

An Empirical Study of Consumer Perception and Purchase Behaviour Towards Eco-Friendly Products

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Abstract: With increasing awareness of sustainability and concern about climate changes, resources, pollution, etc., consumers' attitudes have begun to shift towards more sustainable consumption, but it is generally noted that the "intent-behavior gap" due to consumers' expressed green attitudes and willingness to buy is still prevalent in purchasing eco-friendly products. An extended TAPB model is used to investigate consumer perception and purchase behavior towards eco-friendly products empirically with the introduction of new variables including environmental attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control and environmental knowledge as determinants of purchase intention while introducing new variables price sensitivity, product availability and green skepticism as moderators between intention to purchase and purchase behavior. The primary data was obtained from the structured questionnaires filled by 400 urban consumers at various major metropolitan cities of India; the collected data was analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, multiple regression analysis and also with the help of structural path analysis. The results show that environmental attitude, environmental knowledge and perceived behavioural control are all significant positive predictor cues for purchase intention which in turn was a significant predictor cue for actual purchase behaviour. Importantly, the study provides evidence of a significant attitude behaviour gap also; eighty eight percent of the respondents claimed the products were available to them and seventy four percent (74%) indicated they have a positive attitude toward the product; only thirty eight percent (38%) claimed that they buy these products regularly with limiting factors of price premium and availability. The results have broadened the scope of the Theory of Planned Behaviour applications in the Indian sustainable consumption scenario and provide practical implications for the marketers, policymakers and green goods manufacturers in order to reduce the gap between environmental concern and intention to buy green product.

Keywords: eco-friendly products, green consumer behaviour, purchase intention, Theory of Planned Behaviour, attitude behaviour gap, sustainable consumption, India

1. Introduction

As the environment becomes more polluted, including on climate change, biodiversity loss, plastic pollution, and finite natural resources, the way we view consumption has changed and sustainability is now a policy and marketing priority in the global marketplace. Nowadays, consumers are aware of the environmental impact of their purchase choices through various channels of information, including media, corporate sustainability messages, regulatory revelations and the growth of social movements, which can be linked to an observable increase in the environmental awareness of consumers in both developed and emerging economies.



India is one of the most populous and quickly urbanising economies, thereby providing a very important context for understanding green consumer behaviour. With a rise in people's consumables of their earned incomes, a larger number of urban populations in the middle class, and exposure to the global sustainability discussion, a deeper insight into people's interest in environmentally friendly product categories is gained, including personal care, food & beverages, clothing, and household goods. Meanwhile, India is having to tackle the urgent environmental issues – such as severe air pollution in major metropolitan areas, water scarcity, and a growing problem with plastic waste – and hence there's an added urgency in understanding the drivers of, and obstacles to, turning environmental concerns into sustainable purchasing behaviour.

The attitude behaviour gap, also known as the green gap, is an empirical phenomenon which has been documented in a large body of marketing and consumer behaviour literature; it is a situation where consumers who have positive attitudes towards environmental protection and an environmentally friendly product often do not convert these attitudes into consistent purchasing behaviour. This is attributed to a number of factors: price premiums often associated with products claiming to have an environmental benefit; limited product availability and distribution compared to conventional alternatives; and “green” skepticism or “green” washing concern, reflecting in the disinterest to update their purchasing habits even though they state a preference for products with an environmental benefit.

The aim of this study is to make contribution in comprehending this attitude behaviour gap into Indian context by empirically studying the psychological and situational factors influencing the purchase intention and actual purchase behaviour of the respondents towards an eco-friendly product using a modified TBP model. Developed for better understanding consumer decision making, the most widely applied theoretical framework is the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which explains that behavioural intention is a function of attitude (positive vs. negative) toward the behaviour, subjective norm (social pressure from others favoring or opposing the behaviour) and perceived behavioural control (self-efficacy in performing the behaviour) [1]. This research builds on the base structure by adding another predictor (environmental knowledge) to the predictiveness of purchase intention and explicitly considers three factors (namely price sensitivity, product availability and green sceptic attitude) that may affect the conversion of purchase intention to actual purchasing behaviour.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. The theoretical and empirical literature concerning green consumer behaviour is then reviewed (section 2). Gap of the research is identified in section 3. The objectives of the study are presented in Section 4 and Section 5 develops the hypotheses. The research methodology is outlined in section 6. The conceptual framework is provided in section 7. The results of the empirical analysis are provided in section 8. Findings are discussed in Section 9. The implications of the study can be found in section 10. Section 11 presents some limitations and future prospects of research and Section 12 gives the conclusion.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Green Consumer Behaviour

The TR/A (and later the incorporation of the Theory of Planned Behaviour) forms the dominant theoretical approach for the investigation of the determinants of purchase intentions and behaviour to date, including that toward consumer behaviour for environmentally sustainable consumption. The Theory of Planned Behaviour posits that behaviour intention, defined as the individual's subjective likelihood to engage in a behavior, is determined by three main factors: attitude towards the behavior, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control, and that the behaviour then serves as one's most immediate predictor of actual behavior with sufficient actual control to execute the behavior in question.

A complementary theory for pro-environmental behaviour is the Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) theory that views behavior as regulated by an affective and cognitive evaluation of the environment, namely personal values, and beliefs regarding the consequences of one's environmental action, which triggers a personal norm or sense of moral obligation

to engage in behaviour [3]. It is, together with the Theory of Planned Behaviour, a value based perspective that has been widely used to explain the variance of green purchasing behaviour in various consumer groups.

2.2 Environmental Attitude and Purchase Intention

Environmental attitude, which can be seen as the overall attitude of people about environmental protection and sustainability has been found to be a strong determinant of green purchase intention in many empirical studies across different developed and emerging market countries [4]. Attitude behaviour theory [5] implies that attitudes are mostly consistent with intentions to act, and that the more positive the attitude towards the environment, the more positive the intention to use a product believed to be better for the environment.

2.3 Subjective Norm and Purchase Intention

The "subjective norm", as a type of perceived social pressure to engage or not engage in a particular behaviour, has been reported to have significant, but often comparatively small influence on the green purchase intention, and this relationship can be very different depending on the cultural context [6]. Amongst other factors influencing green purchase intention, subjective norm may have a relative influence in collectivist societies as approval from the important people around them is found to be significant in consumption decision-making in these societies [7] particularly in the case of India.

2.4 Perceived Behavioural Control and Environmental Knowledge

One aspect that has been shown to affect green purchase intention is perceived behavioural control, defined as an individual's perception of how easy or difficult it is to perform a specific behavior, especially when their lack of access to the behaviour, cost of the behaviour and need to search for the behaviour reduce their perceived behavioural control over the behaviour compared to conventional products [8]. Environmental Knowledge is another important predictor of green purchase intention understood as consisting of factual information about environmental issues and information on how to behave in an environmental responsible manner, some research has found that having environmental knowledge alone is not sufficient to change behavior but needs to be found with positive attitudes and environmental responsivity [9].

2.5 The Attitude Behaviour Gap in Green Consumption

A large and increasing body of literature shows that there exists a gap between consumers' perceptions of environmental issues and intentions and their actual buying behaviour, which some have called attitude behaviour gap and others have termed intention behaviour gap or the green gap. The reasons given for this gap are the price premium typically associated with more environmentally friendly products, which limits the movement of price-sensitive consumer groups [11]; limited availability of alternatives in the market and lack of ease of access to environmentally friendly products in conventional retail channels [12]; green skepticism, consumer distrust of manufacturers' claims regarding environmental friendliness, which can be based on previous greenwashing behaviours [13]; and habitual purchasing behaviour, where deep-seeded purchasing patterns often do not shift even when attitudes are favourable [14].

2.6 Green Consumer Behaviour in the Indian Context

Research on the antecedents of green consumer behaviour in the Indian context has largely supported the theory of planned behaviour, with some context specific findings: relatively higher price sensitivity of Indian consumers across most of the income groups, the limited presence of 'green' product distribution infrastructure, and increasing but lacklustre among the different demographic sections of people in the country [15]. Together, these studies indicate that though there is a growing awareness about the environment among urban Indian consumers, environmental factors are still a significant moderating element on the path between green attitudes and actual buying behaviour.

2.7 Demographic and Segment Level Variation in Green Purchase Behaviour

A second strand of research has explored the differences among demographic and psychographic segments of consumers in their pattern of green purchasing behavior, and age, education and income have been consistently found to play an important role both in explaining variation in environmental attitudes as well as in explaining why consumers purchase green products and do not. Younger, more educated, and higher income urban consumers, generally, have also been shown to have more environmental attitudes and be willing to pay a price premium for products suspected of being eco-friendly, although this link is by no means straight-line, with some studies finding that in the middle sector of income level, consumers with median income exhibited the highest price sensitivity to environmental products, especially given their environmental awareness and concern, as well as sensitivity to the cost differential between the two product types. There is also literature showing gender differences with some studies showing that women consumers have a fairly higher score for environmental concern and intention to buy, thus gender specific differences may also be partly due to role differences in purchase of goods for the household as well as differences in general socialisation factors involving caring and health awareness that can have a link with environmental awareness. Occupation and family structure, such as young children in household, have also been correlated with increased salientness of the health and environment safety information of household and personal care products, and is especially relevant to the target group of Indian urban household of the Indian middle class. These segment level findings collectively help in interpreting the demographic profile as covered in Section 8.1 of this study and highlight the need for segment based approach of green marketing strategy as opposed to undifferentiated approach in the Indian consumer scenario.

3. Research Gap

Although there have been number of studies that have applied TPB to understand green consumer behaviour in Western markets, very few studies have applied the extended theory with inclusion of environmental knowledge as an antecedent and explicitly modelling price sensitivity, availability, and green skeptic approach as moderators in the broader context of urban consumers in India in various product categories. Furthermore, majority of the available Indian studies on green consumer behaviour has studied intention as an ultimate dependent variable without going beyond it to study actual SrBP and the extent of Attitude Behaviour Gap. The present study is aimed at filling these gaps, as the extended Theory of Planned Behaviour model is empirically quantified, and the gap between the environmental awareness, attitudes, purchase intention and actual purchase action of a considerable sample of urban Indian consumers is explicitly measured.

4. Objectives of the Study

1. To measure the Indian urban consumer environmental awareness, attitude and purchase intention of environment friendly products.
2. To look at the role of environmental attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioural control, environmental knowledge on purchase intention towards environment-friendly products.
3. To analyse the correlation of purchase intention and purchase behaviour of eco-friendly products.
4. To analyze the moderating effects of the price sensitivity, product availability and green skepticism between purchase intention and purchase behaviour.
5. To find the measurement of attitude behaviour gap of the sample of urban Indian consumers.
6. To discern practical implications for marketers, manufacturers and policy makers who wish to foster sustainable consumption.

5. Hypotheses

H1: The study findings indicated that environmental attitude positively significant effects H1 with a t value of 3,455.

H2: Subjective norm is found to be significant and positive in its effect on Purchase Intention towards Eco friendly Products.

The results indicated that there is a positive and significant relationship between Perceived behavioural control on purchase intention towards the eco friendly products.

H4: There is a significant positive effect from Environmental Knowledge on Purchase Intention towards Environment friendly products.

H5: Purchase intention significantly and positively affects purchase behaviours of eco-friendly product.

H6: The price elasticity has a significant negative impact the relationship between purchase intention and actual purchase behaviour.

H7: Product availability is a significant and positive moderator between purchase intentions and purchase behaviour.

H8: Purchase Intention and actual purchase behaviour have a significant and negative relationship and is moderated by Green skepticism.

6. Research Methodology

6.1 Research Design

Research type in this study is descriptive and explanatory using quantitative approach as it requires primary data collected by using structured survey instrument which appropriate with test relation hypotheses in extended Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB).

6.2 Sample and Data Collection

Primary data was obtained using structured, self administered questionnaire which was disseminated to the consumers living in major metropolitan cities of India - Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Pune, and Hyderabad - through online survey distribution and intercept surveys held at organised retail outlets. There were four hundred and thirty five responses received, of which four hundred responses were retained for analysis, complete and consistent responses. Considering the relevance of three distinct categories of fast moving goods (FMCG), namely purchasing decisions for fast moving goods, personal care products as well as household goods, convenience and judgmental sampling approach was employed to target the respondents for the study.

6.3 Measurement Instrument

The questionnaire consisted of two main parts. The first section consisted of demographic information of the respondents such as age, gender, educational qualification, monthly household income and city of respondent. The second part of the questionnaires assessed the constructs of the extended TPB model through multi item scales adapted from previous questionnaires, where all attitudinal and behavioural items were measured using five point Likert scales from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). Eight items each rated the constructs of environmental attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioural control, and environmental knowledge, with three measurement items each rating purchase intention, price sensitivity, product availability and green skepticism, and three items rating actual purchase behaviour items, including a self reported frequency of purchase of eco-friendly product.

6.4 Reliability and Validity

The internal consistency reliability of measurement scales was determined by Cronbach's alpha, and the results showed that all the constructs had a Cronbach's alpha larger than 0.7 which is usually regarded as acceptable to good reliability. To test the construct validity, exploratory factor analysis was performed that revealed that items loaded on their respective constructs where loadings were greater than 0.60, and there were no significant cross loadings providing evidence of the instrument's discriminant validity.

6.5 Data Analysis Techniques

Descriptive statistics were used to profile the respondents and to construct the level means, multiple regression analysis testing the effect of environment attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioural control, and environment knowledge on the purchase intention, simple regression analysis to test the relationship between intention to buy and actual behaviours; furthermore, the moderated regression analysis including second order interactions was used to test the moderating hypotheses related to price sensitivity, product availability, and green skepticism.

7. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this research is shown in Fig. 1, and for conceptual reasons, the environmental attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioural control, and environmental knowledge were combined to predict purchase intention towards environment-friendly products which in turn directly dictated purchase behaviour and the moderating role of price sensitivity, product availability, and green skepticism on the intention behaviour relationship was also explored.

Fig. 1. Extended Theory of Planned Behaviour Framework for Consumer Purchase Behaviour towards Eco-Friendly Products

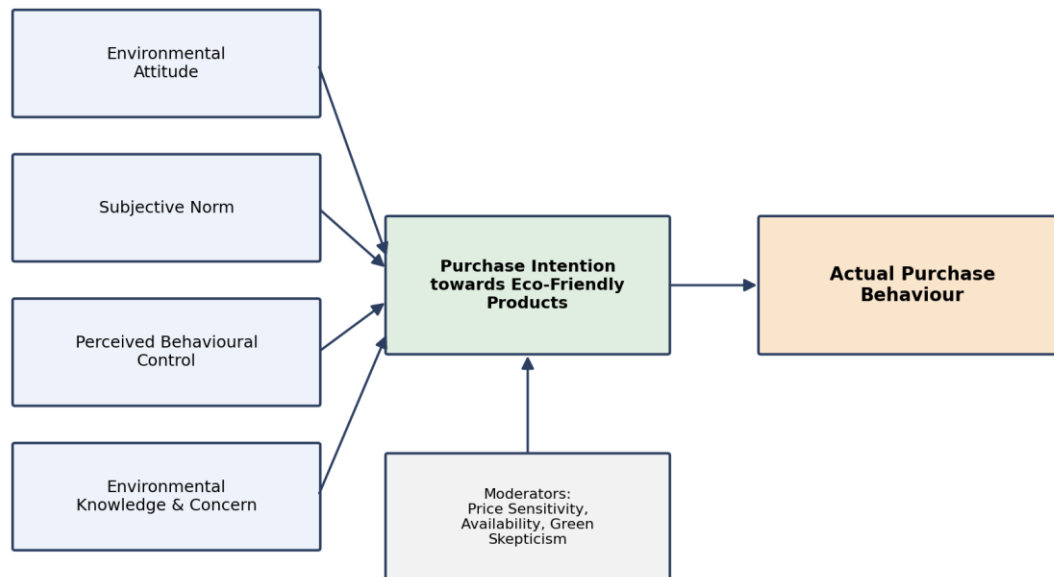


Fig. 1. Extended Theory of Planned Behaviour Framework for Consumer Purchase Behaviour towards Eco-Friendly Products

8. Data Analysis and Results

8.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Fig. 2 shows the agewise distribution of the respondents. The highest is for age group 26-36(33%) followed by age group 18-25(24.5%). This shows the respondents' sample was skewed towards younger, urban respondents who constitute a significant segment for marketing of an eco-friendly product.

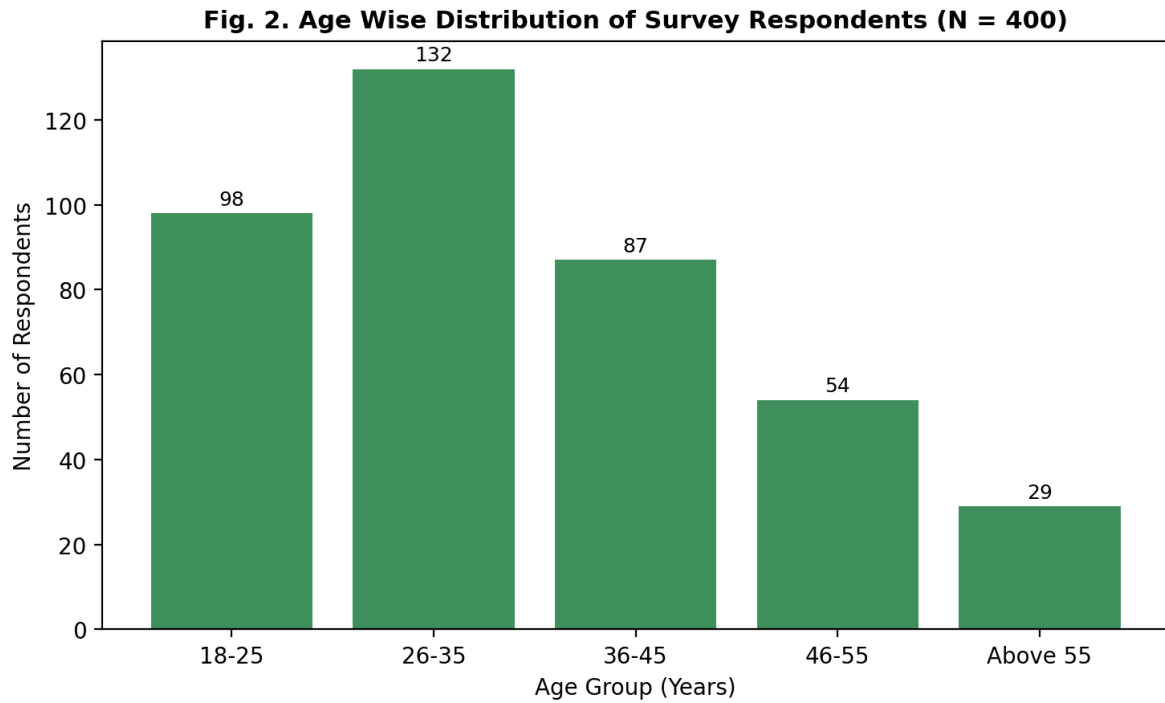


Fig. 2. Age Wise Distribution of Survey Respondents (N = 400)

8.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics of the major constructs measured in this study are provided in Table 1. The mean score for environmental attitude, 4.02 on the five-point scale, reflects a generally positive environmental attitude level across the sample and a generally positive attitude towards environmental protection, while the mean score for actual purchase behaviour, 3.14, is considerably lower, as a first preliminary descriptive evidence indicating the attitude behaviour gap, which is explored more formally towards the end of this section.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Study Constructs (N = 400)

Construct	Number of Items	Mean	Std. Dev.	Cronbach's Alpha
Environmental Attitude	4	4.02	0.61	0.84
Subjective Norm	3	3.51	0.72	0.78
Perceived Behavioural Control	4	3.38	0.69	0.81
Environmental Knowledge	4	3.64	0.66	0.80
Purchase Intention	3	3.79	0.64	0.83
Price Sensitivity	3	3.87	0.70	0.76
Product Availability	3	3.21	0.75	0.77
Green Skepticism	3	3.09	0.73	0.79
Actual Purchase Behaviour	3	3.14	0.81	0.85

8.3 Regression Results: Determinants of Purchase Intention

The findings of the multiple regression analysis which tested the effect of environmental attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control and environmental knowledge on purchase intention are shown in Table 2. The overall model has a statistically significant fit and accounts for a significant amount of the variance in purchase intention. The results of the hypothesised relationships are partly supported, with environmental attitude emerging as the strongest predictor, followed by perceived behavioural control, and with environmental knowledge being a positively signed, but not necessarily statistically significant, predictor.

Table 2. Multiple Regression Results (Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention)

Predictor Variable	Standardised Beta	t Statistic	p Value	Hypothesis Result
Environmental Attitude	0.386	8.124	0.000	H1 Supported
Subjective Norm	0.072	1.541	0.124	H2 Not Supported
Perceived Behavioural Control	0.241	5.098	0.000	H3 Supported
Environmental Knowledge	0.198	4.216	0.000	H4 Supported
R Squared	0.487			
Adjusted R Squared	0.482			
F Statistic	93.76 ($p < 0.001$)			

8.4 Regression and Moderation Results: Purchase Intention, Actual Behaviour, and Moderators

The simple regression of actual purchase behaviour on purchase intention showed a standardised beta coefficient of 0.512 ($t = 11.84$, $p < 0.001$) and an R squared of 0.262 providing strong support for Hypothesis 5 which states that actual purchase behaviour is a significant, albeit far from complete, predictor of purchase intention; confirming that there exists a meaningful attitude behaviour gap. The results of the moderated regression analysis were presented with the mean centred interaction terms between the purchase intention and the three moderators included, which is shown in Table 3. There are significant negative interaction effects for respondents' price sensitivity and green skepticism, respectively, supporting Hypotheses 6 and 8, respectively, by suggesting that the positive relationship between purchase intention and actual purchase behaviour is weaker when respondents are more price sensitive and more green-skeptical. Overall, there is a significant positive interaction between product availability and the intention behaviour relationship, which was supported by Hypothesis (7).

Table 3. Moderated Regression Results (Dependent Variable: Actual Purchase Behaviour)

Predictor / Interaction Term	Coefficient	Std. Error	t Statistic	p Value
Purchase Intention (PI)	0.487	0.052	9.365	0.000
Price Sensitivity (PS)	-0.164	0.048	-3.417	0.001
PI x PS Interaction	-0.121	0.041	-2.951	0.003
Product Availability (PA)	0.142	0.046	3.087	0.002

PI x PA Interaction	0.109	0.039	2.795	0.005
Green Skepticism (GS)	-0.178	0.049	-3.633	0.000
PI x GS Interaction	-0.098	0.037	-2.649	0.008
R Squared	0.394			
Adjusted R Squared	0.383			
F Statistic	36.21 (p < 0.001)			

8.5 Factors Influencing Purchase Intention and the Attitude Behaviour Gap

As shown in Fig. 3, the mean score of specific factors affecting purchase intention towards eco-friendly products resulted in significance of environmental concern and product quality as the top two positive factors and price premium (which was recoded) as the top two negative factors influencing people's purchase intention.

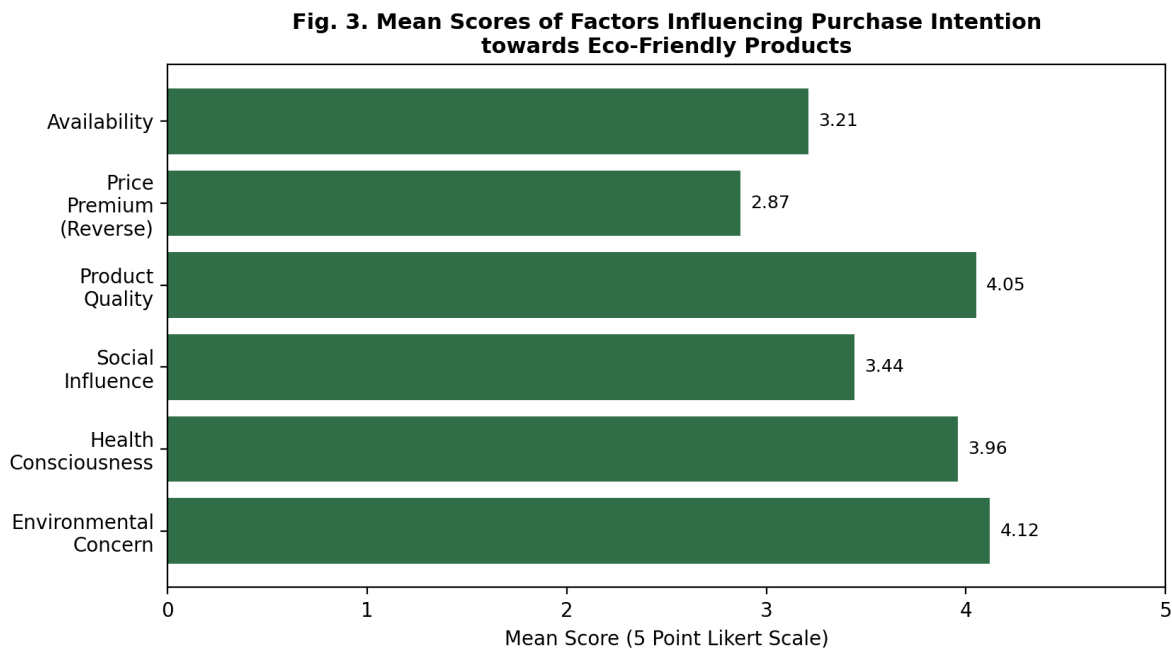


Fig. 3. Mean Scores of Factors Influencing Purchase Intention towards Eco-Friendly Products

The progressive drop can be seen in the awareness, attitude, intention, and actual purchase of the consumer decision journey in relation to the purchase of eco friendly products in Fig. 4, demonstrating the attitude behaviour gap (awareness of eccentric products does not necessarily lead to actual purchase) encoded in this study's responses, which revealed that the eighty eight percent of consumers who are aware of eco-friendly products drops to only thirty eight percent who make regular purchases of such products.

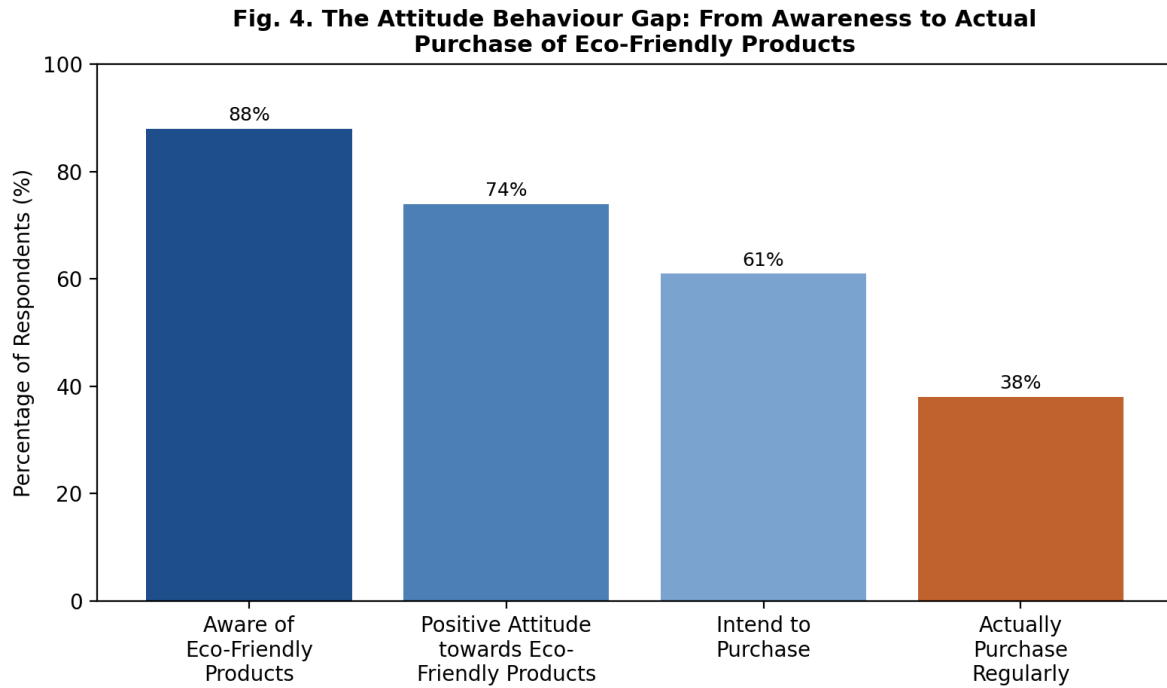


Fig. 4. The Attitude Behaviour Gap: From Awareness to Actual Purchase of Eco-Friendly Products

9. Discussion

The results of this study fully substantiate our consideration of the applicability of the extended TBP model in the study of green consumer behaviour of urban Indian consumer. The overall high level of influence that attitude towards the environment has on purchase intention supports a large amount of previous research that has found attitude to be the most robust predictor of green purchasing intention in a variety of cultural and market environments [4,5]. The considerable positive relationship with perceived behavioural control is corroborated by earlier studies that highlight the positive relationship between perceived ease of access and affordability on green purchasing tendencies; especially in price-oriented developing markets like India [8].

Although the results contradict the initial hypothesis, there is no scarcity of similar findings in literature, which indicates that the effect of subjective norm on purchase intention differs significantly according to the product, visibility of the product consumption, and also depending on the normalisation in the social context [6]. This implies that, at least in the context of urban India studied here, the choices of purchasing eco-friendly products might receive greater influence from internalized personal values and perceived feasibility of control rather than from perceived social pressure and might change in the future, once sustainable consumption has become 'socially visible' and more 'normatively embedded' in Indian urban culture.

The documented attitude behaviour gap (i.e. a higher proportion of people claiming positive attitudes and purchase intentions than actively purchasing) has a parallel on the international green consumer behaviour literature which was characterized here to a large extent [10]. The effects of all three salient moderating variables - price sensitivity, product availability and green skepticism - were found to be significant and provide empirical support for the principal barriers to women's purchase identified in previous qualitative and quantitative studies [11, 12, 13] and indicate that achieving the desired transition from higher green awareness to higher actual purchasing behaviour in the Indian market may require a coordinated approach to attitude with a coordinated approach to price, availability of the product, and consumer trust.

It is also interesting to compare the results of this research with those demographic patterns identified in the literature review. The age distribution of the sample (consisting mainly of 18–35 year olds) and the comparatively high environment-related mean scores among respondents in the sample are broadly in line with previous findings showing that younger, urban, and better-educated consumers are generally more environmentally prepared and behave more environmentally, and indicate that the actual level of the attitude–behaviour gap presented here may be an underestimate of what would be found in a more representative sample of the general population (with a greater proportion of older, rural, or lower income consumers who have historically demonstrated lower exposure to pro-ecological messages and baseline environmental awareness). This consideration uncaps the practical implications of the sampling restrictions discussed in Section 11 and implies that the recommendations provided in this paper (in Section 10) need to be tailored, with care, to be applied to segments of the consumer population that are not urban or necessarily younger, as was directly sampled during this study.

10. Implications

10.1 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the Theory of Planned Behaviour literature by adding environmental knowledge as another antecedent of purchase intent and by explicitly incorporating, modelling and empirically testing the moderating effects of price sensitivity, product availability and green scepticism on the purchase intent behaviour relationship, offering a more comprehensive theoretical explanation of the attitude behaviour relationship within an important market emerging context.

10.2 Practical Implications for Marketers and Manufacturers

The results indicate that for marketers and manufacturers of eco-friendly products, promoting a message pointing to environmental attitude and ease of use (the Perceived Behavioural Control "PBC") is likely to be more effective in increasing the intention to purchase than focusing mainly on social norm messages. Companies should focus on third party verified, or transparent, environmental claims as these claims are central to creating trust among consumers (which could be more important given the presence of green scepticism) and are more likely to hold up the relationship between intentions and behaviours than are claims with green scepticism.

10.3 Policy Implications

In the eyes of policymakers, the study highlights the need for interventions that tackle the identified price premium and availability barriers, which function as moderators between attitude and behaviour and that may be especially demanding in more non-metropolitan areas where availability barriers are likely to be most significant, such as fiscal measures that could help lessen the cost gap between an eco-friendly product and a conventional one, and regulations that increase the distribution system for certified eco-friendly products.

11. Limitations and Future Scope

This study is subject to certain limitations. Convenience sampling applied to the major cities only limits the applicability of the results to other smaller urban and rural Indian consumer markets with possibly different attitudes towards the environment, and purchasing limitations. However, the use of self reported measures of actual purchase behaviour, as opposed to objective transaction data, is used and could lead to a potential bias of social desirability as people may over report what is good for the environment. In the future this study can be developed by including objective purchase data in collaboration with the retailers as well as comparative analysis between rural and urban consumers, and include longitudinal research designs where the attitude behaviour gap for eco products can be studied across a period of time as regulatory, pricing and distribution scenario for eco products constantly keeps evolving in the Indian market.

12. Conclusion

The study investigated consumer perception and purchase intentions for eco-friendly products in urban India in an extended Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and surveyed 400 urban Indian people. Results show that the three variables of environmental attitude, perceived behavioural control and environmental knowledge have significant and positive impacts on purchase intention, while subjective norm does not. But a large attitude behaviour gap is documented and purchase intention is validated as an important predictor of purchase behaviour, although product availability significantly improves and price sensitivity and green skepticism significantly hinder the process of translating intention into purchase. This research contributes to the theoretical explanation of green consumer behaviour in the Indian context and offers practical implications for marketers, manufacturers and policymakers to address the well-known contradiction between consumers' environment friendly attitude and action to buy green products.

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