

Climate Change Anxiety and Pro-Environmental, Ethically-minded Consumer Behaviours in India: The Mediating Role of Environmental Identity

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ABSTRACT

The pervasive impact of unsustainable activities has been a matter of global concern in the present times. Efforts have been directed towards creating an awareness towards climate change in order to promote sustainable living. However, it has been reported that the climate change anxiety alone does not ensure that people would engage in pro-environmental behaviours. In light of the positive influence of the environmental identity on people's involvement in sustainable activities, we test its mediating role in predicting the relationship between climate change anxiety and ethically minded consumer behaviour and pro-environmental behaviour. A survey conducted online involving 304 Indians mainly in the age-group of 18-35 years informs the findings. The results show that people's environmental identity mediates the relationship between climate change anxiety and ethically minded consumer behaviour $ab = .09$, $SE = .03$, $p < .01$ (95% CI, 0.04 to 0.14) as well as pro-environmental behaviour $ab = 0.11$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .01$ (95% CI, 0.04 to 0.18). Environmental identity accounts for 29.42% of the total effect of climate change anxiety on ethical minded consumer behaviour and 31.56% of the total effect on the pro-environmental behaviour. The paper also discusses the indigenous traditional practices in India to preserve the innate relationship between man and nature. Implications: The findings provide key valuable insights for climate-change related awareness indicating that environmental identity is a key element for one's climate change anxiety to significantly impact pro-environmental and ethically minded consumer behaviour. The findings of the study also have significant implications for climate related policy makers in the Indian context and environmentally conscious businesses.

Keywords: Climate change anxiety, Environmental Identity, Pro-environmental behaviours, Ethically minded consumer behavior

Climate change has impacted the physical, psychological, social, and economic aspects of human beings and is continuing to affect them (Clayton, 2020). Rising temperatures can lead to physical exhaustion and psychological distress (Berry et al., 2010) and often climate-related natural disasters such as hurricanes, cyclones cause grief reactions and mental health issues in an individual as they experience the loss of their home,

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environment, or loved ones. The health, economic and environmental consequences of climate change-related issues are augmenting (Ginexi et al., 2000) and surveys conducted across the globe report that climate change is now recognized as a serious threat by most people around the world (Ogunboda et al., 2022; Pandve, 2009).

India is now facing serious climate-change related adverse impacts on agriculture, water resources, biodiversity, and coastal management and the country is one of the global hotspots identified in the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) report as well as domestic reports on the Climate Vulnerability Index (CVI) in terms of geographical and socio-economic vulnerabilities (Singh, 2022). At the Glasgow Climate Summit in November 2021, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi committed that India will cut its carbon intensity by 45% by 2030 by boosting its non-fossil energy and will try to attain net-zero emissions by 2070 (Krishnan, 2022). In addition to the protocols and sanctions by the government, the actions by the citizens of the country are crucial to mitigate the effects of climate change. Hence, this study aims to understand the psychological factors which are related to pro-environmental behaviours and ethically minded consumerism in the Indian context.

Climate change poses an existential threat and individuals are becoming more aware of environmental and climate issues (Jayachandran, 2022). In a recent worldwide survey performed across G20 countries, around 70% of Indian residents are concerned about the state of the environment and over 90% believe that they should be doing more to safeguard it (Lahiri, 2021). There appears to be an increase in the number of individuals feeling psychological distress related to the climate as the acute effects of climate change are experienced by an increasing percentage of the global population (Pihkala, 2020). Climate change anxiety is the fear related to beliefs about climate change, even among those who have not directly seen any direct effects (Clayton & Karazia, 2020). Scholars have suggested that climate related fears may be a sensible, rather than pathological, emotional response that may lead to positive attitudinal and behavioural responses in the majority of cases (Clayton & Karazsia, 2020; Pihkala, 2020).

Environmental Identity

Studies suggest that ecology related values and attitudes are part of an individual's self-concept or ecological identity (Besthorn, 2002; Fielding et al., 2008; Whitmarsh & Neill, 2010). Environmental identity is a self-concept that expresses an emotional and cognitive connection with the environment (Clayton & Karazia, 2020) and provides us a sense of belonging, of being a part of something bigger, and of seeing similarities in ourselves and others (Clayton, 2003).

According to research, those with high environmental identity scores exhibit more pro-environmental conduct as well as greater environmental concern. High levels of environmental identity encourage increased awareness of environmental risks and appreciation for the welfare of nature (Clayton & Karazsia, 2020). Indians who are environmentally conscious and believe that their efforts to mitigate environmental problems are effective feel a connection to nature and appreciate it (Sharma & Paço, 2021). A study done by Jaiswal and Bihari (2020) suggests that consumers who have a sense of connection to nature will choose to buy eco-friendly goods because they will feel both individually and collectively responsible for contributing to environmental degradation and will think it is their responsibility to safeguard the environment. Van Der Werff et al. (2013) suggests that

an individual who has a strong environmental self-identity sees himself or herself as the type of person who will act in an ecologically beneficial manner and is thus more inclined to act pro-environmental. Environmental or eco-identity has also been positively correlated with climate change anxiety (Clayton & Karazsia, 2020; Daouda et al., 2022, Dean et al., 2018). People who have a strong sense of connection to nature are more likely to be aware of and affected by environmental issues (Clayton, 2003). Thus, it was hypothesized that

H1. Climate change anxiety would positively predict a person's environmental identity.

Ethically minded consumer behaviour

Concern for the environment demonstrates how eager people are to participate in sustainability through their purchasing decisions (Dermody et al., 2015). Consumers are more aware now and can choose and make use of a wide variety of products and services according to their interests and consequently, take ethically sustainable decisions (Uusitalo & Oksanen, 2004). Behaviour that does the least amount of damage to the environment, or even helps it, is referred to as pro-environmental behaviour (Steg & Vlek, 2009). The way people behave in their environments varies quite a bit. In other words, one could act sustainably when recycling waste, yet negatively when it comes to the transportation. This suggests that a wide range of factors, including status, comfort, effort, and behavioural opportunities, influence pro-environmental behaviours (Stern, 2000).

In a recent cross-cultural study by Ogunbode et al., (2022) which explored the correlates of climate anxiety with cross-sectional data gathered in 32 countries ($N = 12,246$), it was found that climate anxiety is positively related to pro-environmental behaviour and environmental activism. In another recent study by Gao et al., (2020), it was found that environmental anxiety has been proven to have a direct and considerable impact on pro-environmental behavior intention. A study by Verplanken et al. (2020) suggested that habitual worry about global warming was associated with predictors of environmental action, i.e. past pro-environmental behaviours, pro-environmental values and a green identity. Thus, it may be assumed that climate change anxiety impacts environmental behaviours.

Carrington et al. (2010) suggests that consumer attitudes toward ethical consumption have improved, however, this positive shift in the attitude has not been reflected in behaviour. In many purchase circumstances, the attitude-behaviour gap can be seen. Although consumers are concerned about their surroundings and believe they should act responsibly, other factors such as price, value, quality, and brand are frequently more important selection criteria than ethics (Uusitalo & Oksanen, 2004). This disparity could be due to a desire for variety, as well as economic and societal factors that influence the decision-making process. Studies suggest that consumers are unwilling to expend additional effort to make a pro-ethical choice, particularly in daily purchases and consumers accept ethical factors as long as they do not have to compromise their other criteria or ideals (Carrington et al., 2010). Personal values and norms, environmental orientation, perceptions about environmental conditions, and individual agency all have a role in pro-environmental conduct (Stern, 2000). Thus, it was hypothesized that:

H2. Environmental identity would positively predict ethically minded consumer behaviour and pro-environmental behaviour.

H3. Climate change anxiety and Environmental identity would together predict ethically minded consumer behaviour and pro-environmental behaviour.

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The proposed model of the study is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Conceptual Framework of the Present Study

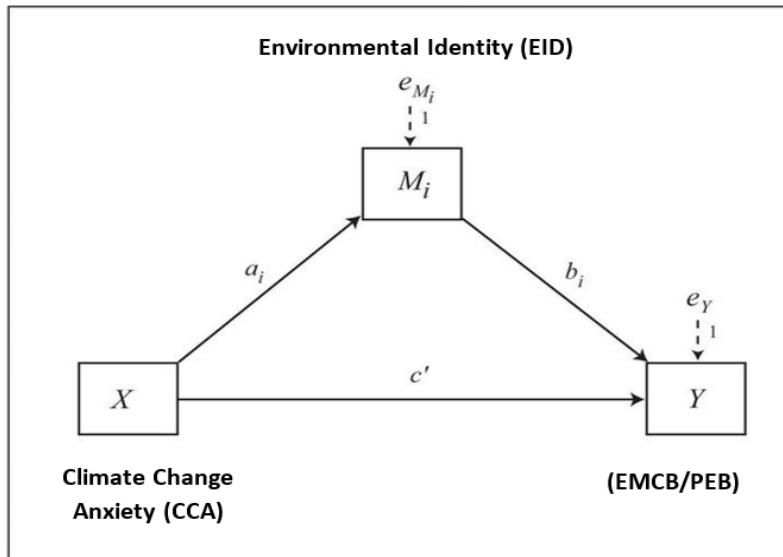


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Present Study

The above model suggests that climate change anxiety would positively predict ethically minded consumer behaviour and pro-environmental behaviour. The model further suggests that an individual's environmental identity would mediate this relationship.

The next section outlines the method of the research.

METHOD

Research Design

A survey method was used to investigate the relationship between climate change anxiety and pro-environmental behaviour, ethically minded consumer behaviour and the mediating role of environmental identity.

Sample & Data Collection

The data was collected using Google Doc forms. It was initially pilot tested with ten participants to understand if the items were understood by the participants and to rectify any errors. The pilot testing did not reveal any major concerns and minor grammatical errors were corrected. Among the various social media platforms, respondents were invited to participate in the survey. The first page of the questionnaire consisted of the Informed consent sheet which outlined the details regarding the study and the participants could check a box if they understood and willingly gave their consent for the study.

In this manner, through purposive sampling, a total of 304 responses were collected from India who were above 18 years of age. Out of the total sample, 96 were males and 208 were females. Eighty-three responses were collected from metro cities, 138 from tier two cities, 67 from small towns, and 16 from villages. The majority 83% of the sample were among the age-group of 18-30 years.

Tools

The following tools were used in the study:

- i) **Climate Change Anxiety Scale (Clayton & Karazsia, 2020):** A five-point Likert scale is used to answer 13 items contained in the scale consisting of two subscales. Items 1–8 assess the cognitive-emotional impairment due to climate change anxiety. The Functional Impairment subscale, which includes items 9–13, assesses if a person's feelings about climate change are interfering with their regular activities. The Cronbach alpha of the scale in the present study was 0.91.
- ii) **Environmental Identity Scale (Clayton, 2003):** The scale measures the cognitive and emotional components of people's perceived relationship with the natural world. The shorter 11-item version of the scale was used in this study. The Cronbach alpha of the scale in the present study was 0.90.
- iii) **Ethically Minded Consumer Behavior Scale (Sudbury-Riley & Kohlbacher, 2015):** This scale conceptualizes ethically-minded consumer behavior as a range of buying decisions that are concerned with environmental issues. A five-point Likert scale is used to answer 10 items contained in the scale. The Cronbach alpha of the scale in the present research was 0.91.
- iv) **Pro-Environmental Behavior Scale (Ojala, 2012):** A 5-point Likert scale is used to answer 8 items contained in the scale referring to behaviours concerning saving energy, using public transportation, and making climate friendly food choices. The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.81 in the present research.

Data Analysis

Preliminary analyses using SPSS (v22.0, IBM) tested the predictors and criterion variable for normality of distribution and outliers. The correlations between the variables under study, namely the Climate change anxiety (CCA), Environmental identity (EID), Ethically minded consumer behaviour (EMCB), Pro-environmental behaviour (PEB), and the demographic variables were measured. The Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each scale used in the study. Pearson's correlation was used to understand the correlations among the various scales. The conceptual framework of the study i.e. the hypothesized model was tested through mediation analysis using PROCESS macro (Model 4) using SPSS (v22.0, IBM) (Hayes, 2017). The detailed process of the mediation analysis is described in the following Results section.

RESULTS

This study was conducted to examine the impact of climate change anxiety (CCA) on ethically minded consumer behaviour (EMCB) and pro-environmental behaviour (PEB) as mediated by environmental identity (EID). It was hypothesized that the climate change anxiety would positively predict their ethically minded consumer behaviour and pro-environmental behaviour. It was also hypothesized that a person's environmental identity would mediate this relationship. This section presents the results of the analyses carried out to test these hypotheses. The table 1 below illustrates the correlation among the variables.

Table 1: Correlation among the Variables

	1	2	3	4
1. Climate change anxiety	--			
2. Environment Identity Scale	.21**	--		
3. Ethically minded consumer behaviour	.22**	.53**	--	
4. Pro-environmental behaviour Scale	.18**	.56**	.58**	--

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

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The table 2 below explains the Mediation Analysis with climate change anxiety predicting ethically minded consumer behaviour and pro-environmental behaviour with environmental identity as the mediating factor in the tested model.

Table 2: Mediation Analysis Results

Mediation Analysis Results

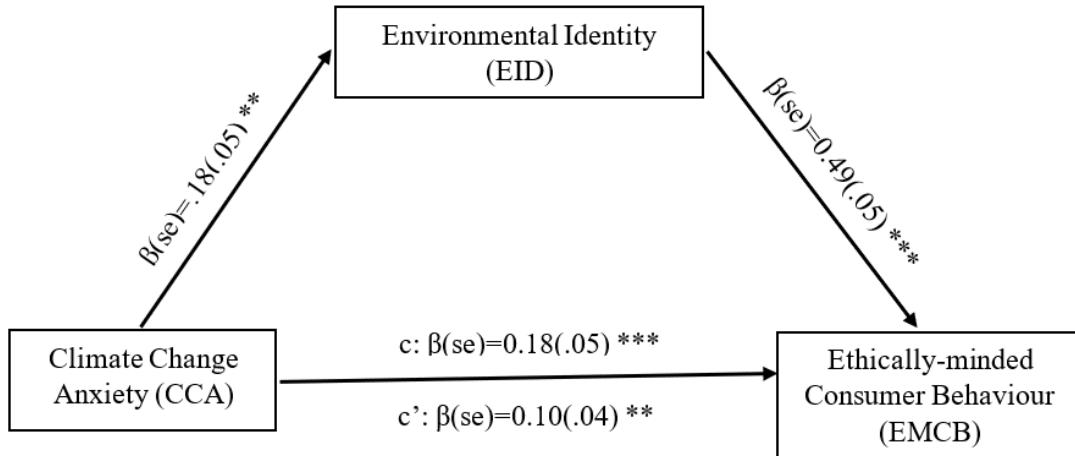
Path	Unstandardized Beta	df ₂	t	p	F	R ²	Model Significance
a	0.18	303	03.64	0.01	13.27	04.20%	0.01
Dependent Measure: Ethically minded consumer behavior (EMCB)							
b	0.49	302	10.23	0.001	62.95	29.42%	0.001
c'	0.10	302	02.42	0.01			
c	0.18	304	03.98	0.01	15.87	04.98 %	0.001
Dependent Measure: Pro-environmental behavior (PEBS)							
b	0.38	302	11.18	0.001	69.64	31.56%	0.001
c'	0.04	302	01.14	0.16			
c	0.11	304	03.19	0.05	10.16	03.24 %	0.01

- Note: Path (a) refers to the direct association between climate change anxiety (CCA) and environmental identity (EID).
- Path (b) refers to the direct association between environmental identity (EID) and ethically minded consumer behaviour (EMCB) and pro-environmental behaviour (PEBS).
- Path (c) refers to the indirect association between climate change anxiety (CCA) and ethically minded consumer behaviour (EMCB) and pro-environmental behaviour (PEBS) via environmental identity (EID).
- Path (c') refers to the direct association between climate change anxiety (CCA) and ethically minded consumer behaviour (EMCB) and pro-environmental behaviour (PEBS) in the absence of environmental identity (EID)

The above table presents the results of the complete test of the hypothesized model which was performed using PROCESS macro (Model 4) using SPSS (v22.0, IBM) (Hayes, 2017). The model posits the climate change anxiety (CCA) as the predictor variable, environmental identity (EID) as the mediating factor, and ethically minded consumer behaviour (EMCB) and pro-environmental behaviour (PEB) as the dependent measures of the study. The results show that climate change anxiety positively predicts their ethically minded consumer behaviour ($B= 0.17$, $SE= .04$, $p<.01$) as well as pro-environmental behaviour ($B= 0.04$, $SE= 0.03$, $p<.01$). To test the hypothesis (H2 and H3) we analysed the indirect effects. Results reveal that the environmental identity significantly mediates the relationship between climate change anxiety and the ethically minded consumer behaviour $ab= .09$, $SE= .03$, $p<.01$ (95% CI, 0.04 to 0.14) and pro-environmental behaviour $ab= 0.11$, $SE= 0.03$, $p<.01$ (95% CI, 0.04 to 0.18). The climate change anxiety affects the environmental identity ($B= 0.18$, $SE= 0.05$, $p<.01$) and environmental identity in turn affects the person's ethically minded consumer behaviour ($B= 0.49$, $SE= 0.05$, $p<.001$) and pro-environmental behaviour ($B= 0.38$, $SE= 0.03$, $p<.001$). Analysing the direct effects, the partial mediation by environmental identity was confirmed since the direct impact of climate change anxiety on the ethically minded consumer behaviour ($B= 0.10$, $SE= 0.04$, $p<0.02$) reported to be significant. But for pro-environmental behaviour, a perfect mediation was reported when its association with climate change anxiety was reported to be insignificant ($B= .04$, $SE= 0.03$, $p=0.16$) in the absence of environmental identity. Environmental identity accounts for 29.42% of the total effect of climate change anxiety on ethical minded consumer behaviour and 31.56% of the total effect on the pro-environmental behaviour. These findings indicate that environmental identity is a key element for one's climate change anxiety to be translated into their ethically minded consumer behaviour as well as pro-environmental activities.

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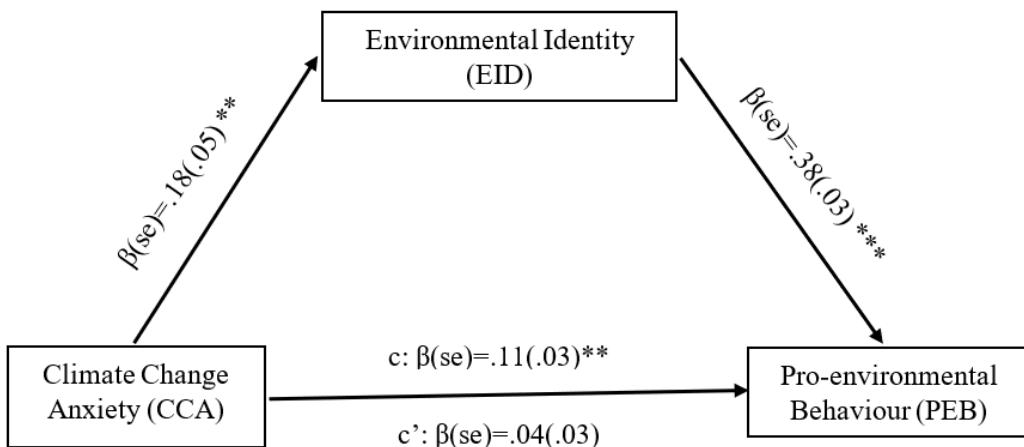
The figures below illustrate the results of analyses to test for the mediation models proposed in the present study.



* Significant at $p < .05$ level, ** Significant at $p < .01$ level, *** Significant at $p < .001$ level

Figure 2: Environmental Identity mediating the relationship between Climate change anxiety and Ethically-minded Consumer Behaviour

The figure 3 below illustrates Environmental Identity mediating the relationship between Climate change anxiety and Pro-environmental Behaviours.



* Significant at $p < .05$ level, ** Significant at $p < .01$ level, *** Significant at $p < .001$ level

Figure 3: Environmental Identity mediating the relationship between Climate change anxiety and Pro-environmental Behaviours

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study confirm the role of environmental identity as a mediating factor between climate change anxiety and pro-environmental, ethically minded consumer behaviours. It was hypothesized that environmental identity will mediate the relationship between climate change anxiety and pro-environmental behaviour and ethically minded consumer behaviour. The results confirm the hypotheses in the partial mediation observed in predicting ethically minded consumer behaviour. However, environmental identity perfectly mediated the relationship between climate change anxiety and pro-environmental behaviour.

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In a recent study by Perera et al., (2022) it was noted that the relationship between climate change beliefs and environmentally conscious behaviour was partially mediated by environmental identity. In addition, the study also finds that the relationships between personnel environmental norms, and environmental identity and environmentally conscious behaviour were partially mediated by climate change beliefs. A study by Khare (2015) finds that consumers' self-identification with environmentally friendly traits is a major predictor of green buying behaviour. Research done by Hinds and Sparks (2009), suggested that the participants who grew up in rural areas reported more meaning, stronger environmental identities, greater frequency of experience, and more positive well-being than those who grew up in urban and suburban environments. Contact with nature can evoke a sense of belonging to or being a part of it, which in turn, can lead to the development of a relationship between a person and nature, which may then influence pro-environmental behavior (Balundé et al., 2019). A study done by Gayathree & Samarasinghe (2019) reported that green self-identity had a considerable impact on ethically conscious consumer behavior.

Kapeller and Jäger (2020) found that in general, exposure to climate change information does not improve pro-environmental intent unless various requirements about the individual's values and information density are met. Someone who has a strong environmental self-identity sees himself or herself as the type of person who will act in an ecologically beneficial manner and is thus more inclined to act pro-environmental (Van der Werff et al., 2013). It was found in another study that emotions, not rational judgments, are the main drivers of pro-environmental buying behavior (Koenig-Lewis et al., 2014).

This study contributes to the field of environmental education and awareness especially in the Indian context. The findings of this research may be used by policy makers, governments and environmental organizations to promote pro-environmental behaviour in the Indian citizens. Rather than just focusing on the rational impact of climate change, the focus may also be on enhancing the environmental identity of the citizens. The findings of the study may also be useful for industries and businesses in the marketing and promotion of ecological and sustainable products. Individual consumers play a substantial role in supporting ethical corporate practices through their daily purchasing decisions and the findings of this study can be beneficial to encourage people to engage in ethical consumption. Overall, since not every member of the market segments for environmentally conscious products is interested in creating and expressing environmental identities, marketers of green products should exercise caution while engaging with them (Perera et al., 2022).

We would also like to discuss the eco-consciousness and environment identity embedded in the Indian context. The idea of nature conversation and being interconnected with the environment is not new to Indians. Indian culture has offered a rich variety of cultural practices and includes practices that advocate regard for nature and the elements that make up the universe. For example, certain trees and plants continue to play an important role in Indian rituals and customs, for example: the peepal tree, and the Tulsi plant are worshipped and considered sacred even to this day in Hinduism. Many Gods and Goddesses are depicted on animals as their mount or vehicle and are revered (Saha, 2016). Animals like the cow are deeply revered in India and seen as a source of nourishment and sustenance. Certain elements of nature are worshipped even today, for example, prayers to the sun are offered in the early morning in certain religions. Many festivals are celebrated in India related to nature, for example *Bathukamma* or 'the floral festival' celebrates the relationship between earth, water and human beings before the onset of winter in Telangana state in South India. Sarhul is a

key festival celebrated across the state of Jharkhand by the Oraon, the Munda and the Ho tribes in central India in which people pray to the trees and it lasts from March to June (Nigam, 2020). The sacred grove tradition was an intrinsic part of the Indian ecological tradition such as kovilkādu in Tamil Nadu, *kāvu* in Kerala, *nandavana* in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, *deorai* in Maharashtra. These forests were considered sacred for centuries in the outer precincts of the villages, however they may face threats today because of population pressure and neglect (Ganguly, 2012). Indians have also been involved in their fair share of environmental initiatives, where they have vowed to safeguard the local flora and animals (Jayachandran, 2022). One of the most prominent environment movements in India, The Chipko (Hug the tree) movement, in the 1970s was a nonviolent protest by Uttarakhand women who resorted to hugging trees to prevent them from being felled for commercial purposes (Kumar, 2017).

Many of the traditional practices which may appear meaningless today, may have been designed as conservation strategies and to preserve and protect nature. In the present era, of disastrous climate change consequences, traditional ethics of nature conservation may be looked upon as a source of guidance and inspiration to deepen the eco-consciousness and eco-identity in the Indian context (Saha, 2016).

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

It has been observed as a global trend that efforts are overly focussed in enhancing climate change awareness. However, we do not necessarily see the efforts being translated into sustainable behaviour among people. In this context, the role of environmental identity emerged pivotal in the climate change anxiety influencing the people to be ethically minded in their activities. The study suggests that environmental identity plays a mediating role between climate change anxiety and pro-environmental, ethically-minded consumer behaviours. To the ecological marketing strategists and communicators, the study recommends to promote and support the environmental identity of the consumer for promotion of pro-environmental behaviours. The study had several limitations. The sample was drawn from India, therefore generalizing the findings to other cultural contexts should be done with caution. Future studies may focus on understanding the effect of specific environmental identities as well as the different environmental values on pro-environmental behaviours.

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Conflict of Interest

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