

The Green Shift: Consumers & Corporates in Response to Ecological Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the growing intersection between environmental challenges, evolving consumer behavior, and corporate sustainability strategies. Escalating ecological degradation, which is manifested through climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion, has heightened global awareness and concern, prompting a significant shift toward sustainable consumption. Empirical evidence indicates that consumers are increasingly influenced by environmental awareness, attitudes, and social norms, leading to a rise in green purchase behavior and a demonstrated willingness to pay a premium for eco-friendly products. This transition is evident across both developed and developing economies. The paper synthesizes findings from multiple studies to identify key drivers of sustainable consumption, including environmental concern, perceived responsibility, and trust in corporate practices. Companies are responding by aligning Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles into their strategies, investing in green innovation, and redesigning products and processes to align with consumer values. This alignment not only addresses environmental requirements but also offers long-term economic and strategic benefits in an increasingly conscious global marketplace.

Keywords: *Ecological Degradation, Sustainable Consumption, Eco-Friendly Products, Green Innovation, Eco-Conscious Buying*

The ecological world is under threat. Pollution, is contaminating our air, water, and soil, leading to dreadful health effects for both humans and wildlife. The world is losing around 10 million hectares of forest every year due to deforestation. (FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020,). More than 150 acres of rainforest are lost every minute of every day. Wildlife inhabitants sizes have seen a distressing average drop of 73% since 1970 (WWF Living Planet Report 2024). The mild balance of nature is being disrupted as species become extinct at a shocking rate due to habitat destruction and deforestation. Standing at the vanguard is the daunting threat of climate change, triggering disruptions in weather forms, rising sea levels, and unexpected natural disasters. More than 50% of the world's gross domestic product. (GDP) relies on nature, highlighting its economic vulnerability to biodiversity loss. (World Economic Forum, June 2025) Identifying these threats is the first step towards battling them. However, these challenges are more demanding than ever, necessitating both awareness and action from all of us. With shared efforts and

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informed choices, we can toil towards a sustainable future where environment and humanity thrive together.

Mindfulness of Global Environmental Issues

Interestingly over the past decade, there has been a significant increase in consumer concern about the environment. (White, Habib & Hardisty 2019). Growing environmental issues have fired this trend. The shift towards eco-conscious buying has amplified by mindfulness of global environmental issues and a collective drive for social responsibility (Prakash Shruthi, April 2024). Broadly, customers are making buying decisions with the environment or society in mind. Findings from a report by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) commissioned by WWF (*World Wide Fund for Nature*) spanning 54 countries that hold 80% of the world's population, reveal some startling shifts. As per this report Google searches for expressions related to biodiversity and nature loss, relative to all searches, have raised manifold globally since 2016. In India, such searches raised by an unbelievable 190%. On Twitter the number of posts connected to nature loss and biodiversity has enhanced by 65% since 2016 globally. In India, such Tweets grew by an overwhelming 550%, from 232,020 in 2016 to 1.5 million in 2020. There was a 71 percent rise in Google searches for environmentally friendly goods between 2016 and 2021, demonstrating a shift towards conscious consumerism (Loughlin Bronagh, August 2023).

Shift Towards Conscious Consumerism

These shifts are reflected in the rising requirement for sustainable goods especially in high-income countries - precisely in the UK, the US, Germany, Australia and Canada. This movement can also be seen in developing countries. In India, sales of 'natural' [organic] products have grown by 13% since 2018, and in China, 41% of consumers say they want eco-friendly products. (An Eco-wakening, Report by EIU May 2021). The market is calling out ethical practices strongly because many researches warrant it.

Main Drivers Accelerating Sustainable Buying

Various studies have been undertaken to understand what drives a consumer towards sustainable buying. The individual personal traits or social pressure may affect individual buying choice. (Alam et al., 2023). Past studies show that 69% of consumers have admitted that pollution in the environment has affected their lives (Schlegelmilch et al., 1996). Research shows that 85% of the global population has been affected by human-induced activities (Callaghan et al., 2021). This awareness is an indication that people are now willing to buy plant-based products based on the added benefits and values (Ogiemwonyi and Harun, 2021). The PwC's 2024 Voice of the Consumer Survey, which collected the perspectives of more than 20,000 consumers from across 31 countries and territories, found that almost nine-in-ten (85%) consumers are experiencing first-hand the disruptive effects of climate change in their daily lives and are prioritising consumption that integrates sustainability-focused practices.

Undoubtedly the awareness and distress for the environment have grown tremendously due to rising environmental problems. An empirical study investigates factors that affect 375 consumers. Findings highlight that green purchase behavior (GPB) of consumers was directly influenced by awareness of consequences and environmental attitude and indirectly by environmental concern and environmental responsibility (Alam et al., 2023). A person who has public and private awareness of the environment will take part in responsible behavior (Lou and Li, 2023). An individual with positive pro-environmental knowledge will create a positive attitude toward GPB and engage in responsible purchase and consumption (Sultana

et al., 2022). Another study examines what drives people to purchase green products, by undertaking a rigorous analysis using the data collected from 446 actual retail consumers. The obtained results indicate that subjective norms, attitude, and environmental consciousness are the strongest predictors in shaping green purchase intention (Mihuț, Sterie & Mican, 2025). As the various researches and studies highlight undoubtedly people have begun to shift their buying habits, supporting ecologically friendly products. Eco-friendly items are made with environmentally friendly materials, production procedures, and packaging. These goods are intended to reduce carbon footprints and harm to the environment.

Increasing Preference for Sustainable Brands

A report shows that more than 40% of unethical domestic purchases are responsible for ecological problems (Joshi and Rahman, 2019). Through the buying of eco-friendly products, environmental problems can be decreased and stopped (Ogiemwonyi, 2022). Consumer today is showing constant inclination to prioritize sustainability in their purchase decisions. Consumer willingness to pay is reinforced by behavioral data showing that a majority of consumers globally prioritize sustainability in purchase decisions, with 66–85% expressing a preference for sustainable brands and many reporting that sustainability influences brand loyalty and purchasing choices (PwC, 2024). 34% of global consumers are more likely to buy products with sustainable credentials. (NielsenIQ, Oct. 2021) 78% of US consumers say they feel better when they buy products that are sustainably produced. (Unilever January, 2017). 55% of consumers say environmental responsibility is very or extremely important when choosing a brand. (IBM, March 2021) 40% of global consumers report that waste reduction and recycling initiatives would make them more likely to purchase from a brand. (PwC Voice of Consumer Survey 2024).

According to a study consumers strongly opined that brands bear as much responsibility for driving positive social change as governments. A study titled "Project Superbrand: 10 Truths Reshaping the Corporate World," Havas Worldwide, 2016 reveals a 65% percent of respondents stated that businesses bear as much responsibility as governments for driving social change. Over half (54%) of consumers say that they would stop buying from a company if they were found to have been misleading in their sustainability claims (KPMG September 2023). There are further many supportive studies in this regard a few have been discussed in this paper. 74% of consumers specified they are more likely to purchase from a company that is transparent about its sustainability practices (Specright, November 2023).

Premium Price for Eco-Friendly Products

In a recent survey more than half (58%) of consumers out of 1,000 surveyed in the U.S shared that they are willing to spend more money on products that are considered sustainable or environmentally friendly. 72% of worldwide consumers will spend more on sustainable products (Arbor.eco, Dec, 2025). Additional studies highlight that 68% of consumers are willing to pay up to a 10% premium and that 54% report higher brand trust when firms demonstrate environmental accountability, suggesting tangible links between sustainability communication and consumer trust (Patel, 2025). Another survey deduced that consumers are willing to spend an average of 9.7% more on sustainably produced or sourced goods, even as cost-of-living and inflationary concerns weigh (PwC's 2024). American consumers are willing to pay, on average, 12% more for sustainable products. (Bain & Company, November 2023).

Another pertinent study delineated the figures related to consumers who quoted paying a premium for their sustainable purchases. Among survey respondents the sustainable purchase in the category of groceries/food 45% respondent consumers cited paying paid a premium of 1.23x more. In the category of household goods 45% respondent consumers cited paying paid a premium of 1.26x more. In the category of clothing and footwear 30% paid a premium of 1.26x more. In the category of Transportation goods 22% respondent consumers cited paying paid a premium of 1.39 x more. In the category of home furnishings and appliances 35% respondent consumers cited paying paid a premium of 1.34x more. In the category of beauty and personal care 47% respondent consumers cited paying paid a premium of 1.28x more (Deloitte, Global State of the Consumer Tracker May 2023). In specific regional contexts, Indian consumers reported willingness to pay up to a 13.1% premium for sustainably sourced products, illustrating variation in sustainability valuation across markets (PwC's 2024). Similarly, broader industry research indicates that approximately one-third of global consumers are willing to pay a sustainability premium, with segments such as Generation Z and Millennials prepared to pay up to 32% *more* for sustainable offerings (Simon-Kucher, 2025). This demonstrates that sustainability increasingly influences not only purchase intention but also price acceptance.

Green Product's Preferred Attributes

One more study review 97 papers specifying empirical research on green purchase behavior from 2015 to 2020. According to Deloitte's sustainable products are no longer niche, nearly half (46%) of consumers across 23 study nations purchased at least one sustainable good or service in April 2023. Surprisingly remarkable is the fact that demand for green products isn't coming from a niche segment of young, prosperous climate activists; it's coming from the mainstream people. Consumers are also hinting intentions to reward innovative brands that deliver on sustainability promises by showing a willingness to pay a premium of 27% on average The study respondents defined green products attributes related to materials (e.g., natural/renewable or recycled/repurposed) remain the most commonly cited. Consumers are also paying attention to how and where they're made. Factors such as energy or resources used in production (44%) and production location (39%) rank relatively high. Many also consider packaging (44%), product durability (41%), and even the availability of information about the product's environmental impact (19%). Many consumers (38%) specified they consider products sustainable when they are made in a socially accountable way—for example, from brands that employ diverse employees and pay fair wages. (Deloitte Insights, May 2023).

Green Buying Popular Product Categories

Food and grocery remain the most popular category. One-third (35%) consumers respondents buying sustainable goods said their purchase fell in the food category. The fresh food subcategory alone represented about a quarter (24%) of the purchases. The two-thirds of green purchases *didn't* happen in food. Daily household goods such as paper goods, cleaning products, and other subcategories represented more than one-quarter of purchases Clothing (8%), personal care and beauty products (5%), transportation (8%), and home furnishings and appliances (5%) are there too. On the other side only, some consumers cited paying a green premium for less-frequent, higher-cost purchases such as home furnishings, appliances, and transportation (Deloitte Insights, May 2023). Another survey was conducted in five European countries: France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and United Kingdom in March 2020 and a total of 4161 respondents which were equally distributed among genders and age group ranging 18 to 75 years participated in it. The findings of the survey concluded consumers do careful planning for the amount of food they will buy in order to avoid waste; shop locally-

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produced food; for paper products and beverages they will buy products made with recycled materials. They tend not to include environmental impact among their purchasing criteria for soap and detergents. Results on how respondents engage in purchasing are reported in Figure 1 below.

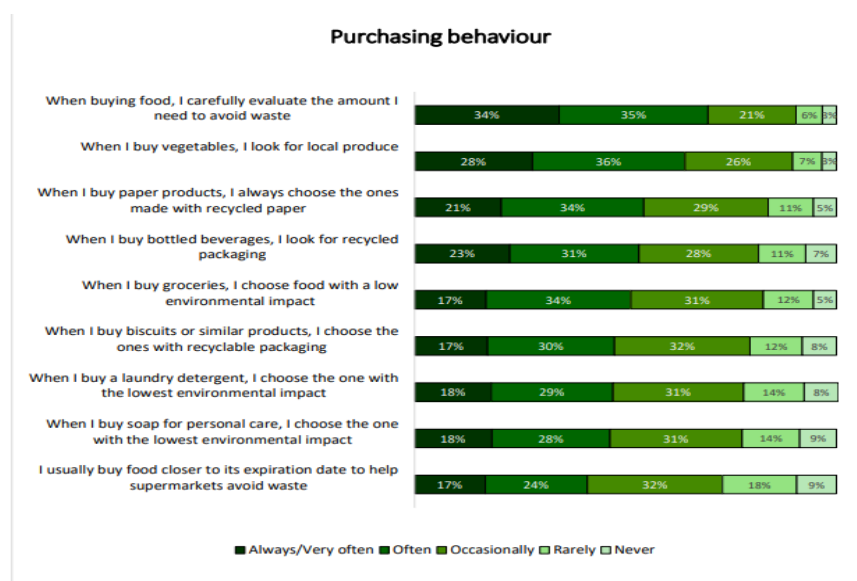


Figure 1. Purchasing behaviour

Today's consumers aren't just looking for lower prices — they're making decisions based on values, speed, and trust. They want convenience, yes, but they also want clarity, integrity, and responsiveness from the brands they buy into (Nigel Wright Group, February and March 2025). With high consumer interest in sustainability, brands will likely need to move quickly. Consumers could easily switch to buying from the growing crop of niche players already making inroads. Sustainability is becoming a baseline expectation rather than a differentiator. This shift creates both strategic opportunities and substantial risks for established brands.

Corporate/ Business Response to the Shift

This shift towards sustainable buying today driven by keen awareness of global environmental issues and a thrust for social responsibility has almost compelled the companies to align their marketing strategies with these values and promoting products that meet sustainability criteria. Failure to respond promptly and authentically to sustainability demands may result in market share erosion. (Achilles, 2024) Consumers are now more selective, particularly younger demographics, demonstrate a greater willingness to experiment with new brands making brand loyalty less guaranteed (Theocharis and Tsekouropoulos, Sustainable Consumption and Branding for Gen Z, Sustainability, May 2025). Delayed or inadequate responses to sustainability concerns may therefore expose firms to financial and compliance risks and can rapidly undermine trust and damage brand equity.

Brands are Reworking and Committing for ESG Practices

The market demands ethical practices strongly because as per a survey 76% of respondents stated they will boycott companies that disregard ESG responsibilities (IIM Pune, 2025). 2 in 3 consumers believe brands bear as much responsibility as governments (Havas Worldwide, 2016). To stay relevant, consumer-facing brands will need to retune their policies for a world. Interestingly, many of consumer brands are reworking, testing new ideas. The need of the hour is that businesses implant ESG philosophies right into the core of the business, not just

marking it on as PR gimmick (Nigel Wright Group, February and March 2025). There are many studies undertaken and reports submitted supporting this stance of modern-day businesses. A few have been discussed in this paper. In the food, cosmetic and natural pharmaceutical industries globally, the number of companies committed to practices that protect biodiversity increased by 45% from 2016 to 2020. In the fashion industry, 60% of brands in North America and Europe say that ‘implementing sustainability measures’ was one of their top priorities in 2020. Last year, 540 of the world’s biggest corporations - including Fortune 500 companies such as Microsoft, Unilever, and Citigroup - signed up to a Business for Nature statement calling on governments worldwide to do more to reverse nature loss (World Wildlife Fund, 2021, May). Corporations are responding, particularly in the cosmetics, pharmaceutical, fashion and food sectors. Deloitte survey of executives in consumer-packaged goods firms stated that over 70% said their companies are likely to make substantial investments in sustainability innovation within the next year, with sustainable packaging and new product offers cited as highest priorities (Deloitte's May 2023 insights). 71% of company boards are incorporating environmental, social, and governance (ESG) objectives into their overall strategy (Report by Spencer Stuart and Diligent 2022). The target of net-zero emissions by 2050 serves as a goal for 60% of global companies and 45% of Fortune 500 firms have established similar objectives (Climate Impact Partners, 2023, Sustainability Online).

Impact of Sustainable Practices on Financial Performance

The green innovation market will expand to USD 140.03 billion by 2034 (Fortune Business Insights., February 2026) because sustainable practices deliver significant economic value. Prior research has acknowledged varied results when analyzing the association between sustainability and financial performance. Some studies indicate a negative relationship between sustainability and profitability (López et al., 2007), while others like Al-Shammari et al. (2022), Veeravel et al. (2023) and Velte (2017) have reported a positive association. In a study by McKinsey products with ESG-related claims accounted for 56% of all growth over the last 5 years, about 18% more than expected based on their initial market share. (McKinsey, Feb.2023). Recently in another study also McKinsey in collaboration with NielsenIQ analyzed five years of US sales data, from 2017 to June 2022. These products came from 44,000 brands across 32 food, beverage, personal-care, and household categories. Study stated that products making ESG-related claims averaged 28 percent cumulative growth over the past five-year period, versus 20 percent for products that made no such claims. (McKinsey Company June 2025). As for the CAGR, products with ESG-related claims displayed 1.7 percentage-point advantage over products without them (Exhibit 1).

Products that make environmental, social, and governance-related claims have achieved disproportionate growth.

Retail sales growth, US, CAGR 2018–22, %



¹Environmental, social, and governance.
Source: NielsenIQ

McKinsey & Company

Based on a sample of 5390 manufacturing firms in 25 Central and Eastern European and Central Asian countries the empirical results indicated a positive impact of customer environmental concerns on profit margins for low energy-intensity firms and a negative impact for high energy-intensity firms. (Xie & Yifan 2022) A sample of listed European firms was studied and the results showed that sustainability in business practices reduces profitability. The research suggests that some companies use ESG reporting strategically. The amalgamation of sustainable practices within effective business models thus remains a pertinent societal problem (Cerciello, Busato and Taddeo, 2022). In other words, instead of genuinely improving their environmental and social impact, some firms exaggerate their positive actions through greenwashing (overstating environmental efforts) and social washing (overstating social responsibility efforts). As a result, truly combining sustainability with strong and profitable business models remains an important challenge for society. A research based on 98 SMEs in Sussex, United Kingdom was undertaken. The analysis outcomes specified that profit is the best predictor of SMEs financial measurement, pollution prevention and control is positively and considerably related to profit and recycling is negatively and considerably related to profit (Jayeola, 2015). In another study the sample embraced 198 high-performing manufacturing companies across 9 countries. Data findings indicated that environmentally friendly practices positively influence companies' financial performance (Pérez, Fuentes & Rodríguez 2025). Another article observes the relationship between sustainable practices and financial performance of companies. The research is based on a systematic review of existing literature. The data findings suggests that sustainable practices benefit companies financially, providing a competitive advantage for those businesses that implement sustainable strategies. Thus, sustainability is not only an ethical and environmental requirement, but it is also a way to improve profitability and business competitiveness (Roffé and Roffe, 2023). The study observes impact of Environment, Social, Governance (ESG) performance on firm value and profitability. The study concludes that investing in high ESG performance promises financial return for the firm in terms of both value and profitability (Aydoğmuş, Gülay & Ergun, 2022).

Numerous empirical studies across different regions and industries provide evidence that sustainability practices can enhance profitability, firm value, and market performance. A recent empirical study of companies listed on the Shanghai and Shenzhen stock exchanges shows that higher ESG performance significantly enhances financial performance. Using panel data and econometric models, the researchers found a *one-unit increase* in ESG environmental performance is associated with a statistically significant increase in Return on Assets (ROA) — a direct measure of profitability (Zhang and Zhao, 2025). In a study involving 174 publicly listed firms from ASEAN countries (2019–2023), panel regression results indicate that social practices show an immediate positive impact on financial performance measured by Return on Assets (ROA) and market valuation (Tobin's Q). These findings reinforce the idea that ESG practices can translate into measurable financial outcomes through innovation and disclosure. (Tripopsakul, 2025) Indian Listed Companies and Sustainable Practices Research on 49 Indian companies in the S&P BSE ESG 100 index (2015–2022) shows that: The social dimension of ESG positively correlates with ROA — meaning better social practices contributed to higher profitability (Gadekar et al., 2024).

Various studies and their results disclosed that sustainability in business practices reduces profitability. The research suggests that some companies use ESG reporting strategically. The amalgamation of sustainable practices within effective business models thus remains a pertinent societal problem (Cerciello, Busato and Taddeo, 2022). In other words, instead of genuinely improving their environmental and social impact, some firms exaggerate their

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Green Shift Creates an Edge

Organizations that execute eco-friendly innovations successfully become industry leaders who establish new corporate responsibility standards while leading transformational change (Porter & Claes, 1995). 71% of employees prefer to work for sustainable employers (The CSR Journal, Global Consumer Study, 2021). 54% of Gen Z and 48% of millennials were "pushing" their employers to start sustainability practices. (Gen Z and Millennial Survey, Deloitte, 2023). Companies integrate sustainability into their strategies to meet consumer demand and build trust (Agu et al., 2024). Sustainability practices support business growth (Vitale et al., 2019) while fostering innovation and meeting global sustainability goals (Peng, 2024). Empirical research suggests that firms embedding sustainability into strategic processes demonstrate stronger brand authenticity, enabling pricing power and improved financial performance linked to consumer trust and willingness to pay (Kumar, Singh, & Gupta, 2025; Simon-Kucher, 2025).

Recent trends in Eco- Friendly Practices

Recent trends in business sustainability focus on circular economy models moving from "take-make-dispose" to reusing, repairing, and recycling (e.g., IKEA's furniture buy-back). Renewable energy Increased solar/wind adoption, energy-efficient buildings (green design, smart lighting). Using sustainable materials (jute, plant-based packaging), reducing transport emissions. Green tech, driving performance through cost savings, using data analytics for ESG, green computing, waste-to-energy tech, and digital traceability (QR codes). Many brands are designing inherently eco-friendly products, to mention some with remarkable execution brands like Unilever achieved carbon neutrality in production, eliminated vast amounts of plastic, and saw sustainable living brands grow significantly faster. Timberland uses recycled materials in shoes and plants a tree for every product sold. FabIndia switched to jute and natural fibers, eliminating plastic. (ReportYak, 2024); (Unilever, 2019 & 2024); (Timberland, 2024).

CONCLUSION

Companies which want to ensure and support ESG product should develop a product design process that embraces ESG-related claims alongside cost engineering (Mckinsey, 2023). Investments in product design aim to achieve a growth but must also resonate with consumers. Meanwhile, ingredients, materials, and processes that don't contribute to this goal should be eliminated. Invest in ESG through both existing brands and innovative new products (Mckinsey, 2023). This study suggests that a flagship, established product fighting for share in a highly competitive environment could potentially create an edge by offering relevant and differentiating ESG-related claims.

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Conflict of Interest

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