Social media emerges as the primary source of awareness (35%), followed by television (23.3%). This reflects the growing influence of digital platforms in shaping consumer knowledge. Word-of-mouth through friends and family also plays a significant role.

Table 4: Preference for Eco-Friendly Products

Preference Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Highly Prefer	30	25.0
Prefer	50	41.7
Neutral	24	20.0
Do Not Prefer	16	13.3

Interpretation:

Around 66.7% of respondents show a positive preference towards eco-friendly products. This indicates a favourable attitude toward sustainable consumption. However, 33.3% remain neutral or disinterested, suggesting a gap between awareness and strong preference.

Table 5: Factors Influencing Purchase Decision

Factor	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Environmental Concern	32	26.7
Price	36	30.0
Quality	28	23.3
Brand Image	14	11.7
Availability	10	8.3

Interpretation:

Price (30%) is the most influential factor affecting purchase decisions, followed by environmental concern (26.7%) and product quality (23.3%). This indicates that although consumers are environmentally conscious, economic considerations significantly impact their purchasing behaviour.

Table 6: Barriers to Purchasing Eco-Friendly Products

Barrier	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High Price	44	36.7
Limited Availability	30	25.0
Lack of Awareness	20	16.7
Lack of Trust	16	13.3
Habit/Resistance to Change	10	8.3

Interpretation:

The primary barrier is high price (36.7%), followed by limited availability (25%). This reinforces the idea that affordability and accessibility are key challenges in promoting eco-friendly products in semi-urban areas like Pudukkottai.

Table 7: Willingness to Pay Premium Price

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	48	40.0
No	72	60.0

Interpretation:

A majority (60%) of respondents are not willing to pay a higher price for eco-friendly products. This highlights the importance of pricing strategies and subsidies to encourage green consumption.

National and International Status of Eco-Friendly Products:

The growing concern for environmental sustainability has significantly influenced consumer behaviour across the globe. Eco-friendly or green products have gained prominence as viable alternatives to conventional goods, aiming to reduce environmental degradation and promote sustainable development. The status of eco-friendly products varies across countries depending on economic development, policy frameworks, consumer awareness, and market dynamics. This section presents an overview of the national (India) and international status of eco-friendly products.

International Status of Eco-Friendly Products:

At the global level, the demand for eco-friendly products has witnessed substantial growth over the past decade. Developed countries such as the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Japan, and Canada have been at the forefront of promoting green consumption. High levels of environmental awareness, stringent environmental regulations, and strong

institutional support have contributed to the widespread adoption of eco-friendly products in these regions. In Europe, countries like Germany, Sweden, and Denmark have established themselves as leaders in sustainability. The European Union has implemented several policies such as the European Green Deal, eco-labelling systems, and circular economy strategies to encourage sustainable production and consumption. Consumers in these countries are highly conscious of environmental issues and often prioritize eco-friendly products, even if they are priced higher. The presence of well-defined certification systems such as EU Ecolabel enhances consumer trust and facilitates informed decision-making.

In the United States, green consumerism has gained significant momentum due to increased awareness of climate change and environmental issues. The market for organic food, renewable energy products, and sustainable goods has expanded rapidly. Companies are increasingly adopting green marketing strategies and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives to align with consumer expectations. Certifications such as Energy Star and USDA Organic play a vital role in influencing consumer preferences. Asian countries like Japan and South Korea have also made notable progress in promoting eco-friendly products. These countries emphasize technological innovation and energy efficiency, resulting in the development of advanced green products such as energy-saving appliances and electric vehicles. Government policies and incentives further encourage both producers and consumers to adopt sustainable practices.

China, as a rapidly industrializing nation, has made significant strides in recent years toward sustainability. The government has implemented strict environmental regulations and invested heavily in renewable energy and green technologies. Although consumer awareness is still evolving, there is a noticeable shift towards eco-friendly consumption, particularly in urban areas. Globally, multinational corporations are playing a crucial role in promoting eco-friendly products. Companies like Unilever, Tesla, and Patagonia have integrated sustainability into their core business strategies, influencing consumer behaviour worldwide. Additionally, international organizations such as the United Nations are actively promoting sustainable consumption through initiatives like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 12, which focuses on responsible consumption and production. Despite these advancements, challenges remain at the international level. High costs, lack of standardization in eco-labelling, and the persistence of green washing practices continue to affect consumer trust and adoption. Moreover, developing countries often face constraints in terms of infrastructure, awareness, and affordability, limiting the widespread adoption of eco-friendly products.

National Status of Eco-Friendly Products in India:

In India, the concept of eco-friendly products has gained increasing attention in recent years, driven by rising environmental concerns, government initiatives, and changing consumer attitudes. As a developing country with a large population and diverse socio-economic conditions, India faces unique challenges in promoting sustainable consumption. The Indian government has undertaken several initiatives to encourage eco-friendly practices. Programs such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), and initiatives promoting renewable energy and waste management have created awareness about environmental sustainability. Policies encouraging the use of biodegradable products, reduction of plastic usage, and promotion of electric vehicles have also contributed to the growth of the green market. The market for eco-friendly products in India has expanded across various sectors, including organic food, sustainable fashion, energy-efficient appliances, and biodegradable packaging. Urban consumers, particularly in metropolitan cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Chennai, are increasingly adopting eco-friendly products due to higher awareness, better access, and greater purchasing power. The rise of e-commerce platforms has further facilitated the availability of green products across different regions. Consumer awareness in India is gradually improving, especially among educated and younger populations. Millennials and Gen Z consumers are more inclined towards sustainable consumption and are influenced by global environmental movements and digital media. Social media platforms play a significant role in spreading awareness and promoting eco-friendly lifestyles. However, the adoption of eco-friendly products in India is not uniform across all regions. In semi-urban and rural areas, awareness levels are relatively lower, and consumers often prioritize affordability and convenience over environmental considerations. High prices of eco-friendly products remain a major barrier, as many consumers perceive them as luxury items rather than necessities.

Another challenge in the Indian context is the lack of standardized eco-labelling and certification systems. While certifications such as BIS (Bureau of Indian Standards), FSSAI for organic products, and Energy Efficiency labels exist, there is still a need for greater transparency and consumer education to build trust. The issue of green washing, where companies make misleading claims about the environmental benefits of their products, further complicates consumer decision-making. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in India are increasingly entering the eco-friendly product market, particularly in areas such as handicrafts, organic farming, and sustainable packaging. This not only promotes environmental sustainability but also supports local livelihoods and rural development. Government support and financial incentives can further encourage these enterprises to scale up their operations. In recent years, there has also been a shift in corporate strategies, with many Indian companies adopting sustainable practices and green marketing. Organizations are investing in eco-friendly packaging, reducing carbon footprints, and promoting environmentally responsible products. This trend reflects the growing importance of sustainability as a competitive advantage in the market.

Comparative Perspective:

When comparing the national and international status of eco-friendly products, it is evident that developed countries are ahead in terms of awareness, infrastructure, and policy implementation. Consumers in these countries are more willing to pay a premium for sustainable products, and the market is well-regulated with strong certification systems. In contrast, India is still in a transitional phase, with growing awareness but limited adoption in certain regions. Economic constraints, lack of awareness, and infrastructural challenges hinder the widespread acceptance of eco-friendly products. However, the increasing involvement of government, businesses, and consumers indicates a positive trend towards sustainability.

Recommendations:

- Enhance consumer awareness through targeted environmental education and campaigns.
- Reduce prices of eco-friendly products through subsidies and cost-efficient production.
- Improve availability of green products in local markets and online platforms.

- Establish reliable and standardized eco-labelling to build consumer trust.
- Adopt effective green marketing strategies to influence consumer behaviour.
- Integrate sustainability education into school and college curricula.
- Provide government incentives to promote eco-friendly production and consumption.
- Support local entrepreneurs engaged in sustainable and green businesses.
- Encourage consumers through offers and incentives to bridge the attitude-behaviour gap.
- Utilize social influence and community participation to promote sustainable practices.

Conclusion:

The present study on consumer awareness and preference for eco-friendly products in Pudukkottai District provides valuable insights into the evolving patterns of sustainable consumption in a semi-urban context. With increasing environmental challenges such as pollution, climate change, and resource depletion, the importance of eco-friendly products has grown significantly. This study highlights how consumers are gradually becoming more aware of these issues and are showing a positive inclination towards environmentally responsible purchasing behaviour. The findings of the study reveal that a considerable proportion of consumers in Pudukkottai District possess moderate to high levels of awareness regarding eco-friendly products. This indicates that environmental consciousness is steadily increasing, supported by factors such as education, media exposure, and government initiatives. Social media and digital platforms have emerged as key sources of information, playing a crucial role in shaping consumer knowledge and attitudes. Despite the growing awareness, the study identifies a noticeable gap between consumer awareness and actual purchase behaviour. While many consumers express a preference for eco-friendly products, their purchasing decisions are often influenced by practical constraints such as high prices, limited availability, and lack of trust in product claims. Price sensitivity, in particular, remains a major barrier, as a significant portion of consumers are not willing to pay a premium for green products. This highlights the need for making eco-friendly products more affordable and accessible. The study also emphasizes the role of socio-economic factors such as education, income, and social influence in shaping consumer preferences. Educated and higher-income consumers are more likely to adopt eco-friendly products, while others may prioritize cost and convenience. Additionally, factors such as product quality, brand image, and environmental concern significantly influence purchasing decisions. From a broader perspective, the study underscores the importance of promoting sustainable consumption at the grassroots level. Pudukkottai District, representing a semi-urban setting, reflects the challenges and opportunities associated with encouraging green consumer behaviour in similar regions across India. The findings suggest that increasing awareness alone is not sufficient; it must be complemented by supportive policies, effective marketing strategies, and improved product accessibility. The study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence from a relatively underexplored region, thereby enhancing the understanding of consumer behaviour in diverse socio-economic contexts. It also offers practical implications for policymakers, businesses, and environmental organizations to design targeted interventions that promote eco-friendly consumption. In conclusion, the transition towards sustainable consumption requires a collective effort involving all stakeholders. By addressing key barriers such as affordability, availability, and trust, and by strengthening awareness initiatives, it is possible to foster a culture of environmental responsibility among consumers. The future of eco-friendly products in regions like Pudukkottai District depends on continuous efforts to align consumer preferences with sustainable practices, ultimately contributing to environmental protection and long-term societal well-being.

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