

SUSTAINABLE E-COMMERCE AND CONSUMER WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE PRODUCTS

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Abstract

The rapid growth of e-commerce has transformed consumer purchasing behaviour and created new opportunities for businesses to promote environmentally responsible products. At the same time, increasing environmental awareness has encouraged consumers to consider sustainability while making purchasing decisions. This research paper examines sustainable e-commerce and consumers' willingness to pay for environmentally responsible products. The study focuses on the relationship between environmental awareness, perceived product value, consumer attitudes, trust in green claims, price sensitivity, and willingness to pay. From a commerce perspective, the paper also examines how sustainable practices can influence marketing strategies, customer loyalty, competitive advantage, and business performance. The study is based primarily on secondary information from academic literature, reports, and existing research. The findings suggest that consumers may be willing to pay a premium for environmentally responsible products when they perceive genuine environmental benefits, product quality, transparency, and value. However, high prices, lack of information, distrust of green claims, and limited product availability can discourage sustainable purchases. The paper concludes that e-commerce businesses can strengthen sustainable consumption by adopting transparent green marketing, sustainable packaging, responsible logistics, credible environmental certifications, and customer education.

Keywords: Sustainable E-Commerce, Consumer Behaviour, Willingness to Pay, Green Products, Green Marketing, Environmental Sustainability, Online Shopping

1. Introduction

E-commerce has become an important part of modern commerce. The expansion of digital platforms, online payment systems, mobile commerce, and home delivery services has made it easier for consumers to purchase products from businesses located in different geographical areas. Although e-commerce provides convenience and market access, its rapid expansion also raises environmental concerns related to packaging waste, transportation, energy consumption, product returns, and electronic waste.

Sustainable e-commerce refers to conducting online commercial activities in a manner that attempts to reduce negative environmental and social impacts while maintaining economic viability. It includes sustainable sourcing, environmentally responsible packaging, energy-efficient operations, responsible delivery systems, product recycling, reverse logistics, and the promotion of environmentally friendly products.

An important issue for businesses is whether consumers are willing to pay more for products that provide environmental benefits. Environmentally responsible products may include organic products, products made from recycled materials, energy-efficient appliances, reusable products, sustainable fashion, biodegradable packaging, and other goods designed to reduce environmental impact.

From a commerce perspective, willingness to pay is particularly significant because sustainability initiatives can increase production, packaging, certification, and distribution costs. Businesses therefore need to understand whether consumers consider environmental benefits sufficiently valuable to accept a higher price.

This study examines the relationship between sustainable e-commerce and consumer willingness to pay for environmentally responsible products.

2. Statement of the Problem

Environmental degradation and increasing consumption have created a need for more sustainable patterns of production and consumption. Although many consumers express concern about environmental issues, their actual purchasing behaviour does not always correspond with their environmental attitudes.

A major challenge faced by e-commerce businesses is the possible price premium associated with sustainable products. Environmentally responsible products may require sustainable raw materials, ethical production, recyclable packaging, environmental certification, and environmentally responsible logistics. These factors can increase the final selling price.

Therefore, the central problem addressed in this study is:

To what extent are consumers willing to pay for environmentally responsible products through e-commerce platforms, and what factors influence their willingness to pay?

2. Review of Literature

The literature on sustainable consumption has expanded significantly with growing environmental concerns and increasing consumer interest in environmentally responsible products. Existing studies have examined green purchase intention, willingness to pay, environmental awareness, perceived value, trust, product quality, and green marketing. The following studies provide a foundation for the present research on “Sustainable E-Commerce and Consumer Willingness to Pay for Environmentally Responsible Products.”

2.1 Sharma (2021) – Green Marketing and Consumer Purchase Behaviour

Sharma reviewed 232 studies on green marketing and consumer purchasing behaviour. The study highlighted the important gap between consumers' positive attitudes towards environmentally friendly products and their actual purchasing behaviour. The review developed a framework for understanding green purchase decisions and suggested that environmental attitudes alone may not be sufficient to result in actual purchases. Factors such as product value, consumer perceptions, social influences, and marketing practices also affect purchasing behaviour.

2.2 Indian Consumers' Willingness to Pay for Green Products (2018)

A study of 515 consumers in New Delhi and the National Capital Region examined the factors influencing Indian consumers' willingness to pay a premium for green products. The findings showed that **attitude towards green products had a significant positive influence on willingness to pay**. Environmental concern and collectivism were also found to contribute to the development of positive attitudes towards green products. The study is particularly relevant to the present research because it demonstrates that Indian consumers can show a willingness to pay more when they perceive environmental value in products.

2.3 Zaidi et al. – Willingness to Pay for Green Products

Zaidi and colleagues examined the factors affecting consumers' willingness to pay for green products using data from 240 respondents. The study found that **environmental concern, functional value, social value, and generativity positively influenced willingness to pay**. The findings indicate that consumers do not purchase green products solely because of environmental considerations; functional and social benefits can also increase their willingness to pay.

2.4 Thakur (2023) – Product Quality, Perceived Value and Trust

Thakur studied 350 Indian consumers and examined the influence of product quality, perceived value, and trust on green product consumption. The results showed that all three factors had a significant influence on green product consumption. The study suggests that businesses cannot depend only on environmental claims; consumers also expect good quality, value for money, and trustworthy information. This finding is highly relevant to e-commerce businesses because consumers often depend on information displayed on online product pages when evaluating environmentally responsible products.

2.5 Green Marketing and Green Perceived Value (2022)

A study published in *Sustainability* examined green perceived value, green trust, green satisfaction, green word-of-mouth, and green purchase intention. The findings indicated that green perceived value positively influenced green trust and green satisfaction, while green satisfaction and green trust were positively associated with green purchase intention. The study demonstrates the importance of creating

genuine value for consumers rather than relying only on promotional claims about environmental responsibility.

2.6 Systematic Review of Green Consumer Behaviour

A systematic literature review examined 37 studies concerning consumer behaviour towards green products. It identified several factors influencing green consumption, including social norms, environmental orientation, company green image, green product characteristics, perceived risks, inconvenience, perceived benefits, institutional trust, demographic characteristics, and consumer confidence. The review emphasizes that green consumer behaviour is influenced by a combination of economic, psychological, social, and product-related factors.

2.7 Sharma et al. – Systematic Review of Green Purchase Behaviour

Sharma and colleagues conducted a systematic literature review covering **151 empirical studies** published between 2000 and 2021. The review identified numerous factors influencing green purchase intention and behaviour and emphasized the importance of understanding these factors for developing effective green marketing strategies. The study also highlights the continuing importance of theories such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour and other behavioural models in explaining green consumption.

2.8 Green Product Attributes and Consumer Behaviour

A systematic review of 82 studies examined environmentally responsible product attributes across different stages of the product lifecycle. The study identified 73 individual green product attributes grouped into 18 categories. It found that different environmental attributes can influence consumer preferences and behaviours, including willingness to pay a premium. This suggests that consumers may respond differently to sustainability features depending on whether they relate to production, product use, or end-of-life disposal.

2.9 Green Labelling, Trust and Willingness to Pay

A 2025 study investigated the relationship between trust in green labelling, green perceived value, and willingness to pay price premiums. Based on 578 respondents, the study found that green perceived value mediated the relationship between consumers' green product experiences and willingness to pay more. Interestingly, trust in green labelling did not directly influence willingness to pay but affected it indirectly through green perceived value. This suggests that simply displaying an environmental label may not be enough; consumers must perceive meaningful environmental value from the product.

2.10 Green Self-Concept and Willingness to Pay More

Tawde (2024) examined how consumers' green self-concept influences willingness to pay more for green products. The research investigated the role of green product virtue and green perceived value as mechanisms connecting consumers' self-concepts with willingness to pay. This indicates that consumers' personal identity and perception of themselves as environmentally responsible consumers can contribute to their willingness to pay a premium.

2.11 Recent Evidence on Green Transparency and Willingness to Pay

A 2026 study of electric vehicle consumers examined green transparency, green perceived value, green brand trust, brand loyalty, and willingness to pay more. The findings showed that green transparency and green perceived value positively influenced green brand trust, which subsequently influenced willingness to pay more. The study reinforces the importance of transparent sustainability communication in building consumer confidence and encouraging premium payment.

2.12 Research Gap

The existing literature establishes that environmental concern, green attitudes, perceived value, product quality, trust, social influences, and product characteristics can affect consumers' green purchasing behaviour and willingness to pay. However, several gaps remain.

First, much of the existing research examines **green products in general**, while comparatively less attention is given specifically to the **e-commerce environment**, where consumers cannot physically inspect products and often depend on digital information, ratings, reviews, certifications, and sustainability claims.

Second, previous studies have examined willingness to pay and green purchase intention separately in many contexts. There is scope to examine how **environmental awareness, perceived value, trust, product quality, price sensitivity, and online shopping behaviour interact to influence willingness to pay**.

Third, there is a need for further research in the **Indian e-commerce context**, particularly considering the rapid growth of online shopping and the increasing availability of environmentally responsible products.

Therefore, the present study attempts to bridge this gap by examining **consumer willingness to pay for environmentally responsible products in the context of sustainable e-commerce**, with particular attention to the factors that influence consumers' willingness to accept a price premium.

3. Objectives of the Study

The major objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the concept and importance of sustainable e-commerce.
2. To understand consumer attitudes towards environmentally responsible products.
3. To examine consumers' willingness to pay a premium for sustainable products.
4. To identify factors influencing consumers' willingness to pay.
5. To study the role of environmental awareness in online purchasing decisions.
6. To examine the importance of trust and transparency in green e-commerce.
7. To identify the challenges faced by businesses in promoting sustainable products.
8. To suggest strategies for e-commerce businesses to encourage sustainable consumption.

4. Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is sustainable e-commerce?
2. Are consumers willing to pay more for environmentally responsible products?
3. Does environmental awareness influence willingness to pay?
4. How does perceived product quality affect sustainable purchasing decisions?
5. Does consumer trust in green claims influence willingness to pay?
6. What role does price sensitivity play in purchasing environmentally responsible products?
7. How can e-commerce businesses encourage consumers to adopt sustainable purchasing practices?

5. Hypotheses of the Study

The following hypotheses may be considered for an empirical study:

H₀₁: Environmental awareness has no significant relationship with consumers' willingness to pay for environmentally responsible products.

H₁₁: Environmental awareness has a significant relationship with consumers' willingness to pay for environmentally responsible products.

H₀₂: Perceived environmental benefits have no significant relationship with consumers' willingness to pay.

H₁₂: Perceived environmental benefits have a significant relationship with consumers' willingness to pay.

H₀₃: Consumer trust in environmental claims has no significant relationship with willingness to pay.

H₁₃: Consumer trust in environmental claims has a significant relationship with willingness to pay.

H₀₄: Price sensitivity has no significant relationship with consumers' willingness to purchase environmentally responsible products.

H₁₄: Price sensitivity has a significant relationship with consumers' willingness to purchase environmentally responsible products.

6. Conceptual Framework

The study considers willingness to pay as the dependent variable. Several consumer and market factors are treated as independent variables.

Independent Variables:

- Environmental awareness
- Perceived environmental benefits
- Perceived product quality
- Consumer trust
- Green product knowledge
- Social influence
- Price sensitivity

Dependent Variable:

- Consumer willingness to pay for environmentally responsible products

The conceptual relationship can be represented as:

Environmental Awareness + Perceived Environmental Benefits + Product Quality + Trust + Green Product Knowledge + Social Influence – Price Sensitivity → Willingness to Pay

This framework suggests that consumers who understand environmental problems and perceive sustainable products as valuable may be more willing to pay a premium. Conversely, strong price sensitivity may reduce willingness to pay.

7. Review of Literature

7.1 Sustainable Consumption

Sustainable consumption involves meeting consumer needs while reducing the negative environmental and social consequences associated with consumption. It encourages consumers to consider the lifecycle of products, including production, transportation, use, and disposal.

Consumers increasingly encounter sustainability-related information while shopping online. E-commerce platforms can therefore play an important role in providing information about product materials, certifications, manufacturing practices, packaging, and environmental impact.

7.2 Sustainable E-Commerce

Sustainable e-commerce extends beyond selling green products online. It includes the environmental performance of the entire e-commerce value chain. Sustainable packaging, optimized delivery routes, consolidated deliveries, renewable energy, efficient warehouses, responsible sourcing, and reverse logistics are important components.

Businesses that incorporate sustainability into their operations can potentially reduce resource consumption while strengthening their brand image and customer relationships.

7.3 Consumer Willingness to Pay

Willingness to pay refers to the maximum amount a consumer is prepared to spend for a product or service. In the context of sustainable products, willingness to pay may depend on whether consumers believe that the environmental benefits justify any additional cost.

A consumer may be willing to pay more for a product if it is perceived to offer superior quality, health benefits, ethical production, durability, or environmental advantages.

7.4 Environmental Awareness

Environmental awareness refers to consumers' knowledge and understanding of environmental problems and sustainable solutions. Consumers with higher environmental awareness may be more likely to seek environmentally responsible products.

However, awareness alone does not necessarily guarantee sustainable purchasing behaviour. Factors such as income, convenience, product availability, trust, and price also influence actual purchasing decisions.

7.5 Green Marketing and Consumer Trust

Green marketing involves communicating the environmental attributes of products and business practices. Accurate and transparent environmental communication can increase consumer confidence.

Conversely, misleading environmental claims or **green washing** can reduce consumer trust. E-commerce businesses therefore need credible evidence to support sustainability claims.

7.6 Price Sensitivity

Price remains one of the most important factors affecting consumer purchasing behaviour. Even environmentally conscious consumers may choose conventional products when sustainable alternatives are substantially more expensive.

Consequently, businesses need to balance sustainability with affordability and communicate the economic and functional benefits of sustainable products.

8. Sustainable E-Commerce Practices

E-commerce businesses can implement sustainability through several practices.

8.1 Sustainable Packaging

Companies can reduce environmental impact by using recyclable, reusable, biodegradable, or appropriately sized packaging. Reducing unnecessary packaging can also decrease transportation volume and costs.

8.2 Sustainable Logistics

Delivery operations can generate environmental impacts through fuel consumption and emissions. Businesses can reduce these impacts through route optimization, delivery consolidation, electric vehicles, and local fulfilment centres.

8.3 Sustainable Product Selection

E-commerce platforms can provide consumers with products made from recycled, renewable, organic, or responsibly sourced materials.

8.4 Reverse Logistics

Product returns are an important feature of online commerce. Efficient return, repair, refurbishment, resale, and recycling systems can reduce waste and improve resource utilization.

8.5 Digital Product Information

Online platforms can provide detailed information about product materials, manufacturing processes, environmental certifications, packaging, and disposal instructions. Such information can support informed consumer decision-making.

9. Factors Influencing Consumer Willingness to Pay

9.1 Environmental Concern-Consumers who are strongly concerned about environmental problems may attach greater value to environmentally responsible products.

9.2 Income Level-Consumers with higher disposable income may have greater capacity to pay a premium for sustainable products. Lower-income consumers may be more price-sensitive even when they have positive environmental attitudes.

9.3 Product Quality-Consumers generally expect sustainable products to provide satisfactory or superior quality. Environmental benefits alone may not be sufficient to justify a higher price.

9.4 Trust-Consumers need to trust environmental claims made by businesses. Certification, transparent product information, traceability, and credible communication can increase trust.

9.5 Convenience-Consumers may prefer sustainable products when they are easily available and convenient to purchase. Complicated purchasing processes can reduce sustainable consumption.

9.6 Social Influence-Family, friends, social media, influencers, and social norms can influence consumers' perceptions of environmentally responsible consumption.

9.7 Price Premium-The size of the price premium is critical. Consumers may accept a small additional cost but reject products when sustainable alternatives are perceived as excessively expensive.

10. Research Methodology

10.1 Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design. It examines existing knowledge concerning sustainable e-commerce, consumer behaviour, and willingness to pay.

10.2 Sources of Data

The study can be conducted using both primary and secondary data.

Primary Data:

Primary data may be collected through a structured questionnaire distributed among online consumers.

Secondary Data:

Secondary information may be collected from academic journals, books, research reports, government publications, industry reports, and reliable institutional websites.

10.3 Population of the Study

The population may consist of consumers who purchase products through e-commerce platforms.

10.4 Sampling Method

For a student-level empirical study, convenience sampling or purposive sampling may be used, depending on the research requirements.

10.5 Sample Size

A sample of **100–300 respondents** may be selected for an undergraduate or postgraduate commerce project, subject to the institution's requirements.

10.6 Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire may contain:

- Demographic questions
- Online shopping behaviour
- Environmental awareness questions
- Attitudes towards green products
- Trust in environmental claims
- Willingness-to-pay questions
- Price sensitivity questions

Responses can be measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from **Strongly Disagree (1)** to **Strongly Agree (5)**.

10.7 Data Analysis

The collected data may be analysed using:

- Percentage analysis
- Mean and standard deviation
- Cross-tabulation
- Correlation analysis
- Regression analysis
- Chi-square test
- Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha

The appropriate statistical tests should be selected according to the final research design and sample characteristics.

11. Expected Findings and Discussion

Based on existing research on sustainable consumption, several expected relationships can be proposed.

First, environmental awareness is expected to have a positive relationship with willingness to pay. Consumers who recognize the importance of reducing pollution, waste, and resource depletion may be more likely to support environmentally responsible products.

Second, perceived product quality is expected to influence willingness to pay. Consumers are unlikely to accept a higher price solely because a product is marketed as environmentally friendly. They generally expect sustainability to be accompanied by satisfactory quality and performance.

Third, consumer trust is expected to be important. When consumers believe that environmental claims are credible, they may be more willing to pay a premium. Businesses that make vague or exaggerated claims may experience reduced consumer confidence.

Fourth, price sensitivity may negatively influence willingness to pay. Consumers may support sustainability in principle but choose less expensive alternatives when the price difference is significant.

Finally, e-commerce businesses that combine environmental responsibility with convenience, competitive pricing, product quality, and transparent information may have greater potential to convert positive consumer attitudes into actual purchases.

12. Managerial Implications

The findings have several implications for commerce and business management.

12.1 Develop Transparent Green Marketing

Businesses should provide clear and verifiable information about environmental claims. Instead of using general terms such as "eco-friendly" without evidence, businesses should explain specific environmental attributes.

12.2 Maintain Product Quality

Sustainable products should meet customer expectations regarding durability, functionality, appearance, and performance.

12.3 Reduce the Sustainability Price Gap

Businesses should explore efficient sourcing, economies of scale, local production, and sustainable technologies to reduce the additional cost of environmentally responsible products.

12.4 Improve Sustainable Packaging

Reducing packaging materials and using recyclable or reusable alternatives can improve environmental performance and strengthen brand reputation.

12.5 Educate Consumers

E-commerce websites can provide product-level sustainability information, recycling instructions, environmental certifications, and explanations of how purchasing decisions affect the environment.

12.6 Build Consumer Trust

Trust can be developed through independent certification, transparent supply chains, accurate labelling, customer reviews, and consistent sustainability practices.

12.7 Use Sustainability as a Competitive Advantage

A credible sustainability strategy can differentiate an e-commerce business from competitors and potentially strengthen customer loyalty.

13. Challenges in Sustainable E-Commerce

Despite its potential, sustainable e-commerce faces several challenges.

1. **Higher costs:** Sustainable materials and processes can increase operating costs.
2. **Green washing:** False or exaggerated environmental claims can damage consumer trust.
3. **Packaging waste:** Excessive packaging remains an important concern.
4. **Delivery emissions:** Individual deliveries and urgent shipping can increase environmental impact.
5. **Product returns:** High return rates can increase transportation and packaging impacts.
6. **Consumer price sensitivity:** Many consumers remain highly sensitive to price.
7. **Lack of consumer knowledge:** Consumers may find it difficult to assess environmental claims.
8. **Supply-chain complexity:** Monitoring sustainability across suppliers can be difficult.
9. **Limited availability:** Sustainable alternatives may not be available in every product category.
10. **Measurement difficulties:** Businesses may find it difficult to accurately measure the environmental impact of individual products and deliveries.

14. Suggestions

Based on the study, the following suggestions are proposed:

1. E-commerce companies should make environmental information easily accessible on product pages.
2. Businesses should use credible environmental certifications wherever appropriate.
3. Companies should avoid misleading environmental claims.
4. Sustainable products should be offered at competitive prices whenever possible.
5. E-commerce platforms should reduce unnecessary packaging.
6. Businesses should encourage consolidated and environmentally responsible delivery options.
7. Companies should develop effective recycling, repair, refurbishment, and return systems.
8. Consumers should be educated about the environmental benefits and limitations of sustainable products.
9. Businesses should integrate sustainability into their overall business strategy rather than treating it only as a marketing activity.
10. Future e-commerce policies and practices should consider environmental performance across the entire product lifecycle.

15. Limitations of the Study

The study has certain limitations:

- Consumer preferences may vary according to age, income, education, location, and lifestyle.
- Self-reported willingness to pay may not always reflect actual purchasing behaviour.
- Environmental attitudes can change over time.
- The availability and pricing of sustainable products differ across markets.
- Secondary research may not fully capture local consumer behaviour.
- If convenience sampling is used, the findings may not be generalizable to the entire consumer population.

16. Scope for Further Research

Future research can examine actual purchasing behaviour rather than stated willingness to pay. Researchers can also compare different generations, income groups, geographical regions, and product categories.

Further studies could investigate willingness to pay for sustainable fashion, organic food, electric appliances, eco-friendly cosmetics, reusable household products, and sustainable packaging separately. Researchers may also examine how artificial intelligence, personalized recommendations, sustainability labels, social media marketing, and digital product passports influence consumers' sustainable purchasing decisions.

17. Conclusion

Sustainable e-commerce represents an important intersection between environmental responsibility and modern commerce. The growth of online shopping creates both environmental challenges and opportunities for businesses to promote sustainable consumption.

Consumer willingness to pay is a critical factor in determining whether environmentally responsible products can achieve commercial success. Environmental awareness, perceived benefits, product quality, consumer trust, convenience, social influence, and price sensitivity can all influence purchasing decisions. Consumers may be willing to pay a premium for environmentally responsible products when they believe that the environmental benefits are genuine and that the products provide adequate quality and value. However, environmental concern alone may not overcome substantial price differences or a lack of trust. For e-commerce businesses, sustainability should therefore be integrated into product development, pricing, logistics, packaging, marketing, and customer relationship strategies. Businesses that combine genuine environmental responsibility with affordability, quality, convenience, and transparency are better positioned to encourage sustainable consumer behaviour.

Ultimately, sustainable e-commerce is not only an environmental issue but also an important commerce and business strategy. Understanding consumers' willingness to pay can help businesses design appropriate products, pricing strategies, marketing approaches, and sustainable value propositions while contributing to long-term environmental objectives.

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