

The Eco-Buying Decision : Understanding Consumer Criteria for Green Purchases

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to develop a theoretical understanding of the variables influencing Eco-Buying Behaviour, how these variables have been examined in existing studies to date, and to propose a conceptual model or theoretical framework of Eco-Buying Behaviour to facilitate its evaluation. The paper examines and critically appraises major contributions to the Eco-Buying Behaviour literature. A structured analysis of research studies from around the world has been conducted to assess consumers' behaviour in buying green products. This theoretical review aims to collate information from various papers to develop a model that explains the decision-making variables of Eco-buying Behaviour. From the exploration of the literature, it is clear that the variables influencing consumer behaviour are varied and so drawing mainly on two theories that are widely used to understand Consumer Behaviour- the Theory of Reasoned Actions (TRA) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), a conceptual framework of Eco-Buying Behaviour is suggested. This model tries to outline the important variables involved in the study of Eco-buying behaviour or green consumer behaviour and the correlation between the variables. The theoretical model that is developed by the present study is the roadmap for further research. It is anticipated to guide organisations and academicians alike, in understanding the nuances of Eco-buying behaviour and implementing holistic sustainability frameworks, that align with consumers' values.

Keywords: Environment, Green Products, Consumer Behaviour, Sustainable Green Marketing, Consumer Awareness, Eco Labels

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1. INTRODUCTION

Climate change and impending ecological crises, have forced organisations and individuals to embrace sustainability (IPCC, 2022). At the individual level, this involves purchasing and utilizing products that inflict minimal or no harm on the environment. Acknowledging this, marketers and manufacturers have increasingly shifted their focus towards eco-friendly products and production methods (IPCC, 2022; Urgent Climate Action, 2022).

Governments and organisations worldwide have invested enormous sums of money and efforts in the conservation of the environment. For instance, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), funded by the governments of Japan, Germany and Canada has approved around \$1.1 billion for green initiatives (Global Environment Facility, 2023). In India, the government

has invested around INR 600 billion in green projects (PIB,2023; Climate Fact Checks, 2023).

Manufacturers, marketers, and consumers have also started to understand their responsibilities regarding this cause. Since the late 1970s, there has been increased awareness about finding ways and means to protect and sustain our environment. The human race, in general, has realised the importance of harnessing products that do minimal or zero damage to nature. Consumers are seeking eco-friendly products, compelling organisations to implement sustainable practices (Barbu et al., 2022; Gomes et al., 2023; Joshi & Rahman, 2015). According to a global survey, almost 65% of consumers prefer making eco-friendly purchases, highlighting the awareness about environmental sustainability (World Economic Forum, 2023).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Marketing academics and practitioners have laid a lot of emphasis on the role that marketing plays in advocating and sustaining environmental balance (Chammaro et al., 2009; Bhattacharya, 2011). Green Marketing, according to the definition given by the American Marketing Association is

1. Retailing definition : The marketing of products that are supposed to be safe for the environment.
2. Social marketing definition : The creation and marketing of products developed in a way that causes zero or minimum damage to the environment.
3. Environments definition: Businesses striving to manufacture, advertise, package, and recycle products in ways that are mindful of the environment.

Green Marketing is a comprehensive, broad approach to marketing, including manufacturing, selling, promoting, usage and disposal, of goods and services, in a manner that limits threats to the environment and preserves the ecological balance. Globally there is an accelerated trend of switching over to “Green” products, both tangible and intangible, be it ecotourism, organic food, recyclable clothes or herbal cosmetics. Several studies have shown that implementing sustainable practices is beneficial for both the organisation and the environment as it contributes in building reputation and customer loyalty from green consumers, which in turn translates to long-term profits (Chen et al., 2023). Moreover, such companies also attract more investors and consumers (Verma & Singh, 2023).

2.1 Global Research on Eco-Buying Behaviour

The emergence of environmental sustainability in human conscience at a global level has led to the advent of Eco-buying behaviour, where consumers increasingly prefer eco-friendly products and services (Cherian & Jacob, 2018). Thus, if they want to remain competitive, businesses have to go the sustainable way (Cini & Ricci, 2018). Organisations are now inspired to develop innovative business models to satiate the needs of customers, who are playing a significant role as protectors of the environment (Pironti et al., 2015) and

implementing sustainable economic activities (Fornasari, 2022). On the other hand, consumers are also facing challenges such as higher costs and limited availability that hinder the adoption of green practices (Reinartz, 2002). Consumer behaviour, according to Kotler & Keller (2006), comprises how individuals and organizations select, buy, use, and dispose of goods and services. Environmental challenges such as climate change and resource depletion have brought home the importance of green consumerism, with consumers playing a vital role in encouraging and adopting green practices (Thøgersen, 2021).

Recognising the determining factors of Eco-buying behaviour helps businesses in creating green products and policymakers in designing effective sustainable tactics and strategies (Zhao et al., 2020).

FSC International (FSC International, 2023; GlobeScan, 2023) has been following a Green Consumer Segmentation worldwide with relevance till today. The segments are as follows

- a) Green in Deed-The greenest segment. This group shows the highest concern for the environment, and they put their money where their mouth is when it comes to green behaviour(FSC International, 2023; GfK, 2023).
- b) Carbon Cultured- Many of these people are located in markets where green has long been on the national agenda (mostly the developed world). As a result, they show a high degree of concern for the environment, like recycling and conserving water and energy, but their behaviour is still below global standards(FSC International, 2023; GfK, 2023).
- c) Green in Need - A group that exists almost exclusively in the developing world. They have the desire but lack the means and know-how to be greener. Given the right tools, these people could climb the environmental ladder and become Green in Deeds(FSC International, 2023; GfK, 2023).
- d) Glamour Greens- “Green” to this group is a status symbol. The environment is only skin deep to them. They are less likely to have core green values, but they will participate if it means they can display their green badge of honour(FSC International, 2023; GfK, 2023).
- e) Jaded- A cynical and sceptical group. This group claims to be knowledgeable about the environment but is less concerned about it and does not want issues to stand in the way of economic progress. Some may have rejected the “green movement”, and even be overtly hostile towards it (FSC International, 2023; GfK, 2023).

2.2 Eco-Buying Behaviour - The Indian Context

Ipsos Green Gauge Report (Ipsos, 2024) has done the segmentation of consumers in India, according to their level of concern and engagement, as follows:

- Activists- 23% are Activists who believe that the environment is at a critical stage and the world must act now.
- Pragmatists- 07% are Pragmatists believe that the environment is at risk, but there is still time to act.
- Conflicted Contributors- 06% is confused about the current state of affairs.
- Busy Bystanders- 41% are Busy bystanders who think that climate change is not a priority – it's largely overblown.
- Disengaged Denialists - 24% are Disengaged Denialists who believe that the environment is not a concern 24%.

According to the 2023 survey findings of Greendex ("Consumer Greendex," a scientifically derived sustainable consumption index of actual consumer behaviour and material lifestyles across various countries, conducted by National Geographic and GlobeScan), India is the country with the highest Greendex score index at 57. Indians are thus considered among the most eco-friendly consumers in the world. The majority of Indian consumers are prepared to spend extra, for an energy-saving product if it will save money over the product's life (ScienceDaily, 2023; Vivid Maps, 2023).

A contemporary survey indicates that a majority of Indians want the government to support more green innovation and regulation. Many consumers in India plan to invest more in eco-friendly products in the near future. However, they mention limited availability and inconsistent labelling as the major hurdles to buying green. Additionally, 86% of Indian respondents feel that advertising about green products aids consumers in making informed decisions (NIQ, 2023; Euromonitor, 2023).

AC Nielsen- a market research agency, published an article in Business Standard namely "Indians prefer eco-friendly products". The agency found that most Indian shoppers are concerned about the impact their purchasing will have on the environment and sustainability. Around 79% of consumers showed their trust in recyclable packaging and 86% of Indian consumers believe in energy-efficient products and appliances. India is ranked among the top three Asian Pacific countries with a strong inclination towards green products. The study showed that 90% of people in India were worried about air and water pollution, though 80% of Indians believed that climate change was an important environmental issue (AC Nielsen, 2023; Indian Retailer, 2023).

Varghese and Santhosh (2015) conducted a study in the Kollam district of Kerala, where they found that most of the respondents were aware of green products among which organic vegetables and organic food products were the favoured choices. The study also found that the key factor influencing the buying behaviour of consumers was the quality of the product and the challenges faced by the consumers were limited availability and high price.

Similarly, Maheswari & Sakthivel (2015), in their study on the customers' awareness and satisfaction level towards green marketing products in Coimbatore city, found all respondents to have knowledge about eco-friendly products. The chief sources from where people get information about green products are schools and universities (Yusuf & Fatima, 2015).

Singh & Kumar (2015) in their study found that most of the respondents from North India (more specifically, from the states of Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh) are acquainted with Green Marketing. Significant correlations were found between awareness and respondent's income, occupation, and marital status, irrespective of their age, education and state. Awareness about Green Marketing is not influenced by gender. The study also found that Web Based Marketing was a major source of building awareness. Consumers' attention to the environmental issues and initiatives taken by the government and different organisations are the chief considerations that influence awareness about Green Marketing. Laddha & Malviya (2015), surveyed 150 samples in Mumbai, where the participants were asked about the environment and buying behaviour. The study revealed that concerns, knowledge, and awareness of the environment and environment-friendly products, together with educational levels affect green buying behaviour. Building awareness through advertising, individual buying behaviour can be changed. It is also crucial for companies to develop new environment-friendly products to ensure competitive performance. Green marketing is in its early stages and substantial research is needed to explore its potential.

2.3 Elementary theory

This paper mainly endeavours to study the various evaluative research papers. However, we will now consider an elementary theory frequently used to comprehend consumer behaviour, the Theory of Planned Behaviour.

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

This paper is based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) model, that was introduced by Ajzen (1991). According to Ajzen (1991), "the theory of planned behaviour is an extension of the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) made necessary by the original model's limitations in dealing with behaviours over which people have incomplete volitional control". The latter theory has included the concepts of attitude, social norms and PBC, in so doing providing a thorough insight into an individual's behaviour (Savari *et al.*, 2023). Ajzen (1991) explained that "intentions to perform behaviours of different kinds can be predicted with high accuracy from attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control; and these intentions, together with perceptions of behavioural control, account for considerable variance in actual behaviour." The TPB framework has been widely used in various studies as a socio-psychological theory for analysing behaviour in different domains (Yeh *et al.*, 2021). Thus, to understand eco-buying behaviour too, individual behaviour can be explained by attitudes, subjective norms and PBC, which are the main elements of the TPB framework (Ajzen, 1991; Savari & Khaleghi, 2023; Si *et al.*, 2020; Taufique & Islam, 2021).

The different parameters used in this theory are explained below. (a) Attitudes denote an individual's positive or negative assessment of a definite behaviour (Savari *et al.*, 2023). (b) Subjective norms denote an individual's perception of social pressure or influence from significant others to perform a specific behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Ling *et al.*, 2023; Savari *et al.*, 2023). (c) Perceived Behavioural Control denotes an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform a behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Ling *et al.*, 2023; Savari *et al.*, 2023). Various research worldwide has used TPB to explore consumer behaviour in different settings, and green consumerism is no exception. Ling *et al.* (2023) examined consumer attitudes regarding single-use plastics, and Farani *et al.* (2019) researched the influence of social norms on Green Consumer Behaviour.

The following figure (Fumiyo, 2014) illustrates the Theory of Planned Behaviour as propounded by Ajzen (1991).

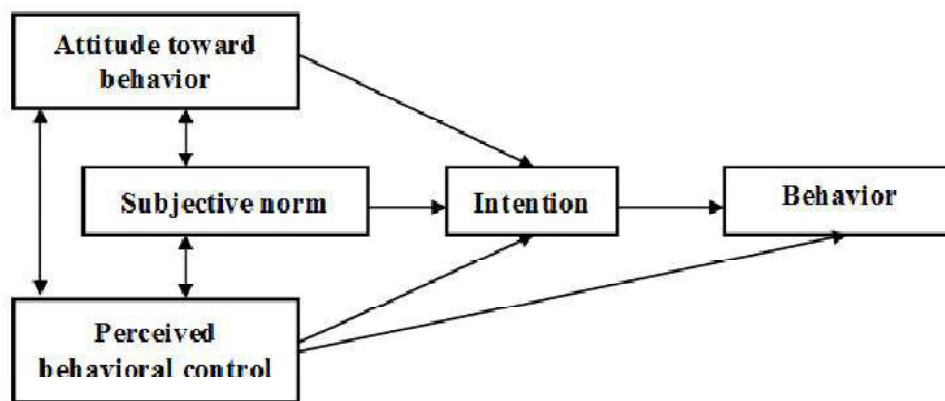


Figure 1: Theory of Planned Behaviour [Source: Research Paper Fumiyo, 2014]

Fumiyo, Kondo. (2014). A Cross-National Analysis of Intention to Use Multiple Mobile Entertainment Services. *Journal of Global Information Technology Management*. 17. 45-60. 10.1080/1097198X.2014.910991.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Drawing on the main factors identified in the literature and the insights obtained from it, the present research study aims to propose a rudimentary conceptual model of consumers' buying behaviour towards green products. This model tries to identify all the relevant factors for assessing the decision-making process for purchasing green products and demonstrates the relationships between these factors.

4. METHODOLOGY:

An exhaustive literature survey in the global context and also, the context of India, has been made to understand the growth and development of the concept of Green Consumer

Behaviour towards environmental sustainability. Based on the findings from the different papers, a theoretical model has been developed to explore Green Consumer behaviour.

5. DISCUSSION AND DEVELOPMENT OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the following Conceptual model is being proposed. Here, the five independent variables are instrumental in inducing Eco-Purchase Intention, which in turn will lead to Eco-Purchase Behaviour. Figure 2 shows the conceptual framework established to study the relationship between the dependent variable, the moderating variable (Purchase Intention) and the independent variables.

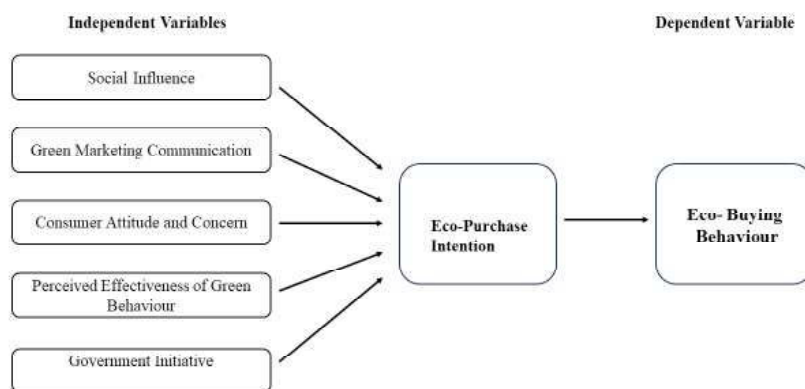


Figure 2: Proposed Conceptual Framework [Researchers Construct]

5.1 Eco-Buying Behaviour

Eco-buying Behaviour or Green Purchase Behaviour according to Chan (2001) is a particular type of purchase behaviour in which consumers express their caring and attention to the environment. Green purchase behaviour involves the consumption of products that are recyclable or conservable, useful or generous to the environment, and sensitive or receptive to environmental concerns (Mostafa, 2007). Many past researchers have conducted research on consumers' behaviour towards green products since 1970s on different variables such as attitudes, values, beliefs or knowledge. Eco-friendly purchasing behaviour is not only a substitute for traditional consumption patterns but also minimises the detrimental effects of individual consumption practices on terrestrial and marine environments (Wang *et al.*, 2021)

Research has been done by Paco *et al.* (2009) on demographic and environmental criteria in Portuguese consumers where it was found that they were reluctant to buy green products even though they are aware of the environmental issues. Kumar and Anand (2015)

suggested the need for advertisements that would promote environmental protection and the relevance of green products which would not only enhance consumers' knowledge but alongside pre-empt perceived behavioural control inclination towards green practices.

Manaktola and Jauhari (2007) surveyed consumers' attitudes and behaviour towards environment-friendly practices in the hospitality industry. Their findings indicated that consumers prefer green practices although they were not willing to pay extra for such services. Research by Kumar (2012) established a significantly positive relation between environmental knowledge and attitude towards green products. Similarly, a positive relationship was found between purchase intention and purchase behaviour. According to Mahesh & Ganapathi (2012), consumers' socio economic features and attitudes impact their intention to buy green products. Their study revealed that the intention to purchase green products is influenced by a positive attitude, adherence to subjective norms related to the green movement, and perceived behavioural control regarding the environmental impact of green foods. Cultural and socio-economic differences between countries may also give rise to different factors of influence. Thus, the variables researchers use to assess consumer green purchase behaviour differ among studies.

5.2 Eco-buying intention

Eco-buying intention or Green purchase intention refers to consumers' willingness to purchase green products expressed by the consumer for betterment of the environment, and such consumers' willingness to purchase eco-friendly products (Chan, 2001; Dagher and Itani, 2014). This means that consumers are not only concerned about the environmental quality of the product but also about what will be the implications of such purchases. The underlying relationship between purchase intention with purchase behaviour for green products has been proven in several studies, including some in India (Kanchanapibul et al., 2014; Lai and Cheng, 2016). In addition, Lai and Cheng (2016) found that consumers' expressed willingness is instrumental in capturing consumers' minds for green purchases (Lai and Cheng, 2016). Hence the existing information endorses that intention is a major predictor of behaviour for sustainable products. The higher the intention, the more the likelihood of Eco-purchase Behaviour.

5.3 Social Influence

The first variable considered for Eco-buying Behaviour is Social Influence. As social creatures, we human beings naturally share our beliefs, thoughts and values with others. In the context of this paper, we assume social influence to be aligned with subjective norms from the Theory of Planned Behaviour or social norms. Social norms refer to unwritten social rules or beliefs that guide expected and acceptable behaviour within a community. Subjective norms are particularly influential in shaping intentions, as they represent the perceived social pressure to act in specific ways due to expectations from others (Rhodes et al., 2020; Schorn, 2024). Social Influence has been found to have a positive relationship with Eco-buying behaviour too (Huo et al., 2022; Gong et al., 2023).

5.4 Green Marketing Strategies

Green Marketing grew in importance in 1975, when the American Marketing Association organised the first workshop on Ecological marketing in Austin (Texas), which resulted in the first book being published, *Ecological Marketing*, by Henion and Kinnear in 1976. According to Peattie (2001), green marketing has evolved over time into three phases:

Phase I – ‘Ecological’ green marketing. This period saw marketing efforts primarily focused on addressing environmental issues and offering remedies.

Phase II- ‘Environmental’ green marketing. In the next phase, the focus was on clean technology that addressed waste management and environmental degradation.

Phase III – ‘Sustainable’ green marketing. It gained popularity in the 1990s and early 2000s. The term ‘sustainable development’ was adopted. The definition runs as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

Green marketing has been found to have a direct influence on eco-purchase intentions. So this is being considered as the second independent variable in the proposed model. Organisations can induce customer interest in buying eco-friendly products and promote environmental sustainability by employing effective marketing strategies and emphasizing the benefits of their products or services for the environment (WahyuBaskoro, 2018). There are several strategies when trying to evolve and shift a company’s focus to a greener approach, such as trying to create innovative as well as creative new products (Cronin et al. 2011). Research points out that for any company, Green Marketing strategies that influence consumer buying decisions can be categorised into the following:

- Green Product Positioning (Situmorang et al., 2021)
- Sustainable Packaging. (Jain & Hudnurkar, 2022)
- Green Supply Chain (Çankaya et al., 2018)
- Transparent and Authentic Communication (Chen et al., 2022)
- Creating Consumer Education and Awareness (Huo et al., 2022)
- Product Lifecycle Information and Recyclability (Gong & Li, 2023)
- Social and Community Engagement (Wei et al., 2023).
- Eco-Labeling and Certifications

One important tool of green marketing involves the promotion of eco-labels on environmentally friendly products (D Souza, 2004; Wang et al., 2021). Eco-labels help customers, businesses and the government in identifying and assuring sustainable practices. (UNEP, 2017). The ISO 14020 series was an initiative taken up by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) in 1989, with the idea of providing an internationally accepted standard of eco-labelling. Eco-labels are the only means of communication between organisations and consumers, so they should be strongly

reinforced by national or international regulatory bodies to differentiate them from false marketing claims made by companies. Several years back in 1991, the Indian Government, acknowledging consumers' shift towards eco-friendly (or green) products, introduced the eco-labelling scheme called 'Ecomark'. The Indian Ecomark Scheme, based on a cradle-to-grave approach, is also associated with the quality of products. In simpler terms, this means that, for eligibility, products have to be both eco-friendly and high-quality. Around 16 product categories are listed under the Ecomark scheme, cosmetics being one of them. Nowadays, companies in India have also started using international Ecolabels. Rashid (2009) discovered that consumers exhibit a more favourable response to green marketing and the buying of environmentally friendly products when they are informed about eco-labels.

5.5 Environmental Attitude and Concern

The third independent variable discussed is Environmental Attitude and Concern. According to Ajzen (1991), attitude can be defined as desirable or undesirable evaluations that a person has towards objects, issues or other people. Environmental Attitude generally refers to an individual's values and evaluative judgments regarding environmental protection and sustainability. Schultz (2000), proposed three categories of environmental attitudes based on a person's value orientation— (a) Egoistic Orientation, those who focus on self-interest (b) Altruistic Orientation, concerned about the well-being of other people (c) Biospheric Orientation, where environmental concern is rooted in a sense of duty or moral responsibility to protect all living things and the biosphere as a whole, independent of human or personal benefit. Based on research results, Schultz (2000) found that self-centred attitudes are the cause of consumer behaviour. Several studies have highlighted the significance of attitude in bolstering the intention to purchase green cosmetics, with attitude emerging as one of the leading forecasters of intention (Amin et al., 2020; Pop et al., 2020; Sajinè et al., 2021).

Dunlap and Jones (2002) have described Environmental Concern as the public's awareness of green problems and endeavours to solve them. Also, environmental concern refers to an individual's emotional engagement or anxiety a person feels about environmental degradation and its after-effects. People with high concern will buy products that do no damage or minimum damage to the environment (Han et al., 2022; Walia et al., 2020).

5.6 Perceived Effectiveness of Environmental Behaviour

The fourth independent variable being considered in the proposed model is Perceived Effectiveness of Environmental Behaviour. *Perceived Effectiveness of Environmental Behavior* describes an individual's belief in the impact of their actions on the environment. People who believe that their efforts can contribute to positive environmental changes are more likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviours, such as recycling or conserving energy. This perception can drive individuals with pro-environmental attitudes to become more involved in sustainable practices, as they feel empowered to make a difference (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Studies suggest that confidence in one's ability to influence

the environment is closely linked to an increased commitment to eco-friendly behaviour and efforts toward long-term environmental improvement (Cuadrado&Tabernero, 2022; Tabernero et al., 2015). Recent studies endorse that collective effectiveness and individual perception of environmental effects are important in promoting behaviours such as recycling and energy conservation (Cuadrado&Tabernero, 2022; Tabernero et al., 2015). Also, some other research shows that self-efficacy is crucial in adopting sustainable behaviours such as reducing fossil fuel use, with individuals who feel they can bring about change, engaging more frequently in sustainable choices (Kothe et al., 2019).

5.7 Government Initiative

The fifth independent variable in the model, Government Initiative and Eco-Labeling, encompasses actions and support provided by national or regional governments to promote sustainable practices. Government initiatives may include policy measures, financial incentives, and regulatory frameworks aimed at encouraging environmentally friendly behaviour among businesses and consumers (Diekmeyer, 2008; Prakash&Potoski, 2006). The government of a country plays an important role in environmental protection and so should execute environmentally sustainable development plans. For example, in India, government initiatives like hosting World Environment Day, banning plastics, cleaning up rivers, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, etc., are some examples of supporting sustainability and green movement. These initiatives may not directly affect green cosmetic sales, but encourage a green attitude and green behaviour,

6. CONCLUSION

Green Consumerism is experiencing unprecedented growth around the world, steered by certain factors like environmental awareness, social influence, health and wellness trends, etc. This has propelled companies towards sustainable practices like- Green Marketing, Green Production, CSR activities, and ESG reporting among other such practices. Governments around the world have been implementing laws related to sustainability, most of which are aligned with the UN SDGs.

In this paper, we have re-examined research literature on Eco-buying Behaviour. Based on our analysis and integration of different papers, a conceptual model has been proposed. This model may be further enhanced as a natural evolutionary process of our understanding of the topic. The theoretical model that the present study has developed is the roadmap for generating further research questions like what drives different consumer segments, the impact of culture and psychology on green behaviour, etc. It is nevertheless hoped that such a conceptual model will aid comprehension of the significant variables affecting Eco-Buying Behaviour.

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