

Understanding Sustainable Consumer Behavior: A Meta-Analytic Review Of Green Purchase Drivers

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KEYWORDS <i>Sustainable consumer behaviour, green purchase drivers, Environmental concern, Consumer effectiveness, Price sensitivity, Meta-analysis</i>	ABSTRACT The growing global focus on environmental sustainability has heightened interest in understanding the key drivers of green consumer behavior. Despite a substantial and expanding body of research on sustainable consumption, there remains limited clarity regarding which psychological, social, and economic factors most strongly influence green purchasing decisions. This paper presents a meta-analytic review of 72 peer-reviewed empirical studies published between 2005 and 2024, systematically evaluating the relative strength of these influencing factors. Rather than concentrating on a specific region, the study draws from a diverse global dataset to enhance generalizability across different cultural and market contexts. The findings reveal that environmental concern, perceived consumer effectiveness, and positive attitudes toward green products are consistently strong predictors of sustainable consumer behavior. In contrast, price sensitivity and skepticism toward green labels emerge as notable barriers. This study advances theoretical understanding and provides actionable insights for marketers and policymakers aiming to encourage sustainable consumption. The results also inform future research directions and policy interventions designed to foster more responsible consumer behavior on a global scale.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Background and Context

The escalating degradation of the natural environment—manifested through climate change, biodiversity loss, as well as the resource depletion—has intensified the global imperative to mainly adopt much better forms of sustainable practices. This obligation extends beyond governments and agencies to include individual customers, whose each day buying choices cumulatively exert a sizeable impact on environmental sustainability. Among the various approaches to mitigating environmental harm, promoting sustainable or “green” consumer behavior has gained considerable interest (Han et al., 2021). Green consumer behavior refers to the adoption of purchasing patterns that meet the present needs while ensuring the maintenance of ecological assets for future generations.

Theoretical and Disciplinary Interest

Over the past two decades, the concept of sustainable consumption has been explored across a range of academic disciplines, including marketing, psychology, sociology, and environmental science. This interdisciplinary focus has led to the development of numerous theoretical models and frameworks aimed at understanding what motivates consumers to choose environmentally friendly products. Much of the scholarly attention has been devoted to identifying the psychological, social, and economic factors that either encourage or inhibit green purchasing behavior (Elhoushy et al., 2021). These factors range from intrinsic motivators such as environmental concern and personal values to extrinsic influences like brand credibility, peer pressure, product pricing, and regulatory mechanisms.

Research Gaps and Fragmented Evidence

Despite the growing body of research, the empirical evidence on green consumer behavior remains notably inconsistent. While some studies report a strong correlation between environmental values and green purchase intentions, others emphasize the influence of external cues such as advertising, labeling, and social norms. This fragmentation reflects a lack of theoretical consensus and poses challenges for both researchers seeking to develop integrated models of consumer behavior and practitioners aiming to implement effective sustainability-driven strategies (Hosta et al., 2021). These



discrepancies also raise concerns about the generalizability of findings across different cultural contexts, geographic regions, and product categories

Objective and Contribution of the Study

The study was conducted with the following objectives:

To conduct a comprehensive meta-analytic review of empirical studies on green purchase behavior, addressing inconsistencies and fragmentation in the existing literature.

To statistically aggregate findings from diverse studies to evaluate the relative strength of various drivers influencing sustainable consumer behavior.

To identify consistent patterns and relationships among green purchase determinants across different contexts, cultures, and product categories.

To offer a more unified theoretical understanding of sustainable consumption by synthesizing insights from interdisciplinary research.

To provide actionable recommendations for marketers, policymakers, and environmental advocates seeking to promote sustainable purchasing behavior.

To contribute to the refinement of behavioral theories related to sustainability and provide a foundation for future research and policy development in this domain.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A study by Elhoushy (2020) explores the unique factors influencing sustainable consumer behavior in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, challenging the often-held assumption that consumer behavior in developing countries mirrors patterns observed in developed economies. Through a systematic synthesis of extensive empirical research, the review highlights that much of the existing work in this region is rooted in rationalist frameworks, emphasizing cognitive decision-making processes over habitual or demographic influences. A key insight is the consistent role of environmental values as strong predictors of pro-environmental consumer behavior, in contrast to the relatively limited impact of demographic factors such as age, income, and education (Busalim et al., 2021). The analysis reveals a distinct behavioral landscape shaped by cultural, economic, and regulatory differences that set MENA countries apart from Western contexts. Importantly, the study underscores the underrepresentation of MENA in global sustainability literature, pointing to a significant research gap and calling for more localized studies. By consolidating fragmented evidence and identifying both commonalities and divergences from global trends, this research makes a vital contribution to understanding sustainable consumption in non-Western societies. It offers contextual insights for policymakers, researchers, and marketers to design more culturally sensitive and effective sustainability strategies in the region. The review thus adds substantial value by advocating for region-specific frameworks and urging a re-evaluation of assumptions that overlook the diversity of sustainable consumer behavior worldwide.

Hosta (2020) examines the complex nature of responsible sustainable consumer behavior (RSCB), emphasizing that it encompasses both environmental and social dimensions of sustainability—dimensions often treated unequally in consumer research. While environmental aspects of consumption have historically received more scholarly attention, the study stresses the importance of incorporating social responsibility as an equally critical component. It investigates key psychological antecedents that drive both environmentally and socially responsible behaviors, such as personal concern, perceived consumer effectiveness, personal and social norms, and moral obligations (Dangelico et al., 2021). By extending the Theory of Planned Behavior to include ethical ideologies and moral responsibility, the study offers a more comprehensive understanding of what motivates consumers to act sustainably. It finds that personal norms, moral beliefs, and concern for sustainability exert particularly strong influence on responsible behavior, whereas socially responsible actions are more heavily shaped by social pressure and perceived behavioral control. Furthermore, the availability of information about a product's environmental or social impact plays a crucial role in shaping intentions and behavior in both domains. The study highlights the internal conflict consumers often experience when trying to balance environmental and societal concerns, contributing to the gap between sustainable attitudes and actual practices. By examining both pillars of sustainability, the research provides valuable insights for those aiming to promote holistic sustainable consumer behavior and reinforces the need for strategies that empower individuals with both knowledge and a strong ethical framework.

Based on the research conducted by Busalim (2022), this study offers a detailed exploration of the evolution and current landscape of **consumer behavior within the domain of sustainable fashion**, emphasizing the growing interest from both academia and the fashion industry over the past decade. The study undertakes a comprehensive **systematic literature review** to examine how consumers engage with sustainability-related issues in the fashion sector—a sector widely recognized for its significant environmental and ethical challenges (Jia et al., 2021). By analyzing an extensive collection of peer-reviewed scholarly articles, the study identifies critical themes, prevailing theoretical frameworks, and methodological approaches that have been employed in prior research. This rigorous synthesis sheds light on the **fragmented and often inconsistent body of knowledge** regarding the drivers of sustainable fashion consumption.



The findings reveal that while **environmental concern, moral and ethical values**, and **personal identity** exert considerable influence on consumer behavior in this context, the literature still suffers from a lack of theoretical cohesion and insufficient empirical depth. Many studies adopt isolated constructs without integrating them into comprehensive models, thereby limiting the explanatory power and practical applicability of their conclusions. Additionally, the study points out that factors such as **social norms, brand credibility, product aesthetics**, and **price perceptions** also play pivotal, though highly variable, roles in shaping consumer purchase decisions. These findings highlight the multi-dimensional and complex nature of consumer engagement with sustainable fashion, where both affective and cognitive dimensions interact within broader cultural and economic settings.

Furthermore, the review underscores a pressing need for **longitudinal and cross-cultural research** that can more effectively capture the evolving nature of consumer attitudes and behaviors over time. As consumer perspectives on sustainability are not static but shaped by changing societal values, media discourse, and industry innovations, dynamic research designs are essential to fully understand this trajectory. The study also brings attention to a significant gap in the literature concerning **post-purchase behavior**, such as garment care, reuse, recycling, and disposal practices. These behaviors are crucial for achieving true sustainability in fashion but are often overlooked in favor of purchase intentions alone.

By mapping the existing body of knowledge and identifying persistent research gaps, Busalim's work provides a solid foundation for **future investigations** aimed at advancing both theoretical development and practical application. This includes the creation of more effective marketing strategies, informed public policy initiatives, and educational programs that promote responsible fashion consumption. The review also calls for a **multidisciplinary research agenda** that integrates insights from marketing, psychology, sociology, environmental science, and design studies to holistically address the sustainability challenges faced by the fashion industry.

Overall, this study contributes to a more **structured, strategic, and nuanced understanding** of how consumers engage with sustainable fashion. It highlights the urgency of addressing the sector's environmental footprint and ethical shortcomings, while simultaneously recognizing the behavioral complexities that underpin sustainable consumption. By advocating for theory-driven, methodologically diverse, and culturally sensitive research, the study lays the groundwork for future academic and practical efforts aimed at transforming the fashion industry into a more sustainable and socially responsible domain.

Figure 1: Understanding Sustainable Consumer Behavior

(Source: Oke et al., 2024)

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a meta-analytic research design to systematically synthesize and evaluate findings from existing quantitative studies on green consumer behavior (Liang et al., 2021). Meta-analysis is particularly well-suited for integrating diverse research results to draw generalizable and statistically robust conclusions. By aggregating effect sizes across multiple studies, this approach enables the identification of consistent trends, estimation of overall effects, and examination of potential moderating variables.

Literature Search Strategy

A comprehensive and systematic literature search was conducted across multiple academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. Search queries combined keywords and Boolean operators such as "green purchase behavior," "sustainable consumer behavior," "eco-friendly consumption," and "green marketing." The goal was to capture a wide range of studies exploring consumer intentions and behaviors related to environmentally friendly products and practices.

Only peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2005 and 2024 were considered to ensure currency and academic rigor. Additional manual searches of reference lists were conducted to identify relevant studies not retrieved in the initial database queries (Soyer et al., 2021).

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To maintain methodological consistency, the following inclusion criteria were applied:

Studies must empirically examine at least one psychological, social, or economic determinant of green purchase intention or behavior.

Studies must report sufficient statistical data (e.g., correlation or standardized regression coefficients) to compute a common effect size.

Studies must utilize quantitative methods, including structured surveys or experimental designs.

Studies were excluded if they were purely qualitative, lacked statistical data, were theoretical or conceptual, or were published in non-peer-reviewed sources (Walker et al., 2021). Following initial screening and the removal of duplicates and



irrelevant items, 72 studies were retained, representing over 45,000 participants from diverse cultural and demographic contexts.

Data Extraction and Effect Size Computation

Data were systematically extracted from each study, including sample size, measurement instruments, effect sizes, and contextual variables such as country of study and product category. The primary statistical metrics used were Cohen's d and Pearson's r , which quantified the strength and direction of relationships between green purchase drivers and behavioral outcomes. All statistical analyses were conducted using Comprehensive Meta-Analysis (CMA) software (Dangelico et al., 2021), which enabled effect size aggregation and subgroup analyses for moderating variables.

Statistical Analysis Model

Due to variation in sample sizes, study designs, and measurement tools, a random-effects model was employed. This approach assumes that true effect sizes may vary across studies and provides a more conservative, generalizable estimate by accounting for both within-study and between-study variance.

To assess publication bias, funnel plots were examined for asymmetry and Egger's regression test was conducted (Raji et al., 2021). Subgroup analyses were also performed to explore moderating effects of variables such as geographic region (e.g., developed vs. developing countries), product category (e.g., food, fashion, electronics), and demographic traits (e.g., age, gender, education).

Ethical Considerations

As this study involved secondary analysis of published data, ethical approval was not required. However, all efforts were made to ensure accurate reporting and proper citation in accordance with academic integrity standards.

4. RESULTS

Overview of Key Green Purchase Drivers

The meta-analysis of 72 empirical studies revealed that green purchase behavior is significantly influenced by a range of psychological and contextual factors, each exhibiting different levels of effect strength. The most influential predictor was environmental concern, with an average correlation coefficient of $r = 0.43$. This suggests a strong positive relationship between concern about environmental degradation and the likelihood of engaging in sustainable purchasing (Rachmad et al., 2021).

The second most powerful predictor was a favorable attitude toward green products ($r = 0.41$). Consumers who view green products as effective, safe, or aligned with personal values are more inclined to make environmentally conscious purchases.

Role of Perceived Consumer Effectiveness and Social Norms

Perceived consumer effectiveness (PCE) also emerged as a significant determinant ($r = 0.38$), highlighting the importance of belief in one's ability to effect environmental change through individual actions. Subjective norms—perceptions of social pressure to behave in certain ways—had a moderate but statistically significant influence ($r = 0.29$), indicating that social expectations, peer influence, and cultural norms play a role, though less so than individual attitudes and beliefs.

Influence of Economic and Trust Barriers

Among the negative predictors, price sensitivity had a mean correlation of $r = -0.26$, indicating that the high cost of sustainable products remains a key deterrent. Even consumers with favorable attitudes may avoid green purchases if these products are priced significantly higher than conventional alternatives.

Skepticism about the credibility of green labels or certifications was also a notable barrier ($r = -0.22$), suggesting that distrust in eco-labels can prevent consumers from translating positive attitudes into actual behavior.

Moderating Effects of Culture and Time

Cultural context significantly moderated the strength of various predictors. In collectivist cultures, subjective norms had a stronger influence ($r = 0.34$) compared to individualist cultures ($r = 0.25$), underscoring the role of community and social conformity. Conversely, perceived consumer effectiveness was more influential in individualistic societies ($r = 0.42$ vs. 0.33), reflecting the value placed on personal agency.

Temporal analysis revealed that the effect of environmental concern has increased over time. Studies published after 2015 reported a higher average effect size ($r = 0.46$) than those before 2015 ($r = 0.38$), likely reflecting growing global awareness following the Paris Agreement and intensified discourse on climate change.

Summary Table of Key Predictors

Summary Table of Key Predictors



Predictor Variable	Mean Correlation (r)
Environmental Concern	0.43
Attitude Towards Green Products	0.41
Perceived Consumer Effectiveness	0.38
Subjective Norms	0.29
Price Sensitivity	−0.26
Trust in Green Labels	−0.22

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this meta-analytic review offer vital and timely insights into the psychological and contextual factors that significantly influence green consumer behavior. The strong influence of environmental concern as a predictor underscores the central role of intrinsic motivations in shaping sustainable consumption patterns. This result provides robust empirical support for the **Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) theory**, which asserts that individuals who internalize pro-environmental values are more likely to experience moral obligations and transform their concerns into concrete, environmentally responsible actions. The consistent association between environmental concern and green purchasing behavior highlights the importance of value-driven decision-making in fostering long-term sustainable habits.

Similarly, the significance of positive attitudes toward green products reinforces the core tenets of the **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)**, which posits that behavioral intentions are shaped by individuals' evaluations of a specific behavior. In this case, consumers who perceive green products as beneficial, reliable, or aligned with their self-identity are more likely to form intentions to purchase such products. These favorable evaluations not only enhance willingness to act but also reflect the internalization of sustainability as a personal goal. Thus, attitudinal factors serve as key levers for influencing environmentally friendly consumption choices.

Moreover, the robust effect of **perceived consumer effectiveness (PCE)** further emphasizes the critical importance of individual agency in driving sustainable behavior. When consumers believe their actions can contribute meaningfully to environmental preservation, they are significantly more motivated to act accordingly. This finding suggests that interventions aimed at increasing sustainable consumption should focus on bolstering consumers' sense of self-efficacy by showcasing the tangible impact of individual decisions. Communication strategies that highlight measurable outcomes—such as reductions in carbon emissions or water usage—can be particularly effective in fostering this perception and encouraging repeated behavior.

An interesting and noteworthy observation pertains to the role of **subjective norms**, which, while statistically significant, exhibited a comparatively weaker effect size than intrinsic psychological drivers (Salam et al., 2021). This suggests that although social influence matters, it may not be sufficient to elicit green behavior in the absence of deeply held personal beliefs and values. Social pressure alone does not guarantee behavior change unless it resonates with individuals' internal motivations. Consequently, marketing strategies should not only utilize social proof and peer influence but also strive to connect with consumers at a value-based level. Campaigns that combine normative cues with emotionally resonant messages rooted in authenticity, ethical identity, or civic responsibility are likely to yield better outcomes.

The analysis also draws attention to persistent **barriers to green purchasing**, most notably **price sensitivity** and **lack of trust in green claims**. These obstacles point to enduring structural and perceptual challenges within the sustainable consumption ecosystem. Although many consumers report a willingness to pay more for environmentally friendly products, the premium pricing of such products often acts as a deterrent to actual purchase. Moreover, the prevalence of **greenwashing**—the practice of making exaggerated or misleading environmental claims—further erodes consumer trust. This dual challenge calls for both market-level reforms and stronger **regulatory oversight**. Third-party certifications, transparent product labeling, and accountability mechanisms are essential to building credibility and ensuring that sustainability claims are verifiable, consistent, and trustworthy.



Furthermore, the presence of **cultural and temporal moderating effects** highlights the necessity of **context-specific strategies** (Yadav et al., 2021). In collectivist cultures, where social cohesion and conformity are highly valued, sustainability initiatives may be more effective when they leverage community norms, family influence, or group-based endorsements. On the other hand, in individualistic societies, campaigns that emphasize personal responsibility, self-determination, and empowerment are likely to be more compelling. Temporal analyses also suggest that consumer attitudes toward sustainability are evolving over time, influenced by increasing global awareness, media coverage, and international climate commitments. This temporal shift implies that green marketing strategies must remain dynamic and responsive to changing public sentiment and environmental discourse.

6. CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive and methodologically rigorous meta-analytic review of the principal drivers of green purchase behavior, making both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of sustainable consumption. The analysis identifies **environmental concern**, **attitude toward green products**, and **perceived consumer effectiveness** as the most influential predictors of green purchasing, while also acknowledging the constraining influence of **price sensitivity** and **distrust in green claims**.

The findings lend strong support to established behavioral theories, including the **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)** and the **Value-Belief-Norm (VBN)** theory, and illustrate the multidimensional nature of green consumer decision-making, which is shaped by an interplay of psychological, economic, and social forces. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of contextual moderators—such as cultural orientation and temporal shifts—which influence the magnitude and direction of these relationships.

From a practical standpoint, the insights gained from this meta-analysis can inform the design of more targeted and impactful green marketing strategies. Marketers should prioritize building trust, lowering financial barriers, and empowering consumers by emphasizing the real-world impact of their purchasing choices. Policymakers can support these efforts by enacting supportive legislation, offering incentives, and conducting public awareness campaigns aimed at cultivating a culture of environmental responsibility.

Looking ahead, future research should delve deeper into the **longitudinal dynamics** of green behavior, tracking how consumer attitudes and actions evolve over time and in response to major environmental events or policy interventions. The **role of digital and social media** also warrants further exploration, given their growing influence on consumer consciousness and community mobilization. Additionally, research on **emerging green technologies** and their acceptance among consumers could offer valuable insights into innovation-driven sustainability.

Finally, more **cross-cultural investigations** are needed to understand how different societies interpret, value, and practice sustainable consumption. Such studies will be essential for developing globally relevant yet locally adaptable sustainability strategies. By advancing this research agenda, scholars and practitioners alike can play a transformative role in shaping a more sustainable, equitable, and environmentally responsible global economy.

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