

“FROM CONVENIENCE TO CONSCIOUS CONSUMPTION: CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR AND SUSTAINABILITY IN THE DIGITAL ERA”

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Abstract

Digital technologies have transformed the way consumers discover, assess and buy products, moving from impulse to values-based buying. This paper looks at the changing dynamics of consumer behaviour and sustainability in the digital age and how new technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, big data analytics, IoT and cloud computing are helping to increase transparency, traceability and accountability throughout the consumption journey. The study draws on the existing literature and conceptual frameworks to examine the impact of digital platforms on consumer awareness of environmental and social impact, and the extent to which this awareness is translated (or not translated) into sustainable purchasing decisions. The paper highlights the main drivers and barriers to this transition, such as green labelling, tracking carbon footprints digitally, algorithmic recommendations, and the influence of social media on creating eco-conscious identities. The paper concludes with practical suggestions for businesses, policy makers and technology developers to develop digital ecosystems that enable consumers to make conscious and sustainable choices, instead of convenience choices, towards a greener future.

Keywords: Digital Consumer Behaviour; Sustainable Consumption; Digital Technologies; Conscious Consumerism

Introduction

The rapid growth of digital technologies has significantly transformed consumer behaviour, making product discovery, comparison, purchase and payment faster and more convenient. At the same time, growing environmental and social concerns are encouraging consumers to make more responsible and conscious choices. Technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Big Data, Blockchain and the Internet of Things can provide consumers with information about product origins, sustainability credentials and carbon footprints. However, digital convenience may also encourage impulsive and excessive consumption. This study therefore explores the transition from convenience-driven consumption to conscious and sustainable consumption in the digital era.

Objectives

1. To examine the awareness and purchasing behaviour of consumers towards sustainable and eco-friendly products.

2. To analyse the role of digital technologies and social media in influencing consumers' sustainable consumption choices.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive research design using both primary and secondary data. Primary data will be collected from consumers through a structured questionnaire to examine their digital consumption behaviour, environmental awareness, influence of digital technologies, and sustainable purchasing practices. The questionnaire will use mainly Likert-scale statements along with demographic questions. The collected data will be analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation to understand consumer perceptions and behaviour.

Secondary data will be collected from research articles, academic journals, books, industry reports and credible online sources related to digital consumer behaviour, sustainability and technology-enabled consumption. The findings from both primary and secondary data will be integrated to understand the transition from convenience-oriented consumption to conscious and sustainable consumption in the digital era.

Review of Literature

The rapid growth of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed consumer behaviour. E-commerce, social media, mobile applications, digital payment systems, online reviews, artificial intelligence and personalised marketing have made consumption more convenient, faster and more information-driven. At the same time, these technologies have created opportunities to encourage environmentally and socially responsible consumption. Recent literature therefore increasingly examines whether digitalisation can move consumers from convenience-oriented consumption towards conscious and sustainable consumption.

1. Sustainable Consumption and Consumer Behaviour

Sustainable consumption refers to consumption patterns that satisfy consumers' needs while reducing environmental impacts and conserving resources for future generations. Consumer behaviour research has traditionally examined factors such as attitudes, values, social norms, perceived benefits and perceived behavioural control in explaining sustainable purchasing decisions.

A systematic review by Decoding sustainable consumption behavior (2024) found that the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is the most frequently used theoretical framework for explaining sustainable consumption. The review also highlighted the importance of internal motivations such as environmental concern and personal values, along with external factors such as social norms

and policy interventions. Importantly, the literature continues to identify an attitude–behaviour gap, where consumers may express positive attitudes towards sustainability but do not consistently translate these attitudes into actual purchasing behaviour.

This suggests that understanding sustainable consumer behaviour requires moving beyond consumers' environmental attitudes and examining the situational and technological factors that influence actual decisions.

2. Digitalisation and the Transformation of Consumption

Digitalisation has significantly altered how consumers search for information, evaluate alternatives and purchase products. Lehner, Richter and Mont (2023) argue that digitalisation can influence consumption through three broad developments: the growth of e-commerce, participatory consumption and increasingly virtual consumption experiences. Digital technologies can reduce transaction costs, facilitate sharing and repairing, empower consumers and support new sustainable business models. However, digitalisation can also accelerate consumption by making products easier to discover, compare and purchase.

Thus, digitalisation has a dual impact on sustainability. On one side, it can facilitate sustainable choices by providing information, enabling product comparison, supporting second-hand markets and promoting sharing and circular-economy models. On the other side, digital convenience, personalized recommendations and frictionless purchasing can encourage excessive consumption.

3. Social Media and Green Purchase Intention

Social media has become an important influence on consumer decision-making. Nekmahmud et al. (2022) investigated the role of social media and social media marketing in green purchase intentions. Their study of 785 respondents found that attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, green thinking and social media marketing were positively associated with consumers' intention to purchase green products. The study demonstrates that social media can extend traditional behavioural models by creating new channels through which consumers receive sustainability information and social influence.

Similarly, a study published in *Young Consumers* in 2024 examined the effect of social media on green purchase intention among 310 young consumers. It found that social media, green consumption values and environmental responsibility significantly influenced green purchase intention. Interestingly, green product knowledge did not significantly influence purchase intention in the study, indicating that simply providing information may not be sufficient to create sustainable behaviour.

4. Digital Marketing and Sustainable Consumption

Digital marketing has created new opportunities for organisations to communicate sustainability-related messages. Consumers are increasingly exposed to sustainability claims through social media advertising, influencer marketing, online reviews, eco-labels, personalised recommendations and brand websites.

A recent systematic literature review of digital marketing and sustainable consumption identified digital marketing, sustainability communication, consumer behaviour and sustainable purchase decisions as interconnected research areas. The review also indicates growing academic attention to how digital content, personalisation and online engagement can influence consumers' sustainability-related decisions.

However, the effectiveness of digital sustainability communication depends heavily on consumer trust. Luo and Sun (2020) examined green advertising skepticism on social media and showed that consumers' responses to green advertising are affected by their perceptions of the credibility of sustainability claims. This is particularly important because consumers may become sceptical when companies engage in exaggerated or misleading green claims.

5. Consumer Empowerment Through Digital Platforms

Digital platforms have changed consumers from passive recipients of marketing communication into active participants in the marketplace. Consumers can compare prices, read reviews, share experiences, evaluate sustainability claims and communicate directly with brands.

The literature suggests that this empowerment can support sustainable consumption by improving access to information and facilitating responsible choices. Digital platforms can also support sharing economies, second-hand markets, product repair and circular consumption. However, platform-based consumption may simultaneously encourage higher consumption frequency and convenience-driven purchasing. Research on digitalisation and sustainability therefore emphasises the need to examine both its positive and negative consequences.

6. Smart Technologies and Sustainable Consumer Behaviour

Emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), big data analytics and smart applications are increasingly being incorporated into consumer decision-making. These technologies can provide personalised sustainability information, track consumption patterns, recommend environmentally preferable products and improve resource efficiency.

A 2025 review by Sharma and Garg examined the relationship between smart technologies, sustainability and consumer behaviour and highlighted the growing importance of technological interventions in shaping sustainable consumption.

Similarly, recent research on the digital economy identifies big-data analytics, consumer empowerment, value co-creation, circular economy practices and sustainable consumption as important areas where digital technologies can contribute to sustainability.

7. The Convenience–Consciousness Paradox

An important theme emerging from the literature is the convenience–sustainability paradox. Digital platforms make consumption extremely convenient through one-click purchasing, home delivery, personalised recommendations and instant payment. These features can improve consumer experience but may also encourage impulsive and frequent consumption.

Therefore, the same digital ecosystem can produce two contrasting consumer behaviours:

Digital convenience → easier purchasing → increased consumption

versus

Digital information → greater awareness → conscious consumption

Lehner et al. (2023) emphasise precisely this tension, arguing that digitalisation can become either a tool for sustainable consumption or an accelerator of consumption depending on how technologies, markets and policies are designed.

8. Emerging Research Gap

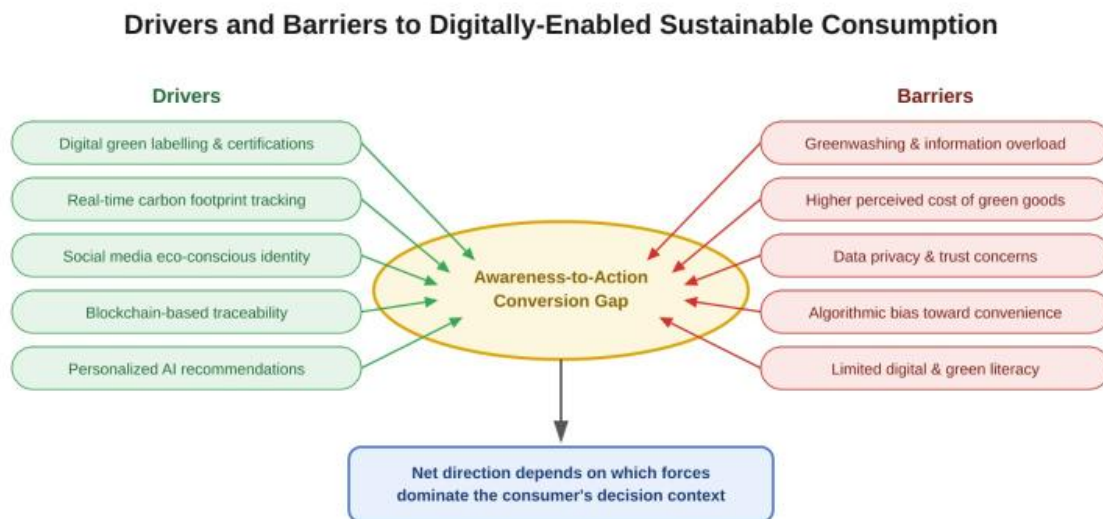
Recent systematic reviews demonstrate that research at the intersection of digitalisation, consumer behaviour and sustainability is still developing. A 2026 systematic literature review analysing 151 papers found that much of the existing research has focused on firms and specific technologies rather than taking a comprehensive consumer perspective. The review also identified limited research on how digital platforms influence consumer behaviour towards sustainability and noted geographical concentration of studies in Europe, the United States and the United Kingdom.

A 2026 systematic review of green consumer behaviour in digital environments similarly identified gaps in cross-cultural research, geographical diversity, theoretical integration and under-researched industries.

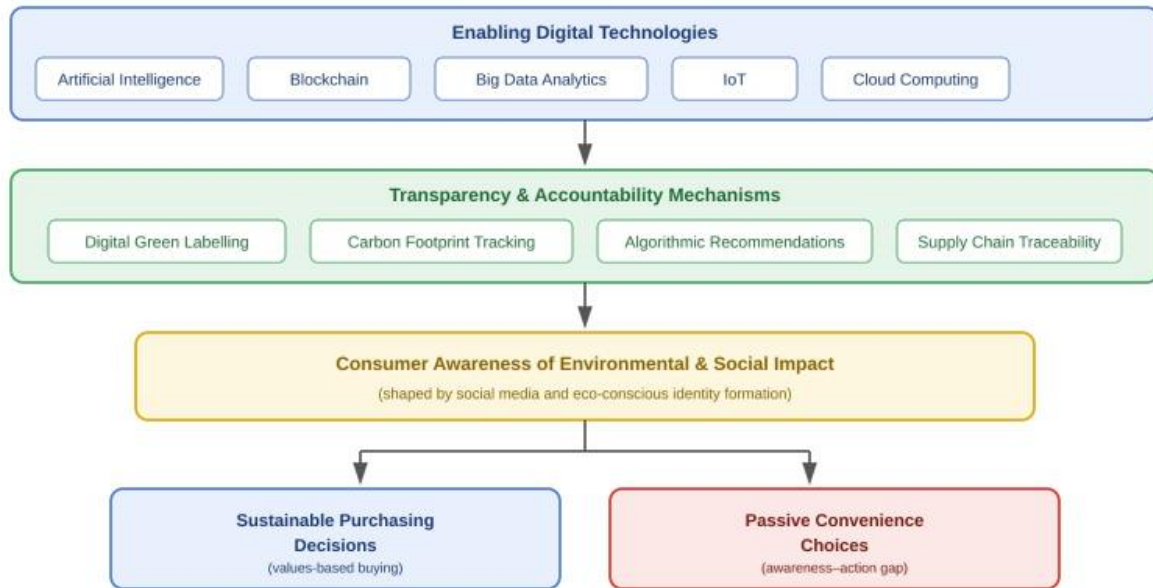
Therefore, there is scope to examine how consumers in emerging economies such as India move from digital convenience to conscious consumption, and whether factors such as social media engagement, environmental awareness, green trust, digital literacy, social influence and perceived convenience influence this transition.

Based on the literature, the following gaps can be identified:

1. Attitude-behaviour gap: Consumers may demonstrate positive attitudes towards sustainability without consistently engaging in sustainable purchasing.
2. Convenience versus consciousness: Existing research has not sufficiently examined whether digital convenience encourages overconsumption or facilitates conscious consumption.
3. Consumer-centric digitalisation research: Much of the literature examines digitalisation from the organisational or technological perspective, with comparatively less emphasis on the consumer's decision-making process.
4. Social media influence: Although social media has been shown to influence green purchase intentions, further research is needed to understand whether this influence results in actual sustainable consumption behaviour.
5. Trust and greenwashing: Digital sustainability communication can be weakened by advertising scepticism and concerns about the credibility of green claims.
6. Emerging technologies: AI, personalised recommendations, smart technologies and digital platforms require further investigation in relation to sustainable consumer decision-making.
7. Indian consumer context: There is scope for more empirical research examining digital consumer behaviour and sustainable consumption among Indian consumers, particularly younger and digitally active consumers.



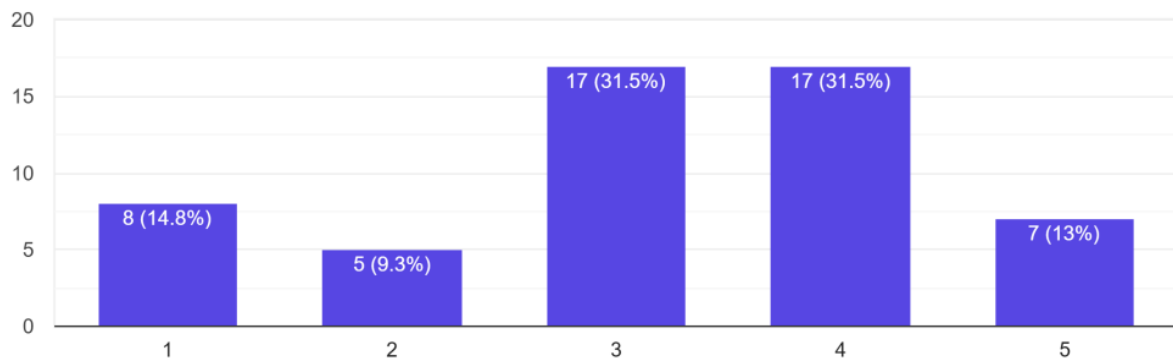
Digital Technology–Enabled Sustainable Consumption Framework



Data Analysis

How familiar are you with the concept of sustainable consumption?

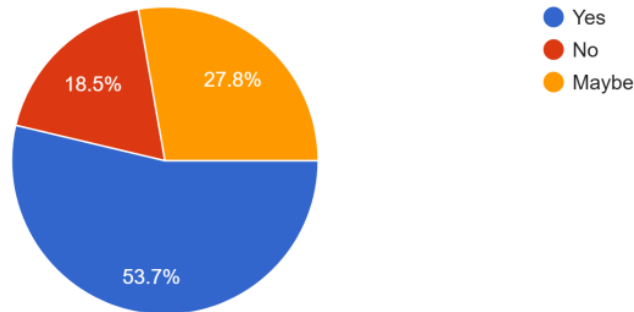
54 responses



The results show that there is a moderate to fairly high degree of awareness of sustainable consumption on the part of the respondents. Most (75.9%) rated their familiarity as 3 or more, with 44.5% indicating they were high or very high. But there are still opportunities for raising awareness and understanding of sustainable consumption, as indicated by the number of respondents who gave lower scores.

Has social media influenced you to buy a more sustainable / eco-friendly product?

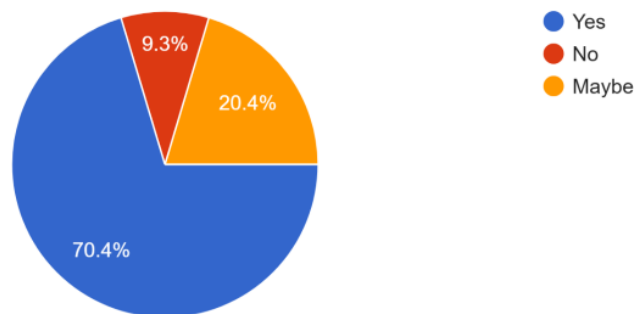
54 responses



Results show that the greatest hurdle for sustainable product adoption is limited availability (40.7% of respondents). This is followed by lack of awareness (29.6%) and higher cost (18.5%). Furthermore, 9.3% of the respondents voiced concerns about the credibility of green claims. In summary, the findings indicate that the improvements in product availability and consumer awareness along with providing sustainable alternatives at a lower price may play a significant role in promoting sustainable consumption.

Do you believe technology (AI, apps, tracking tools) can help consumers make more sustainable choices?

54 responses



The results show that technology has a great potential to create sustainable consumption. 70.4% of respondents say that AI, applications, and tracking can assist consumers in making more sustainable choices, with 20.4 percent not being sure, but saying they believe it can. 9.3% had a negative opinion. Overall, the findings indicate that technology can have a significant impact in driving and supporting sustainable consumption.

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