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Environmental Consciousness and Consumer Perception as Determinants of Market Accountability: A Mixed-Methods Model of Sustainability Attitude Formation and Behavioural Intention

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper will explore the association between environmental awareness and consumer perception, with the emphasis of determining the effect of sustainability awareness on consumer behaviour and decision-making. Particularly, the analysis determines the influence of the attitude towards sustainable brands and sustainable brand products, based on the degree of environmental consciousness- as the tool of analysis in the perception of consumers in the framework of sustainable practices.

Methodology: The mixed-methods approach will be used in the study to integrate quantitative and qualitative methods to gain in-depth understanding of consumer psychology. Online survey will help in capturing consumers perception and behavioural responses, whereas semi structured interviews will give a deeper qualitative insight. The causal relationships between the most significant variables are tested with the help of the regression analysis based on Smart PLS, and thematic analysis of the interview data demonstrates the motivational and perceptual factors that stimulate the eco-conscious consumer behaviour.

Findings: The results prove the existence of a strong correlation between environmental awareness and consumer image indicating the importance of psychological and attitudinal determinants in influencing sustainable buying behaviour. Combining statistical and thematic knowledge, the study offers a comprehensive knowledge of the consumer internalization process of sustainable practices and its subsequent conversion in behavioural performance.

Practical Implications: The findings provide practical suggestions to brands and retailers that want to enhance their sustainability in positioning. Through the knowledge of how the environmental consciousness reflects on consumer perception and behaviour, organisations will be in a position to structure their marketing strategy, product development and sustainability programs along with consumer values thus creating trust and long-term interests with the consumers.

Originality/Value: This research has a contribution on the theoretical and empirical discussion of green practices because it attributes environmental awareness to consumer perception and behaviour using a psychological approach. The dual-method analysis and integrated design offer a solid structure of studying the formation and operationalization of sustainability attitude and

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have significant implications to scholars and practitioners of sustainability-related market research.
Keywords: Environmental Consciousness; Consumer Perception; Consumer Behaviour; Sustainable Practices; Psychological Drivers; Market Accountability; Sustainability Attitude Formation

1. Introduction

1.1. From Environmental Strain to Sustainable Transformation: The Context of Industry Accountability

The clothing industry around the world is in the middle of a paradigm shift, and sustainability is becoming one of the key pillars of the industrial continuity. Although its impact on the economy is considerable, the industry is one of the most resource-intensive areas in the world, the source of massive water usage, toxic chemicals release, and billions of euros per year of waste generation (Fletcher and Grose, 2012; Ellen, 2017). These sorts of environmental externality have cast the sector in a growing level of suspicion requiring a shift towards sustainable production systems that strike a balance between profitability and environmental responsibility. The use of environmentally friendly materials organic fibre, recycled fabrics, and biodegradable fabrics provide quantifiable steps in eliminating carbon emissions, water consumption, and chemical reliance, thus matching production to sustainable business (Bhati et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, in this regard, sustainability cannot be reduced to material innovation. It entails a comprehensive strategy, which involves companies entrenching environmental ethics, transparency and accountability in all their value chain. The growing consumers concern on environmental degradation has led to sustainability becoming an outer fringe ethical issue to a core determinant in the market. Companies that practice ecological responsibility are becoming more apparent and acceptable and credible, as the intersection between corporate responsibility and consumer demands becomes more pronounced (Bick et al., 2018). The change in the industry may therefore not only be a move of need but also a reaction to the shifting consumer consciousness.

1.2. Consumer Perception and Behavioural Dynamics: The Psychological Lens of Sustainable Practices

\The consumer perception is central to the development of sustainability in the consumption systems. Modern consumers do not judge products only based on quality or price but rather by psychological and moral prism based on environmental awareness. Consumers form attitudes related to the relationship between ethical responsibility and brand authenticity and transparency as the sustainability awareness increases (Joy et al., 2012; Niinimaki et al., 2020). This change shows a move to value-based consumption where environmental commitment will complement and not contradict profitability. To most consumers, buying an eco friendly product is not only a moral gesture, but also a form of identity and accountability towards the environment.

Attitudes towards sustainable products are therefore highly connected with the behavioural intentions. Purchasing behaviour is greatly affected by the cognitive and affective elements of perception namely trust, empathy and perceived environmental impact. Sustainable goods are

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more and more connected to fairness, quality, and emotional satisfaction, and a psychological connection between the moral belief and market action has been established (Sinha et al., 2023; Ray et al., 2023). Empirical research also shows that environmentally conscious customers will be ready to pay a price premium to goods that satisfy their principles (Nielsen et al., 2020). This knowledge of these psychological dynamics is what firms should utilize to create communication, branding and designs that touch on the conscious of the environmentally aware consumer and therefore translate the awareness into behavioural results that can be measured.

1.3. Linking Environmental Consciousness with Market Accountability: Theoretical and Practical Imperatives

A theoretical bridge between sustainability and market accountability is made by environmental consciousness and consumer perception. With the sustainability becoming a mass value, the companies are forced to adjust their production, reporting, and strategic goals to the environmental and moral standards of the consumer (Bhati et al., 2023). This congruence does not just end with corporate image but it forms the basis of organizational legitimacy and long term competitiveness. As an accounting research, consumer environmental awareness conversion to perceived brand accountability gives an insight of how the measure of sustainability can reflect the stakeholder expectation in a measurable, value-oriented way.

The current research paper enhances this discussion by exploring the connection between the environmental consciousness and consumer perception in sustainable practices. In particular, it determines the way environmental awareness influences attitudes toward sustainable brands and their products-defined as a behavioural instrument of measuring accountability. In a mixed-methods design, the study combines a quantitative regression model (Smart PLS) and qualitative thematic investigation to model the formation of sustainability attitudes and behavioural intention. Such two-faceted strategy allows pursuing the comprehensive explanation of perceptual and motivational processes underlying sustainable consumption. Finally, the research adds to theoretical framework of sustainability in consumer behaviour and accounting situations, setting environmental awareness as a quantifiable factor of responsible market behaviour.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Sustainable Practice as Systemic Reform: Rethinking Industry and Accountability

Sustainable fashion, also commonly known as eco-fashion, has grown to be a multi-dimensional activity that promotes the ethical, ecological, and socio-economic necessities (Sinha et al., 2023). It goes further than material substitution to encompass a total re-engineering of the production-consumption system, with a focus on responsibility in all stages of production-consumption, including reuse, repair and recycling (Ray et al., 2023). The aim is to reduce the scope of carbon, water and waste impact of the fashion industry and enhance circular production formats that conserve and re-create value. According to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2021), the core of redefining sustainability as a moral and an economic responsibility is the notion of circularity, or the idea to ensure that the products and materials used stay in place as long as possible. Sustainability in this regard is not merely a matter of compliance, but a strategy of responsiveness to accountability integrated in the industrial governance and reporting practices.

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In terms of theory, sustainable practice also reinstates the relationships among stakeholders. It requires the cooperation of producers, consumers, policymakers, and future generations and incorporates accountability into the systems of making decisions (Hugo et al., 2021). The change is an indicator that the issues of environmental degradation and social inequity are, in fact, linked, and cannot be addressed with a single intervention. Studies indicate that systemic sustainability leads to legitimacy and sustainability in the long-term in cases where ethical imperatives are aligned to the market incentives (Bhati et al., 2023). Thus, sustainable practice is not only a flexible response to environmental pressures in the world but also a restructuring of the institutions in which transparency and quantifiable responsibility are the two important signs of the market credibility in the modern system of accounting and governance.\

2.2. Material Innovation and Consumer Trust: The Role of Eco-Friendly Inputs

Green materials symbolize a practical cross-over of the sustainability innovation and the consumer perception. Research suggests that incorporating organic cotton, bamboo fibre, and recycled polyester have a direct positive impact and influence on the environmental impact and shape consumer perceptions of authenticity and responsibility (Shen et al., 2019; Joy et al., 2012). Such innovations are tangible proof of the environmental commitment of the firm and enhance the impressions about brand integrity and ethical credibility. The material origin and production transparency are becoming a major indicator that consumers use to build trust and behavioural intentions, which in most cases are equated with high quality and social value by eco-materials. Therefore, material innovation can be seen as a solution to the environment and a symbolic means of communication, which connects the sustainability performance with the creation of psychological values.

Empirical analysis also provides support to a positive correlation between knowledge on eco-materials and readiness to pay high prices. Shen et al. (2019) discovered that purchasing environmentally conscious products is regarded as a way of being morally responsible by the environmentally conscious consumers. But Armstrong, Niinimaki, and Lang (2020) claim that material disclosure should be supported by adequate information streams to maintain the confidence of the consumers. Lack of standard disclosure of sustainability may hide the true effect leading to scepticism and greenwashing attitudes. The solution to this dilemma is that the producers need to introduce traceability and reporting systems into their sustainability policy-connecting the material information with the verifiable measures of the environmental behaviour. Therefore, green inputs are not merely differentiators of products but also tools of corporate responsibility, which allows reinforcing the connection between technological innovation and consumer behaviour and sustainable market governance.

2.3. Consumer Perception and Influencing Factors: Behavioural and Social Determinants

Perception of the consumer is a characterizing aspect of the purchase behaviour and sustainability. Recent studies state that purchase choices are the product of the interaction between environmental interest, product quality, and price sensitivity (Gam et al., 2020). Sustainability is an environmental awareness that drives a large number of consumers to purchase alternatives that are environmentally friendly, but competing needs like affordability and fashionability frequently mutter this urge. As Bhattacharya, Rahman, and Hasan (2021) note,

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this relationship has a crucial mediating role that is represented by trust and perceived brand integrity: when consumers relate brands with transparency, ethical sourcing, and plausible sustainability statements, they are more likely to select sustainable products. Therefore, perception is cognitive, based on the knowledge and information, and affective, which is associated with emotional attachment to the values of a brand.

These perceptions are still further shaped by social and cultural contexts. The social influence, peer expectations and community norms have a strong impact on the interpretation of sustainability claims by individuals. Joergens (2021) shows that influencers and social media have become influential in the creation of frames of sustainability, changing not only their perception of awareness but also their perception of want. This can enhance the level of environmental awareness but can also result in superficial conformity, where environmentally friendly decisions are made due to social approval and not because of any actual concern (Ray and Nayak, 2023). These dynamics indicate that the psychosocial nature of consumer perception of sustainability is psychosocial in nature (with a moral basis) but is sensitive to social approval. These determinants are crucial to the creation of the behavioural models that can relate environmental consciousness with quantifiable consumer outcomes and, consequently, to the accountability mechanisms in sustainable markets in this way.

2.4. Environmental Knowledge and Attitudinal Mediation: Linking Awareness to Action

The awareness and behavioural intention of sustainable consumption use environmental knowledge as a mediator. Research done previously brings forth the idea that awareness in itself might not lead to behavioural change unless it is coupled with knowledge of the effects that individual-level choices have on the environment (Le et al., 2024). The environmental knowledge is what prepares the consumers to be critical of the ecological claims that are made and how to convert ecological concern into steady purchasing patterns. According to Ou et al. (2023), the degree of environmental knowledge determined a strong positive relationship between attitudes toward sustainable practice and design students and implied that informed consumers tend to be more active in the implementation of sustainable alternatives. This mental aspect turns environmental concern into an abstract value into an action.

Zhang et al. (2023) build on this line of thought and suggest a mediation model, according to which environmental knowledge has a direct effect on green fashion behaviour by perceived value of sustainable products. This research concludes that knowledge increases perceived utility and ethical satisfaction that leads to long-term commitment to behaviour. As a result, educating to become more environmentally literate, labeling, and communicating with corporate becomes a strategic need. In the theoretical accounting and governance systems, the environmental knowledge is also useful in informed stakeholder assessment of sustainability reporting. It eliminates the asymmetry of information of both companies and consumers, contributing to better transparency and strengthening accountability. Therefore, environmental knowledge qualifies as both a personal level of cognitive resource as well as an institutional tool of enhancing market integrity in sustainability-based economies.

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2.5. Social Influence and Collective Norms: The Moderating Dynamics of Eco-Friendly Adoption

Environmental consciousness and sustainable behaviour are moderated by social influence that is a strong force. Armstrong et al. (2020) note that in the event that sustainability is appreciated in a peer group, people tend to make the awareness actionable even without having profound environmental knowledge. Social endorsement, therefore, increases moral motivation, which changes the individual concern into a socially shared behaviour. According to Bhattacharya et al. (2021), this promotion of perceived trustworthiness of sustainable brands increases the concept of sustainability in the self-perception of the community. It is particularly notable in the digital realm, where influencers and opinion leaders spread sustainability standards and organize consumption patterns in line with environmental principles (Joergens, 2021).

However, social aspect of adoption of environmental friendliness is complicated. Although social approval may hasten sustainable behaviour, it may also cause performative consumption which arises on the basis of conformity as opposed to conviction about the environment (Ray and Nayak, 2023). The ensuing conflict between genuineness and show makes brands work towards developing substantive and not symbolic sustainability engagement. Niinimaki et al. (2020) emphasize that the organizing of sustainable market change is not possible without social environments that appreciate knowledgeable and ethical decision-making, rather than following the trends. To the policy and practice, this highlights the importance of instituting communication strategies and institutional incentives that promote social influence to be anchored in believable environmental knowledge. The knowledge of social moderation, therefore, is perhaps vital in the development of behavioural and accounting models that will expound the ways in which collective norms and peer validation will shift environmental consciousness into responsible market practice.

3. Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

3.1. Integrating Environmental Knowledge, Material Attributes, and Consumer Perception: A Theoretical Model

Conceptual framework of this research is based on behavioural and cognitive theories of sustainable consumption that discuss the fact that the knowledge, perception, and decision making of consumers are interdependent factors of environmentally-sustainable behaviour. Based on the previous study (Armstrong et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2023), environmental knowledge is an auxiliary variable that helps fill the gap between material innovation and consumer perception. In particular, the extent of consumer awareness about the ecological superiority of sustainable materials would be biodegradation, recycling and resource performance define consumer perception of brand authenticity and value of products. Use of environmentally friendly materials is hence not merely a production option but a source of information and perceptions to affect environmental literacy and behavioural impacts.

In that context, consumer perception is one of the most important psychological outcomes that define the way people rate sustainable apparel concerning its ethical implication, trustworthiness, and quality. The perception is enhanced by environmental knowledge which turns sustainability information into cognitive awareness and emotional resonance (Le et al., 2024). By understanding the benefits of using eco-friendly materials in terms of environmental

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conservation, consumers will become more inclined to construct a positive perception and increase their intentions to purchase. Therefore, the conceptual model assumes that there is a linear relationship between material qualities and utilisation and environmental knowledge, which influences consumer perception and behaviour. This convergence incorporates behavioural and accountability views, relating consumer insight with quantifiable sustainability activities in market systems, and thus becoming the foundation of the subsequent hypotheses:
H1: Specific attributes of eco-friendly materials positively influence environmental knowledge.
H2: Use of eco-friendly materials positively influences environmental knowledge.
H3: Social influence positively influences environmental knowledge.
H4: Environmental knowledge positively influences consumer perception of sustainable apparel.
H5: Consumer perception of sustainable apparel positively influences purchase intention.

3.2. Moderating Role of Social Influence: Linking Collective Behaviour and Knowledge Formation
Social influence is a moderating factor that has significant directive influence on the strength and direction of the relationship between environmental knowledge, material use, and consumer perception. According to the social identity theory, behaviourally, individuals would internalize sustainability norms which are approved by their reference groups in order to receive social acceptance and self-consistency (Joergens, 2021; Ray and Nayak, 2023). Therefore, social validation has the potential to enhance the perceived significance of eco-friendly behaviour even in the situation when the measure of individual knowledge or motivation is low. In the framework of sustainable apparel, peer pressure, communication in social media and cultural pressures are the supporting forces that convert awareness into behavioural involvement. This brings to the fore social influence as a driver and controller of knowledge-based learning in decision-making in the environment.
Besides, the social moderating effect shows how group norms may reinforce or undermine the influence of material innovation on consumer cognitions. The more eco-friendly materials are actively promoted on social networks, the more consumers will think that they are valuable and reliable, and improve the level of ecological awareness. On the other hand, without normative support, even plausible sustainability efforts will not take a hold on behavioural level (Niinimaki et al., 2020). The conceptual model thus acknowledges social influence as a situational influence that cooperates with the cognitive and affective aspects of sustainability to promote accountability in a social network by communicative behavioural norms and communicative social networks which result in development of the following hypotheses:
H6: Social influence moderates the relationship between the use of eco-friendly materials and environmental knowledge.
H7: Social influence moderates the relationship between specific attributes of eco-friendly materials and environmental knowledge.

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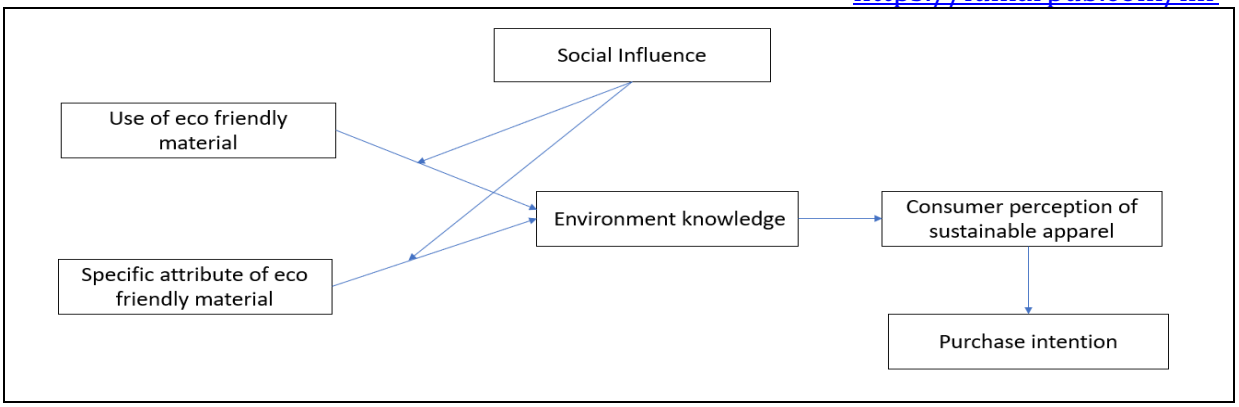

Figure 1. A Conceptual Model of Environmental Knowledge Formation and Sustainable Purchase Intention

4. Methodology

4.1. Overview

This paper will be of mixed-method design where quantitative and qualitative approaches are used to study the effect of environmental consciousness on consumer perception and purchase intention of sustainable apparel. The quantitative was gathered using a structured and self-administered online survey and qualitative information was obtained using in depth interviews to explore the underlying attitudes and motivations. SmartPLS was used to analyse data as a structural equation modelling (SEM) and thematic analysis was used to interpret the interview narratives. This combined methodology guaranteed triangulation of methodology, that is, the combination of statistical rigour and a situational knowledge of consumer behaviour in the context of sustainable practice.

4.2. Participants

The sample size used in the study was 428 people (62% were women) who participated in the online survey. The personal and professional networks of the research team were used to recruit the respondents via Facebook, Instagram, and Whatsapp. The sampling strategy was used is a snowball sampling strategy whereby respondents were asked to distribute the survey link among their social groups in a bid to expand the sample size. The respondents whose geographical location was the Delhi-NCR region were sampled, so that there was variation in terms of demographic and socioeconomic factors. This method provided a sample that was suitable in analysing the environmentally conscious behaviour in consumption and intentions to purchase sustainable apparel. Majority of the participants were of ages between 31-40 years then 18-30 years, 51-60 years and 41-50 years. Postgraduates formed the highest number of people in the context of the educational attainment with graduates, professionals and others in the last position. On income, the majority of the respondents had a monthly earning of between [?]50,000 and [?]1,00,000 with a smaller percentage earning less than [?]15,000. The population sample shows that it is an educated and economically active group of people, which is suitable to investigate the nature of environmental consciousness, consumer attitude, and eco-friendly buying behaviour.

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4.3. Procedures

The electronic questionnaire was designed in a systematic methodological approach in order to make it clear, reliable, and attractive to the respondents. The pilot test was done before the actual data collection to find and rectify any possible ambiguities. After validation, the questionnaire was administered online in the social media in order to participate in a large number and ways. In order to supplement the quantitative part, semi-structured interviews were also carried out in order to understand better the motivations, values and factors that influence consumers when making decisions concerning eco-friendly apparel. It was a sequential mixed methodology that allowed the combination of numerical results and interpretive knowledge, which contributed to the explanatory richness of the study.

4.4. Measures, Reliability, and Validity

The frameworks of measurement were derived based on the already established empirical scales in the study of sustainability and consumer behaviour so as to establish content validity and consistency with theory. It has questions about environmental knowledge, consumer perception of sustainable apparel, social influence, and purchase intention rated on the five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Such a format enabled a subtle analysis of cognitive and affective aspects of consumer behaviour about environmentally friendly clothes. To ensure the strength of the measurement model, reliability and validity were measured. All the construct-specific values of Cronbach alpha and composite reliability (CR) were above 0.70, which shows strong internal consistency. Averging a variance extracted (AVE) value of more than 0.50 was used to determine convergent validity, whereas the Fornell-Larcker criterion was met by discriminant validity. In the qualitative part, sufficiency in credibility and consistency of interpretation was achieved through thematic saturation and peer debriefing. All these steps supported the reliability and validity of the study measures in terms of empirical and conceptual soundness.

4.5. Data Analysis

SmartPLS was used to perform structural equation modelling (SEM) and hypothesis testing based on regression to analyse the quantitative data. This allowed indirect, mediating and moderating impacts of environmental knowledge, eco-friendly material properties, social influence and consumer perception to be assessed. Thematic analysis of qualitative interview data was conducted through systematic coding, categorization and identification of patterns to identify behavioural and motivational themes. The combination of both sets of analysis gave an overall view of the way environmental consciousness is transferred into sustainable purchase intention creating consistency between the empirical findings and theoretical constructions.

5. Results

5.1. Descriptive Analysis of Demographic Characteristics

The demographic structure reveals that most of the respondents are women, which is also true to the past research that indicated that women are more likely to express environmental concerns and greater tendencies towards sustainable consumption (Table 1). The greatest

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percentage (31.63) is found in the segment of 31-40-year-old population, which is usually economically active and interested in the environment, which indicates that it makes informed choices on sustainable clothing. Most of the respondents were postgraduates (31.9%), followed by 29.75 percent of graduates; this shows that the respondents were relatively knowledgeable and involved in their professions and could understand the information related to sustainability-related products. The income distribution, 38.33% of that between [?]50,000 and [?]1,00,000, indicates a middle to upper-income bracket that has the income available to think about making ethical consumption decisions. On the whole, the population structure shows that it is a well-educated, economically stable, and social conscious sample, which is appropriate to address cognitive and behavioural aspects of environmental consciousness and perception of consumers. The profile reinforces the validity of the results in that the responses will be based on informed awareness, not a price-related motive or driven by pure aspirational motives, which will offer a plausible foundation to the sustainability-oriented purchasing behaviour analysis.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	141	37.80%
Female	232	62.01%
Age		
18-30	108	28.97%
31-40	118	31.63%
41-50	67	17.96%
51-60	78	20.91%
Educations		
Graduate	111	29.75%
Post graduate	119	31.9%
Professional	59	15.81%
Others	82	21.98%
Income		
Below 15,000	20	5.36%
15,000-50,000	115	30.83%
50,000-1,00,000	143	38.33%
1,00,000-1,50,000	63	16.89%
1,50,000 and above	30	8.4%

5.2. Measurement Model Evaluation

5.2.1. Reliability and Convergent Validity

The outer loadings were all above 0.70, meaning that each of the items had a close connection with its latent construct and thus, supporting convergent validity (Table 2). Cronbachs alpha and Composite Reliability were used to measure internal consistency and both exceeded the reliability threshold of 0.70 establishing high reliability of all the constructs. Moreover, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of all constructs was more than 0.50 indicating that each construct explained most of variance of its indicators as opposed to measurement error. These findings support the fact that these constructs were reliable, internally consistent, and convergent, which means that the measurement framework is applicable in the measurement of the theoretical aspects of consumer perception and sustainable purchase behaviour (Hair et al., 2010).

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Table 2. Measurement Model Assessment

Variables	Outer loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Use Of Eco-Friendly Materials		0.770	0.866	0.684
UFM1	0.844			
UFM2	0.823			
UFM3	0.814			
Specific Attribute of Eco-Friendly Material		0.750	0.855	0.663
SAM1	0.816			
SAM2	0.807			
SAM3	0.820			
Social influence		0.838	0.892	0.673
SI1	0.829			
SI2	0.808			
SI3	0.829			
SI4	0.815			
Environment knowledge		0.794	0.866	0.618
EK1	0.799			
EK2	0.800			
EK3	0.808			
EK4	0.735			
Consumer Perception		0.858	0.813	0.592
CPA1	0.747			
CPA2	0.811			
CPA3	0.749			
Purchase Intention		0.853	0.901	0.694
PI1	0.842			
PI2	0.850			
PI3	0.847			
PI4	0.792			

5.2.2. Discriminant Validity

The assessment used Fornell-Larcker criterion, according to which the square root of AVE of the constructs exceeded the correlations of the construct with others (Table 3). This condition was met entirely and this proved that constructs like Environmental Knowledge, Social Influence and Consumer Perception are separate conceptual areas. The results offer strong indications that the constructs used in the study are unique and not multicollinear thus validity and accuracy of the further analysis of the structural model.

Table 3. Discriminant validity

	CPA_	EK_	PI	SAM_	SI_	UFM_	SI_ x UFM_	SI_ x SAM_
CPA_								
EK_	0.581							
PI	0.789	0.600						
SAM_	0.621	0.610	0.612					
SI_	0.749	0.698	0.726	0.619				
UFM_	0.786	0.566	0.657	0.611	0.649			
SI_ x UFM_	0.185	0.061	0.057	0.161	0.051	0.273		
SI_ x SAM_	0.125	0.112	0.083	0.054	0.032	0.152	0.382	

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5.3. Structural Model Assessment

5.3.1. Model Fit Indices

The Chi-square/df (CMIN/df) ratio was less than 3, which is a good requirement of the model fit (Hayes et al., 2017) (Figure 2). It was a good comparative fit: the Normalized Fit Index (NFI) was above 0.90 (Hair et al., 2019; 2020). Moreover, the value of the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) was lower than 0.08, indicating reasonable levels of residuals and the model in its entirety (Maydeu-Olivares et al., 2018). All these indices are indicative of the fact that the structural model exhibits a highly assertive and consistent fit and hence is acceptable to proceed with the use of inferential testing.

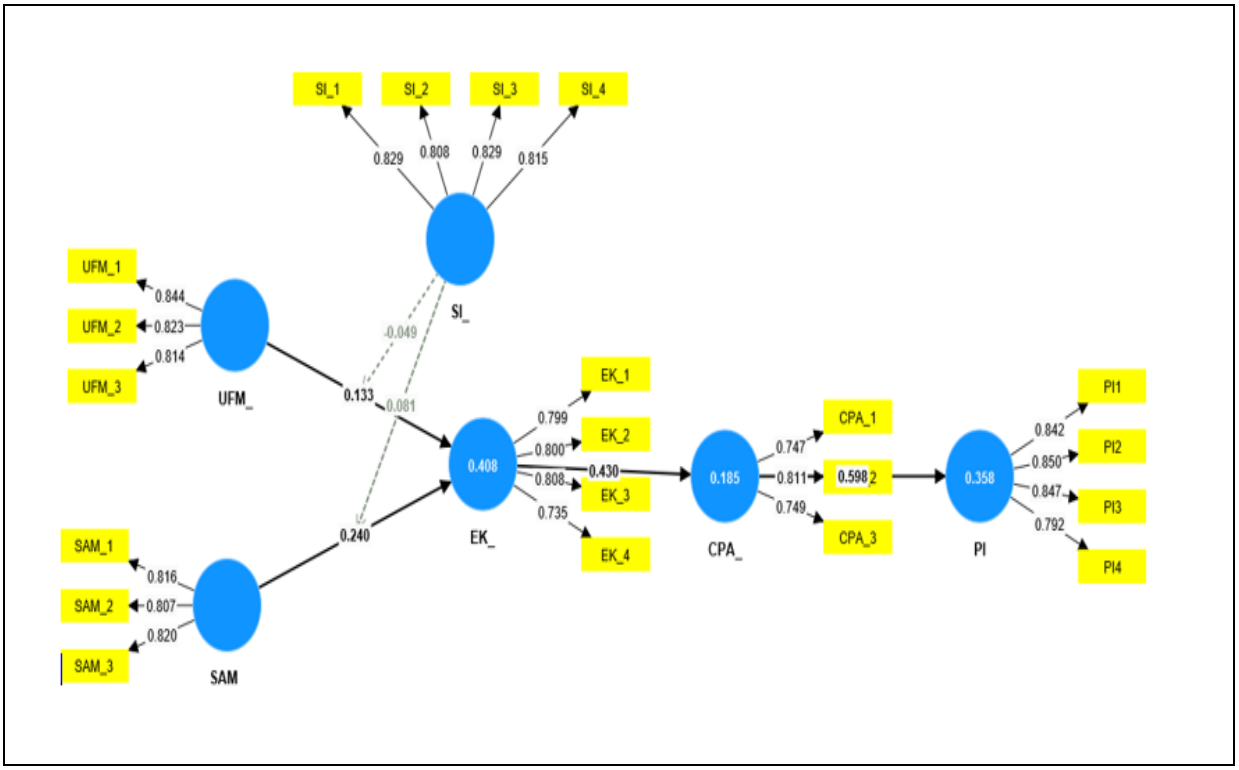

Figure 2. Structural model

5.3.2. Structural Path Coefficients

The last model had 21 structural components, which interconnected the six latent constructs. SmartPLS structural equation modelling was used to assess the strength, direction and importance of each of the pathways (Figure 2). The findings showed statistically significant correlations, which indicated the theoretical soundness of the suggested model. The high path coefficients indicate the explanatory strength of the framework to forecast environmental knowledge and consumer behaviour of sustainable apparel.

5.4. Hypothesis Testing and Inferential Analysis

The findings of hypothesis testing, as well as path coefficient, t-values, and p-values obtained as a part of the SmartPLS analysis (Hair et al., 2020) (Table 4). The level of significance that was used to test hypotheses was $p < 0.05$. The results indicate that the greatest number of the hypothesized relationships proved to be statistically significant. In particular, the environmental

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knowledge was positively affected by the following specific attributes of eco-friendly materials (H1) and the use of eco-friendly materials (H2). Likewise, social influence (H3) influenced environmental knowledge significantly, and positively, which, in turn, had a great impact on consumer perception (H4) and purchase intention (H5). Nonetheless, the interaction term (SI x UFM - EK) is not significant, which means that the social influence does not mediate the direct impact of the eco-material use on the knowledge of the environment. The relationship between specific material attributes and environmental knowledge on the other hand was partially moderated using social influence (H7). All in all, the findings confirm the postulated conceptual framework, indicating the mediating effect of the environmental knowledge and the partial moderating effect of the social factors in influencing the sustainable purchase intentions.

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
CPA_ -> PI	0.598	0.601	0.031	19.025	0.000
EK_ -> CPA_	0.430	0.433	0.042	10.164	0.000
SAM_ -> EK_	0.240	0.243	0.050	4.778	0.000
SI_ -> EK_	0.392	0.391	0.050	7.770	0.000
UFM_ -> EK_	0.133	0.135	0.048	2.789	0.003
SI_ x UFM_ -> E	-0.049	-0.048	0.045	1.079	0.140
SI_ x SAM_ -> E	0.081	0.078	0.043	1.886	0.030

5. Discussion

5.1 Environmental Consciousness as an Evolving Dimension of Market Accountability

The results show that there has been a considerable change in the fashion industry in the sense that environmental awareness ceased to be an auxiliary issue but is now a major defining factor of corporate responsibility and consumer behaviour. The increasing concerns of the sustainable sustainability of the environment and ethical practices have developed a dynamic situation where sustainability is not only a moral requirement but also a market expectation (Fletcher and Grose, 2012; Bhati and Mittal, 2023). This can be viewed as a broader social shift where performance is no longer financial, but ecological and socially responsible. The data show that the environmentally conscious consumers are actively affecting the market structures through their rewarding of the brands that are sincerely concerned with sustainability. This confirms that sustainability has taken a strategic role as source of legitimacy in which transparency and ethical behaviors are the foundation of brand credibility (Bick et al., 2018). As companies react to this trend, the reporting systems are becoming more and more sustainable with the ecological information being correlated to the indicators of stakeholder confidence and marketability in the long-term.

5.2 Eco-Material Adoption as a Symbol of Strategic and Ethical Alignment

The research verifies that application and specific properties of the green materials have a massive positive influence on the environmental awareness and the consumer image. This highlights the multifunctionality of material innovation as not only a functional intervention in

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the environment but also a symbolic statement of a moral orientation (Shen et al., 2019). As a graphic representation of a brand's dedication to sustainability, material design also becomes a type of communicative responsibility due to the use of eco-friendly materials, including organic cotton and recycled fibres (Black, 2017). In addition, material transparency builds consumer trust because tangible product attributes are associated with corporate responsibility. The preceding literature highlights that adoption of materials should be backed by traceability and verifiable information on sustainability so as to maintain consumer confidence, and prevent allegations of superficially applied greenwashing (Armstrong et al., 2020). The firms can establish accountability arrangements by linking the inputs of production to the transparent reporting systems that transform innovation into credibility. Therefore, the use of eco-material is not just the operational decision but the conscious ethical and communicative gesture and product design is aligned with the responsibility expectations of consumers.

5.3 Environmental Knowledge as a Cognitive Mediator and Accountability Enabler

The observation that environmental knowledge is the mediating variable in the interaction between eco-material usage and consumer perception indicates the importance of environmental awareness in moderating awareness-action interaction. Knowledge of the environment is seen as a working cognitive resource through which consumers derive meaning of sustainability promises, truthfulness of products, and convert values into behaviour (Ou et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). It seals the divide between organizational reporting and customer knowledge, which supports responsible decision-making and behaviour. This relationship also conforms to findings that environmental literacy also changes concern into behavioural commitment (Le et al., 2024). Once the consumer understands the physical effect of the eco-material on the preservation of the environment, the consumer will have a more powerful perception of the brand authenticity and tend to buy responsibly. In this respect, environmental knowledge is a mediator of market accountability and/or a market mechanism of transforming sustainability communication into credible consumer trust.

5.4 The Moderating Role of Social Influence: Collective Accountability and Norm Diffusion

The findings indicate that the relationship between eco-material characteristics and environmental knowledge is moderated by social influence to some extent, which depicts the collective aspect of sustainability. The social norms and peer validation serve as behavioural stimuli through which individual consciousness is transformed to collective responsibility (Bhattacharya et al., 2021; Joergens, 2021). Once the endorsed sustainable practices are supported in the social circle, sustainable practices are socially supported and morally justified, which encourages people to make their decisions in accordance with the common values. Nonetheless, this social support can be empowering and limiting. As positive influence corresponds to sustainability, performative consumption, which is driven by social appearance, but not belief, can undermine environmental commitment (Ray and Nayak, 2023). Therefore, it is necessary to promote the element of authenticity in the discussion of social sustainability. These results show that sustainability is not a process that is observed in isolation but rather it is a process of social negotiation which is based on common meanings and group dynamics. The

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spreading out of sustainable norms therefore extends the accountability of the firm to the society and incorporates the principle of ethical decision making in the societal systems of influence.

5.5 Consumer Perception as a Behavioural and Economic Asset

The structural model illustrates that the perception of consumers is a great predictor of purchase intention, which supports the idea that beliefs related to sustainability have a direct influence on market performance. Eco-friendly products are viewed as a sign of moral responsibility by consumers, and this fact increases the emotional and economic value (Henninger et al., 2016; Joy et al., 2012). Essentially, perception is a currency of behaviour that transforms the moral approval into market preference. This observation has more extensive effects on strategic sustainability management. With the alignment of ecological transparency and consumer values, the companies can transform the ethical positioning to a competitive differentiation. According to the evidence provided previously, consumers can spend more on the products that correspond to their sustainability principles (Shen et al., 2019). Therefore, consumer perceptions can be viewed as a psychological and an economic resource - the source of brand loyalty, demand formation, and the supporting accountability structures in the sustainable market.

5.6 Toward a Circular and Holistic Model of Sustainability Accountability

The paper also notes the need to stop individual product-based innovations and transition to circular and systemic sustainability designs. The fashion industry must be truly accountable, which means that the process of producing, consuming, and reusing clothes should be closed-loop so that materials, production, consumption, and reuse are interrelated in a regenerative economic system (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2023). The change is reminiscent of Niinimaki et al. (2020) who suggest that sustainability requires structural change that includes resource cycles, labour ethics, and social equity. A total model of sustainability thus incorporates environment, social and economic aspects as a unified system of responsibility. The implementation of circular practices, i.e. repair, reuse, and recycle, allows firms to not only decrease the impact on the ecology, but also provide the actions that can be measured as responsible. These kinds of metrics redefine success in terms other than financial returns, making sustainability performance one of the core pillars of organizational legitimacy and stakeholder trust.

5.7 Integrating Theoretical and Practical Dimensions: The Emergence of Accountable Sustainability

Together, the findings portray eco-fashion as a paradigm of responsible sustainability, [in which] environmental awareness, consumer awareness and social power come together to redefine the market behaviour. The journalism highlights that accountability does not lie within the realm of corporate reporting and is co-created with the help of consumer insight and social engagement (Ray and Nayak, 2023; Bhattacharya et al., 2021). Sustainability turns into a process of multi-level governance, which lies on the basis of informed consumers, transparent organizations, and ethical social systems. This study contributes to the theoretical domain of accountability in the discussion of sustainability by showing how environmental awareness can be converted into a perception and purchase intention. The combination of cognitive, behavioural and social determinants offers a holistic approach in the study of the operationalization of responsibility in

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markets. Finally, the findings confirm the idea that sustainability and accountability are convergent forces, that establish the transformation of the fashion industry into a more transparent, ethical, and regenerative future.

6. Conclusion

The current research will offer a comprehensive insight into the joint effect of environmental consciousness and consumer perception in promoting sustainable buying behaviour in the fashion industry. The results prove that the shift to the use of environmentally friendly materials and the stipulation of the open sustainability are not only a technological change, but also a socio-cultural change of the consumer value. More consumers are increasingly driven by a sense of environmental consciousness, and they would like to identify with a brand that is actually integrating environmental values into its business practices (Le et al., 2024). This is a structural change of the ethical consumption as a niche choice to sustainability as a mainstream factor of market responsibility.

It is supported by empirical evidence that eco-fashion is a stable change and not a temporary trend. Consumers who have a superior understanding of the environment have more favorable views towards sustainable clothes, which translate into a high purchase desire. Social norms as moderating variables also support the difference of the sustainability values in the network of peers and the communities. Collectively, these results point to the fact that sustainability in fashion has become a system of collective behaviour, i.e. rooted in awareness, authenticity and shared responsibility.

However, challenges remain. The study finds that there remains a worrying consumer scepticism towards sustainability-related claims, which is caused by an inconsistent system of certification and lack of transparency in terms of material provenance. Before most consumers place their full trust on green branding, they would want verifiable evidence as to the commitment of the company on the environment. This highlights the urgent necessity to have a standardized sustainability reporting and traceable accountability systems. The future of eco-fashion will lie in the possibility of the industry to institutionalize trust by means of measuring reporting, consumer education, and circular production systems.

In general, the research confirms that the sustainable fashion trend is the manifestation of the meeting of the ethical responsibility and the development of the market. The organizations that truly integrate innovation with environmental and social responsibility are the ones that are the easiest to lead the shift to the more regenerative and circular, economically viable fashion ecosystem. The need to incorporate sustainability concepts in the entire value chain of designing, manufacturing to disposal will boost the legitimacy, long-term consumer loyalty, and profitability reconfigured through responsible production.

7. Limitations

This research, despite its strength, recognizes a number of weaknesses that leave the opportunities to rectify it open. To start with, the sample of the research study mainly reflects the urban and digitally literate consumers and, therefore, may not be fully applicable to other demographic or cultural backgrounds. The populations that are less technologically connected and those living in the rural areas may have a different sustainability perception that needs to be

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investigated. Second, this is due to the fact that the dependability of self-reported data is a potential bias due to the overstatement of environmentally positive attitudes, or behaviours, by respondents. To reduce such subjectivity in future designs, incorporating behavioural tracking, or experimental validation, might be useful. Third, the research is cross-sectional and, therefore, it does not allow concluding about causal associations with time. Longitudinal or panel data would be a better measure of changing consumer attitudes and adoption persistence of eco-fashion.

Lastly, even though the mixed method approach enhanced conceptual clarity, future studies might adopt institutional, policy or accounting-based approaches to study the role of governance structures in facilitating sustainable change in the fashion value chains.

8. Practical Implications

The results of this work are relevant to various stakeholders of the fashion ecosystem, in particular, industry players, policymakers, educators, and sustainability activists. To the practitioners, the evidence highlighting sustainability should not be considered merely at the unit level of product design but across the organization value chain. The adoption of greener materials, fair labour policy, and the adoption of transparent system of traceability of supply-chain is now strategic imperatives, rather than a voluntary option. Fashion companies can increase their customer trust and gain a competitive edge in the ever more sustainability-conscious market by using technologies like blockchain to track materials or digital passports to trace a product history. Such practices make sustainability more than a marketing story; yet one that can be proven to be an element of corporate responsibility and brand integrity.

Moreover, the marketing and communication plans will need to transform to a more factual and transparent story. Instead of stating generalized messages of being green, firms ought to concentrate on showing quantifiable results, these may include carbon-cutting measures, water-saving and recycling rates, and express the information through interactive and reachable mediums. High sustainability communication will inform the consumer and translate environmental awareness to purchase behaviour. The findings of the study also indicate that the extent of both perception and purchase intention is highly mediated by the environmental knowledge of the consumer meaning that sustainable consumption can be enhanced by investing in educational outreach, labeling clarification and impact narration.

The findings at the policy level are directed to the immediate necessity of the development of standard sustainability certification frameworks and more powerful environmental reporting systems. The regulators and the industries can have a catalytic role whereby they can come up with unified systems to label sustainability which would give a credible authenticate green claims and eliminate confusion by the consumers. These institutional changes can bring about the culture of collective responsibility the firms would be motivated to innovate in a responsible way and the consumers would be empowered to make informed ethical decisions. Even the educational institutions and advocacy groups can play an important role in enhancing the sustainability literacy. It is possible to prepare a new breed of responsible producers and consumers by incorporating environmental ethics and sustainable design principles in the curricula and the training of professionals. Together, these suggestions emphasize the idea that sustainable fashion can be viewed as a not only an ethical but also a strategic and economic

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redefinition of the industry as the one with resilience, transparency, and the creation of long-term value.

9. Future Research

The future of eco-fashion as a social movement and market creates a number of positive prospects on future research. A potential solution is identified in the development of the role of digital technologies in enhancing consumer education and the effectiveness of sustainability communication in the form of artificial intelligence, blockchain-traceability, and augmented reality interfaces. A research on how the technologies affect the formation of trust and behavioural intention would provide valuable information on how to create transparent and accountable fashion systems. Moreover, longitudinal research is needed to investigate the possibility of the growing involvement in eco-fashion as a longer-term cultural shift or a temporary consumer trend. Monitoring sustainability-oriented attitudes and purchase trends across time will help to understand whether the eco-consciousness has taken the status of a stable behavioural pattern or is subject to market fluctuations.

The psychological and moral processes that lie behind sustainable consumer behaviour should also be investigated in the future. A greater dive into variables like moral identity, cognitive consistency and perceived authenticity may shed more light into why certain consumers always make sustainable decisions whereas others are apathetic despite their awareness. This knowledge can be used to develop interventions that may help to enhance moral commitment and trust in sustainability labels. Another promising field is provided by cross-cultural comparative studies because cultural norms, social values, and economical structure influence the perception and the practice of sustainability significantly. These contextual differences will also be understood to develop globally consistent but locally responsive sustainability policies.

Similarly, a more detailed research on the role of policy and institutional mechanisms cannot be overlooked. A gap between governance and market accountability can be bridged by studying how the certification systems, environmental labelling and government-led incentive programs impact on the consumer decisions. Lastly, the research study ought to incorporate sustainability in accounting and corporate governance models to determine whether non-financial effects of eco-fashion, such as carbon saving, social welfare, and reputational benefits, can be quantified as an indicator of accountability. This integration will enhance both theoretical and practice aspects of sustainability scholarship, taking stronghold to the fact that there is no mutually exclusive but rather a mutually reinforcing relationship between ethical responsibility and economic performance. Collectively, these research directions feature the possibility to evolve a coherent picture of sustainable fashion - one that integrates environmental sustainability, social justice, and financial sustainability in the long term in a responsible and open-minded model of the industry.

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