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Exploring The Role of Environmental Awareness in Shaping Consumer Behaviour Towards Sustainable Practices

Noorain Mohd Nordin^{1*}, Wei Loon Koe², Siti Daleela Mohd Wahid³ and Restu Fahdiansyah⁴

^{1,2,3}Faculty of Business & Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Melaka Kampus Bandaraya Melaka, Malaysia.

³Graduate School of Business, University Kebangsaan Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia

⁴Faculty of Islamic Economics & Business, Universitas Islam Negeri Mantaram, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Environmental awareness plays a pivotal role in influencing consumer behaviour towards sustainable practices, making it a critical area of study in sustainability research. This paper presents a structured narrative review to consolidate existing knowledge and build a theoretical foundation for understanding how environmental awareness shapes sustainable consumption. Using a qualitative conceptual approach, the review synthesises evidence from high-quality secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, institutional reports, and global sustainability frameworks. Guided by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), the analysis focuses on the interaction between environmental awareness and the core TPB components, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control in shaping behavioural intentions. The review employs thematic analysis and narrative synthesis to map relational pathways among these constructs and identify theoretical gaps for future research. By consolidating current knowledge, the paper contributes to academic discourse on sustainable consumer behaviour. It provides insights for guiding empirical investigations, policy formulation, and strategic marketing initiatives aligned with global sustainability goals.

^{1*} Corresponding author. E-mail address: noorainnordin@uitm.edu.my

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Environmental awareness has undergone a significant transformation over the past few decades, marked by increasing public concern for sustainability and the consequent implications for consumer behaviour. Historically, the push for environmental awareness originated from global movements addressing climate change, pollution, and resource depletion. Through educational campaigns and policy initiatives, individuals have become more conscious of the environmental implications of their actions, particularly in how they consume products and services. Recent studies indicate that heightened awareness serves as a catalyst for shifts in consumer behaviour towards more sustainable practices Schneller & Baum (2011). For instance, Schneller & Baum (2011) underscore that the growing concern for sustainability plays an essential role in shaping green purchasing decisions, where consumers increasingly prioritise environmentally friendly products over traditional alternatives.

1.1 Scope of Review

This review is to examine the impact of environmental awareness on consumer behaviour on sustainable practices, emphasising the identification of primary drivers, theoretical frameworks, and practical implications. The study integrates data from empirical and conceptual investigations, highlighting the influence of personal values, social norms, and marketing methods on sustainable consumption patterns.

The literature reviewed spans the period from 2014 to 2024, drawing from peer-reviewed journals indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Relevant keywords used to guide the search included: environmental awareness, consumer behaviour, sustainable consumption, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Priority was given to studies providing robust theoretical insights or empirical evidence related to the interaction between environmental consciousness and consumer decision-making.

This review concentrates on literature from diverse sectors, including ecotourism, automotive, energy, and consumer goods, offering a broad understanding of how environmental awareness translates into behaviour across industries. It also highlights emerging trends among demographic groups, particularly the influence of younger generations and regional variations. This paper enhances the discussion on sustainability by recognising common themes and gaps in the literature, while providing guidance for future research, especially for longitudinal studies and cross-cultural assessments.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview of Environmental Awareness

Environmental awareness refers to an individual's understanding of environmental issues and the recognition of the interconnectedness between human actions and the natural ecosystem (Khalili & Ismail, 2024; Wang et al., 2018). It involves consciousness about critical environmental challenges such as climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion, and emphasises the necessity of adopting sustainable practices to mitigate adverse ecological impacts (Freeman & Chen, 2015). Environmental awareness plays a fundamental role in fostering sustainable behaviours by encouraging individuals and communities to evaluate their environmental footprint and motivating shifts towards eco-friendly lifestyles.

In the context of sustainability, environmental awareness acts as a precursor to behavioural change, influencing consumption patterns and lifestyle choices (Linder et al., 2022). Consumers showing higher environmental awareness are more likely to choose products and services that align with sustainable values, therefore enhancing their pro-environmental purchasing intentions. (Kaiser et al., 2024). Empirical studies support this link, indicating that increased awareness positively correlates with responsible consumption practices (Kaiser et al., 2024).

Global perspectives highlight significant regional variations in environmental awareness. For example, Scandinavian countries report the highest levels of public engagement in sustainability initiatives, driven by widespread environmental education and government policies (Martínez et al., 2019). However, most developing countries show decreased awareness of environmental issues, which could reduce their willingness to invest in sustainable products and restrict engagement in sustainability initiatives. (Tavitiyaman et al., 2024).

Moreover, generational shifts are evident in environmental consciousness. A survey conducted in 2020 found that over 70% of individuals across various age groups acknowledged the climate crisis and expressed readiness to modify their consumption habits to reduce environmental impact (Galati et al., 2023). Notably, millennials and Generation Z show heightened environmental awareness and are more likely to engage in sustainability initiatives compared to older generations (Gomes et al., 2023). This trend underlines the growing relevance of environmental education and advocacy in shaping future consumer behaviour towards sustainability.

2.2 Consumer Behaviour and Sustainability

Consumer behaviour plays a pivotal role in advancing sustainable development, as individual purchasing decisions collectively impact environmental outcomes. Sustainability in consumer behaviour refers to the tendency of individuals to consider environmental, social, and ethical implications when making consumption choices (Peattie & Peattie, 2009). As environmental concerns gain prominence, consumers are increasingly motivated by values that promote long-term ecological balance over short-term convenience or cost (White et al., 2019).

Many factors affect sustainable consumer behaviour, such as individual beliefs, environmental views, social conventions, and perceived behavioural control (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006). Environmental awareness is a primary catalyst, as it cultivates a sense of responsibility and educates customers regarding the effects of their decisions (Gleim et al., 2013). Research indicates that consumers with higher environmental awareness tend to purchase eco-friendly products, engage in recycling, and reduce waste (Joshi & Rahman, 2015). Moreover, the integration of business principles with sustainability reinforces brand loyalty among conscious consumers (Nguyen et al., 2023).

Despite growing awareness, a gap often exists between consumers' intentions and actual behaviour, known as the attitude-behaviour gap (Johnstone & Tan, 2015). Barriers such as limited availability of sustainable products, higher prices, lack of trust in green claims, and insufficient knowledge can impede sustainable choices (Gupta & Ogden, 2009). Addressing these barriers requires both improved consumer education and systemic changes in market structures.

Understanding consumer behaviour is crucial for businesses striving to comply with goals for sustainability. Research shows several consumers are prepared to pay higher prices for environmentally sustainable products, connecting them to enhanced quality and social responsibility (Zhou et al., 2024; Mahmoodi et al., 2021). This willingness highlights the influence of consumer expectations on corporate strategies, pushing companies to adopt greener production processes and transparent sustainability practices.

The influence of younger generations, particularly Generation Z, is particularly noteworthy in this context. Studies show that younger consumers exhibit heightened environmental consciousness and are more likely to support brands that establish a genuine commitment to sustainability (Gomes et al., 2023). Their preferences are reshaping market dynamics, compelling companies to innovate and integrate sustainability into their value propositions. Consumer behaviour is a powerful driver of sustainability. It not only affects market trends and business practices but also plays a central role in societal efforts to address environmental challenges. By aligning consumption with sustainable values, consumers contribute to a broader cultural shift towards ecological responsibility and corporate sustainability.

2.3 Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

Understanding the dynamics between environmental awareness and consumer behaviour requires the application of robust theoretical models. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), introduced by Ajzen in 1991, is one of the most often utilised frameworks in this field of study. The Theory of Planned Behaviour states that an individual's intention to engage in a behaviour is influenced by three fundamental factors: attitudes regarding the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Gupta & Shankar, 2022). In the realm of sustainability, these components collectively influence a consumer's decision-making process regarding eco-friendly practices and purchases.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) is frequently employed to understand how awareness translates into sustainable consumption. According to this theory, consumer intentions are shaped by attitudes towards behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived control. Environmental awareness strengthens positive attitudes towards sustainable products and aligns social pressures with pro-environmental actions, thereby increasing the likelihood of sustainable consumption (Paul et al., 2016). Additionally, ethical consumerism is a subset of sustainable behaviour that emphasises fairness, labour rights, and environmental integrity, further influencing purchasing decisions (Shaw & Shiu, 2003).

Environmental awareness directly contributes to the formation of positive attitudes towards sustainable consumption. As individuals gain awareness of environmental challenges such as climate change, pollution, and resource depletion, consumers are likely to develop positive attitudes towards products and behaviours that reduce ecological damage (Ahmed et al., 2020). This heightened awareness not only fosters stronger personal norms in favour of sustainability but also aligns with increasing social expectations, as subjective norms evolve to prioritise environmental responsibility (Lucrezi & Cilliers, 2024).

Moreover, perceived behavioural control is the belief in one's ability to engage in sustainable practice. It is enhanced when consumers are provided with accessible and comprehensible information about eco-friendly options. The TPB framework thus highlights the importance of empowering consumers through education and the availability of sustainable choices.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative conceptual approach employing a structured narrative review to examine the role of environmental awareness in shaping consumer behaviour towards sustainable practices. The research design is exploratory and theory-building, grounded in literature synthesis rather than empirical observation. This approach is consistent with Jabareen (2009), who asserts that conceptual methodologies are suitable for analysing complex social phenomena and constructing theoretical models within contextual realities.

3.2 Analytical Approach

The review applies thematic analysis and narrative synthesis as its primary analytical methods, guided by systematic concept mapping and relational pattern identification. Data were collected exclusively from high-quality secondary sources, including peer-reviewed articles indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, institutional reports, and global sustainability frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The selection process followed the guidelines of Webster and Watson (2002), who advocate structured reviews for building comprehensive theoretical foundations, and reflects the recommendations of Miles and Huberman (1994) for mapping relationships among constructs in qualitative studies.

3.3 Data Collection and Inclusion Criteria

The literature search utilised Boolean operators with keywords such as “environmental awareness,” “consumer behaviour,” “sustainable practices,” and “Theory of Planned Behaviour.” Inclusion criteria required studies to be published between 2014 and 2025, written in English, and directly related to environmental awareness and consumer decision-making. Excluded were non-peer-reviewed sources, conference abstracts, and studies unrelated to sustainability behaviour. This selection process ensured rigor and relevance in addressing the research objectives.

3.4 Theoretical Integration

The conceptual framework developed is underpinned by the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), which explains behavioural intentions through attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Environmental awareness is positioned as an antecedent influencing these constructs, thereby shaping sustainable consumption patterns. This integration aligns with the recommendation by Jaccard and Jacoby (2020) that conceptual research should extend existing theories by proposing new relational pathways for future empirical validation.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

This study does not involve primary data collection or human participants. Nevertheless, it upholds research ethics principles by adhering to academic integrity standards and ensuring the inclusion of credible, verifiable sources. This approach enhances transparency and reliability in the development of the conceptual framework.

4.0 KEY THEMES AND INSIGHTS

4.1 Role of Environmental Awareness in Shaping Consumer Intentions

Environmental awareness is crucial in influencing consumer intentions and promoting pro-environmental behaviour. Nguyen et al. (2023) state that consumers with more knowledge of the environmental impact of their behaviours are more likely to prefer products that are environmentally friendly and support businesses that represent sustainable beliefs. This awareness is often cultivated through exposure to environmental education, media coverage, and public discourse on ecological issues. Empirical evidence from various sectors supports this relationship. For instance, in the fashion and beauty industries, increasing consumer awareness has compelled brands to expand their sustainable product lines, leveraging green marketing and eco-labelling to appeal to environmentally conscious buyers (Lili & Rafiq, 2025). Case studies show that publicised environmental events, such as oil spills or plastic pollution crises, can catalyse rapid shifts in consumer behaviour, leading to heightened demand for sustainable alternatives and corporate accountability (Yousaf et al., 2021).

Environmental awareness also has a profound influence on consumer behaviour, fostering shifts towards more sustainable decision-making across diverse sectors. Chiu, Lee, and Chen (2014) illustrate this dynamic within the ecotourism industry, showing how consumers who value sustainability are more likely to choose environmentally responsible travel options. Their study highlights how environmental values and perceptions are critical in shaping behaviour, with heightened awareness translating into more deliberate, eco-conscious actions.

This pattern extends beyond tourism. Zhang & Zhou (2020) demonstrate that increased awareness of environmental consequences influences consumers to opt for electric vehicles over traditional automobiles, underscoring how awareness drives substantial behavioural change in transportation choices. Similarly, environmentally aware consumers make more sustainable choices in energy usage and food consumption, reflecting the broader relevance of awareness across industries. Promoting environmental knowledge as

part of marketing strategies is, therefore, a crucial step towards aligning consumer behaviour with sustainability objectives.

Furthermore, research indicates that socio-demographic factors, including age, education, and income, moderate the impact of environmental awareness on purchasing behaviour (Gupta & Shankar, 2022). Younger generations, particularly Generation Z, exhibit stronger pro-environmental intentions, often driven by a combination of awareness and social influence (Gomes et al., 2023). Businesses seeking to influence consumer behaviour towards sustainability must therefore integrate educational strategies into their marketing efforts. By aligning product offerings with consumers' environmental values and increasing transparency about sustainability practices, companies can enhance consumer trust and loyalty (Zafeiroudi, 2020; Kaiser et al., 2019).

A strong association exists between environmental awareness and participation in sustainable behaviours. As awareness rises, consumers are more inclined to seek and adopt green products, leading to shifts in market demand (Zhang & Rafiq, 2024). Businesses that foster an eco-conscious culture by integrating environmental themes into their marketing strategies are more likely to attract and retain sustainability-oriented customers. Zhang and Rafiq's findings suggest that investments in consumer education can yield significant returns by increasing demand for sustainable products and services.

4.2 Factors Influencing Consumer Behaviour Towards Sustainability

4.2.1 Personal Values and Social Trust

Personal values significantly shape the relationship between environmental awareness and consumer purchasing decisions. Gupta and Shankar (2022) found that social trust and perceived benefits influence the adoption of sustainable technologies, revealing that when consumers trust that companies are genuinely committed to sustainability, their likelihood of engaging in eco-friendly behaviour increases.

4.2.2 Social Norms

Social norms also play a critical role in promoting sustainability. In cultural contexts where environmental responsibility is a shared value, individuals are more likely to conform to pro-sustainability behaviours (Dropulić & Krupka, 2020). These findings emphasise the need for businesses and policymakers to consider societal values when designing strategies to promote green consumption.

4.2.3 Marketing Strategies

Businesses are increasingly leveraging environmental awareness in their marketing strategies to attract eco-conscious consumers. Khan et al. (2020) highlight the effectiveness of advertisements that emphasise environmental benefits suggests that targeted messaging can significantly influence sustainable purchasing decisions. Strategies for marketing that highlight eco-friendly products, ethical sourcing, or reduced carbon footprints appeal to consumers demanding consistency between their values and purchasing behaviours. This approach not only drives sales but also contributes to broader environmental goals.

4.2.4 Psychological Aspects

Attitudes are central to predicting sustainable behaviour. Lavuri et al. (2023) emphasise that positive attitudes, reinforced by green advertising, encourage consumers to engage in pro-environmental behaviours. Understanding these psychological drivers allows marketers to craft compelling narratives that not only inform but also motivate consumers towards sustainability.

4.2.5 Socio-Demographic Variables

Socio-demographic factors, including age, gender, income, and educational level, significantly affect environmental awareness and green purchasing behaviour. Dropulić and Krupka (2020) demonstrate how cultural differences shape green purchase intentions, suggesting that younger, more educated consumers typically exhibit stronger environmental concerns. Recognising these patterns enables companies to tailor their marketing efforts to specific demographic segments, enhancing the effectiveness of sustainability campaigns.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETING AND POLICY

5.1 Business Strategies

A deep understanding of environmental awareness allows businesses to develop more effective marketing and operational strategies. Sinha and Rao (2023) argue that addressing operational barriers and integrating consumer feedback into sustainable product design enhances brand loyalty and market competitiveness. By aligning products and services with the expectations of environmentally aware consumers, businesses can gain a strategic advantage in the growing green economy.

5.2 Policy Recommendations

At the policy level, fostering environmental awareness has significant implications for promoting sustainable consumption. Varga et al. (2024) highlight the role of public policy in supporting environmental initiatives, emphasising the importance of incentives for sustainable business practices and public education campaigns. Government-led awareness programmes can encourage behavioural shifts and support the development of a sustainable consumer base.

6.0 FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Even though extensive research supports the relationship between environmental awareness and consumer behaviour, notable gaps remain that warrant further exploration. One significant limitation in the current literature is the lack of longitudinal studies that examine how environmental awareness evolves over time and influences purchasing decisions in the long term (Zhou et al, 2024). Additionally, there is a limited understanding of how demographic variables such as age, gender, income, and education interact with environmental consciousness to shape sustainable behaviour. Existing studies often generalise findings, overlooking the contextual nuances of different regions, cultures, and socio-economic groups.

To advance in the field, future research should adopt longitudinal designs to capture the dynamic nature of consumer awareness and its behavioural implications over time. Investigating regional and cultural differences could provide more granular insights into how environmental values manifest in diverse consumer markets. Moreover, examining emerging global challenges, such as climate-induced economic shifts or technological advancements in green products, may reveal new factors influencing sustainable consumption. Addressing these gaps will not only deepen theoretical understanding but also guide businesses and policymakers in crafting more targeted and effective sustainability strategies.

7.0 CONCLUSION

This review emphasises the crucial impact of environmental awareness on consumer behaviour regarding sustainable activities. The synthesis of current studies indicates that when consumers gain awareness of environmental problems, they are increasingly inclined to adopt eco-friendly purchasing behaviours. This trend signifies an opportunity for businesses to align their marketing strategies with environmentally conscious values, leveraging consumer awareness to drive brand loyalty and market success.

Furthermore, the findings underscore the need for collaborative efforts between businesses and policymakers to create an ecosystem that supports sustainable choices. Governments can enhance this shift by implementing incentive-driven policies and public awareness campaigns, while businesses must ensure transparency and authenticity in their sustainability initiatives.

Despite the strong correlation between awareness and behaviour, gaps in the literature, particularly regarding regional variations and demographic influences, suggest avenues for future research. By addressing these areas through longitudinal and cross-cultural studies, scholars can provide a more comprehensive understanding of sustainable consumer behaviour. Ultimately, such insights will support the development of practical applications and enhance the theoretical foundations linking environmental awareness to consumer decision-making in the pursuit of global sustainability goals.

8.0 CONTRIBUTION OF AUTHORS

Noorain carried out the conceptualisation of the central research idea, conducted a literature search, organised relevant studies, and wrote the initial draft of the paper. Wei-Loon Koe provided the theoretical framework, guided the structure of the review. Siti Daleela assisted in refining the review methodology, contributed to the organisation and edited the final draft. Restu Fahdiansyah contributed to the literature collection and supported the revision process.

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10.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that this research was completed without any personal benefits, commercial or financial conflicts, and declare no conflicting interests with the funders.

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About the Authors

Noorain Mohd Nordin is a lecturer at the Faculty of Business and Management in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Cawangan Melaka. Her main research activities are social innovation & entrepreneurship, marketing and management. She can be contacted via email at noorainnordin@uitm.edu.my

Wei-Loon Koe holds a PhD degree in entrepreneurship. He is an associate professor at the Faculty of Business and Management in Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Cawangan Melaka. He can be contacted at koewei516@uitm.edu.my

Siti Daleela Mohd Wahid is a postdoctoral researcher at the Graduate School of Business, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. She is also a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Melaka. Her main research interests include digitalisation, entrepreneurship, social innovation & entrepreneurship, and marketing. She can be contacted via email at sitid365@uitm.edu.my.

Restu Fahdiansyah is a lecturer at the Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business, Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram. His main research activities are in accounting and financial management. He can be contacted via email at restu.fahdiansyah@uinmataram.ac.id



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