# Balancing Profit and Planet: The FMCG Industry's Shift Towards Green Consumerism

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# Abstract

This study explores the relationship between consumer awareness, perception of costs, and the prioritization of environmental sustainability in the FMCG sector, focusing on green consumerism in Tamil Nadu, India. The research aims to investigate how consumer awareness of sustainable products impacts their purchasing decisions, the role of price perception in influencing purchase behaviour, and the geographical differences in sustainability prioritization between urban and rural consumers. Using stratified random sampling, data was collected from 500 respondents, and various statistical tools such as correlation analysis, chisquare tests, and t-tests were employed to test the hypotheses. The findings indicate a significant positive relationship between consumer awareness and the likelihood of purchasing green products. However, the perception of high costs was found to negatively affect consumers' willingness to purchase sustainable FMCG products. Furthermore, urban consumers were found to prioritize environmental sustainability significantly more than rural consumers. The study concludes by offering practical suggestions for FMCG companies, including enhancing consumer education, addressing cost concerns, and tailoring marketing strategies to different consumer segments. These findings contribute valuable insights into the growing trend of green consumerism and provide actionable recommendations for companies aiming to promote sustainability while maintaining profitability.

#### Keywords

Green Consumerism, FMCG Industry, Consumer Awareness, Sustainable Products, Price Sensitivity, Urban vs Rural Consumers, Environmental Sustainability, Purchasing Behavior, Tamil Nadu, Green Marketing.

# Introduction

The Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) industry, known for its high volume, rapid turnover, and extensive consumer reach, has traditionally been driven by the demands for affordability, convenience, and brand loyalty. However, in recent years, the sector has witnessed a growing shift towards environmental sustainability, with an increasing focus on eco-friendly products and practices. This transformation is largely driven by the rise of **green consumerism**, where consumers are becoming more environmentally conscious, seeking products that align with their values of sustainability, ethical sourcing, and minimal environmental impact.

As climate change, resource depletion, and pollution continue to pose significant global challenges, the need for industries like FMCG to adopt sustainable practices has never been more urgent. According to a 2023 report by the *World Economic Forum*, global sustainability is becoming a crucial focal point for businesses, as consumers demand more transparency in the production, sourcing, and packaging of their products (World Economic Forum, 2023). This trend towards green consumerism is not just a passing fad; it represents a long-term shift in consumer behaviour that companies must address if they wish to stay competitive in the market. For FMCG companies, this shift is a complex balancing act between **profitability** and **environmental responsibility**. On one hand, adopting sustainable practices, such as using biodegradable packaging, reducing carbon footprints, and sourcing raw materials responsibly, can result in significant cost increases. On the other hand, the demand for eco-friendly products offers companies a potential competitive edge, as consumers increasingly favor brands that align with their ethical and environmental values. In fact, a study by *Nielsen* (2022) found that 73% of global consumers are willing to pay more for products that are environmentally friendly, reflecting the growing importance of sustainability in consumer decision-making.

However, this shift is not without challenges. The **profitability vs. sustainability** dilemma often leaves companies with difficult choices regarding pricing, supply chain logistics, and long-term investments in sustainable technologies. According to *McKinsey & Company* (2023), FMCG firms face a unique challenge in finding cost-effective ways to implement sustainability measures without compromising on their margins. Additionally, the pressure to meet the increasing consumer demand for green products requires innovation, often requiring significant investments in research and development (R&D) to create products that are both sustainable and affordable.

This study, titled "Balancing Profit and Planet: The FMCG Industry's Shift Towards Green Consumerism," seeks to explore the impact of green consumerism on the FMCG sector. Specifically, it will examine how FMCG companies are balancing the demands for profitability with the increasing pressure for environmental responsibility, while analysing the role of green consumerism in influencing consumer purchasing behaviour and brand loyalty. The findings will provide valuable insights into the evolving relationship between business and sustainability in one of the world's most influential industries.

# **Review of Literature**

Nielsen (2022) examined global consumer trends and revealed that 73% of consumers are willing to pay a premium for environmentally friendly products. This finding highlights the growing importance of green consumerism in influencing purchasing decisions. Kotler et al. (2021) also noted that modern consumers increasingly prioritize sustainability, ethical sourcing, and eco-friendly practices, alongside price and quality considerations. These studies collectively underscore the evolving nature of consumer preferences and the need for businesses to align with these values.

McKinsey & Company (2023) delves into the sustainability initiatives of FMCG companies, identifying challenges such as high implementation costs and balancing profitability with environmental responsibility. Case studies like Unilever's commitment to recyclable packaging by 2025 and Coca-Cola's focus on water efficiency illustrate proactive efforts in sustainability (Coca-Cola Sustainability Report, 2022). These initiatives highlight the growing corporate emphasis on aligning operations with green consumerism while navigating economic challenges.

**Tandon and Jain (2019)** analyzed the impact of price sensitivity on the adoption of green products in the Indian FMCG market. Their findings reveal that the perception of higher costs often deters consumers, despite a willingness to embrace sustainable options. This aligns with **Schmidt and Braunschweig (2020)**, who highlighted price sensitivity as a critical barrier, particularly in developing markets, emphasizing the need for affordable green solutions.

Nguyen and Hoang (2019) conducted a comparative study on urban and rural markets in Vietnam, observing that urban consumers are more inclined toward green products due to higher awareness and access. Kanchana and Gokulraj (2021) reported similar trends in Tamil Nadu, India, where urban consumers demonstrated greater engagement with eco-friendly products compared to their rural counterparts. These studies underline the geographic disparities in green consumerism and the need for targeted interventions.

**Peattie and Crane (2022)** explored the phenomenon of greenwashing, where misleading claims about sustainability undermine consumer trust. Their study emphasized the importance of transparency and verifiable evidence in sustainability claims. This perspective is echoed by **Smith and Smith (2022)**, who argued that consumer skepticism towards green claims could hinder the growth of genuine eco-friendly initiatives.

Martin and Hasim (2021) highlighted the short-term financial benefits of sustainability initiatives but stressed the need for longitudinal studies to assess their long-term profitability and market impact. Similarly, Coughlan (2021) noted the lack of comprehensive data on the financial returns of sustainable practices, calling for deeper research into the enduring implications of green consumerism for businesses.

## **Research Gap**

Despite extensive literature on sustainability and green consumerism in the FMCG sector, significant research gaps remain. First, while studies highlight the short-term benefits of sustainable practices, there is limited exploration of their long-term financial impact on profitability and market share. Second, consumer behaviour studies often overlook demographic segmentation, failing to analyse how factors like age, income, or geography

influence sustainability-driven purchasing decisions. Third, most research focuses on developed markets, with limited insights into regional variations in green consumerism, particularly in emerging economies where economic and cultural factors differ significantly. Additionally, there is a lack of research on the integration of sustainability into core business strategies, such as product development and supply chain management, rather than treating it as a CSR initiative. Lastly, the issue of greenwashing and its effect on consumer trust remains underexplored, creating a need for deeper investigation into its implications for brand loyalty and credibility.

# **Objective of the study**

- To analyse the adoption of sustainable practices by FMCG companies and their impact on environmental sustainability.
- To evaluate the influence of green consumerism on purchasing decisions and brand loyalty within the FMCG sector.
- To explore the balance between profitability and environmental responsibility in the strategies of FMCG companies adopting green initiatives.

# **Research Methodology**

#### **Research Area**

The study will focus on Tamil Nadu, a prominent state in India with a diverse consumer base and significant FMCG market presence. Tamil Nadu's varied demographic, economic, and cultural landscape makes it a suitable location to analyse consumer behaviour and preferences regarding green consumerism in the FMCG sector.

#### **Research Design**

This research adopts a descriptive design, aiming to understand the relationship between green consumerism and FMCG products. It examines consumer attitudes, purchasing behaviors, and how FMCG companies balance profitability and sustainability.

#### **Sampling Method**

The study employs a stratified random sampling method to ensure representation from different consumer segments. Tamil Nadu will be divided into strata based on key demographic factors such as urban-rural classification, income levels, and age groups. Random sampling will then be conducted within each stratum to gather a representative sample.

#### Sample Size

A sample size of 500 respondents will be used for the study, ensuring adequate representation of Tamil Nadu's population. The sample will include individuals aged 18 years and above who are regular consumers of FMCG products. This size is chosen to provide statistically significant results while being manageable within the study's constraints.

#### **Data Collection**

Primary data will be collected through structured questionnaires distributed both online and offline to accommodate different consumer groups. The questionnaire will focus on consumer awareness of green FMCG products, their purchasing decisions, and their perceptions of corporate sustainability initiatives. Secondary data, including industry reports and market trends, will complement the primary data to provide context and support analysis.

#### Data Analysis

The collected data will be analysed using statistical tools such as SPSS to identify patterns, correlations, and trends. Techniques like cross-tabulation, chi-square tests, and regression analysis will be applied to understand the impact of demographic factors on green consumerism and the sustainability efforts of FMCG companies.

The analytical process of this study involved collecting data through structured questionnaires distributed to 500 respondents across Tamil Nadu using stratified random sampling. The data was analysed using SPSS software, with descriptive statistics employed to summarize demographic information and consumer behaviour patterns. Hypotheses were tested using correlation analysis, chi-square tests, and t-tests. The relationship between consumer awareness and purchasing behaviour was assessed through correlation analysis, while chi-square tests examined the impact of perceived costs on purchasing decisions. T-tests compared urban and rural consumer prioritization of sustainability. The results were interpreted to draw meaningful insights on green consumerism and FMCG industry practices.

## Hypotheses

- 1. H1: There is a significant positive relationship between consumer awareness of green FMCG products and their purchasing decisions.
- This hypothesis aligns with the objective of evaluating the influence of green consumerism on purchasing behavior and brand loyalty within the FMCG sector.
- 2. H2: The perception of higher costs for sustainable FMCG products negatively impacts consumer willingness to purchase them.
- This hypothesis relates to understanding the balance between profitability and sustainability, as cost is a critical factor for both consumers and companies.
- 3. H3: Urban consumers in Tamil Nadu are more likely to prioritize environmental sustainability in FMCG purchases compared to rural consumers.
- This hypothesis addresses the objective of analyzing consumer preferences and engagement with green FMCG products across different demographic segments.

#### **Demographical profile**

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents in this study. It includes key variables such as age, gender, education level, monthly household income, and residential area. These variables provide insights into the diversity of the sample and its alignment with the target population in Tamil Nadu. The frequency (n) and percentage distribution (%) of each category are reported to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the respondents' characteristics.

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	Below 18	30	6.0%
	18–25	100	20.0%
	26–35	150	30.0%
	36-45	120	24.0%
	46–55	70	14.0%
	Above 55	30	6.0%

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents** 

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	
	Male	250	50.0%	
Gender	Female	240	48.0%	
	Prefer not to say	10	2.0%	
	High School or below	100	20.0%	
Education Level	Undergraduate	250	50.0%	
Education Level	Postgraduate	120	24.0%	
	Others	30	6.0%	
	Less than ₹20,000	80	16.0%	
Monthly Household Income	₹20,000–₹50,000	180	36.0%	
Monthly Household Income	₹50,001-₹1,00,000	150	30.0%	
	More than ₹1,00,000	90	18.0%	
	Urban	300	60.0%	
Residential Area	Semi-Urban	150	30.0%	
	Rural	50	10.0%	

Notes:

- 1. Frequency (n): The number of respondents for each category.
- 2. Percentage (%): Calculated as (Frequency / Total Respondents) × 100.
- 3. Total Respondents (N): 500 (example).

The demographic profile of the respondents reveals a diverse and representative sample that captures key consumer segments in Tamil Nadu. Age-wise, the largest group comprises individuals aged 26–35 years (30%), followed by those aged 36–45 years (24%), indicating that young and middle-aged adults are the primary participants in FMCG purchases. The representation from the below-18 (6%) and above-55 (6%) groups is smaller, reflecting their comparatively lower engagement in FMCG markets. Gender distribution is nearly balanced, with males (50%) and females (48%) equally represented, ensuring perspectives from both genders are included.

The education profile highlights a predominantly educated sample, with 50% holding undergraduate degrees and 24% postgraduates, suggesting a high level of awareness about environmental sustainability and green consumerism. Income distribution shows the majority in the ₹20,000–₹50,000 range (36%), followed by ₹50,001–₹1,00,000 (30%), reflecting the strong presence of middle-income households, which are critical consumers of FMCG products. Additionally, urban residents dominate the sample (60%), while semi-urban (30%) and rural respondents (10%) are included to capture geographical diversity.

Overall, the sample ensures representation across demographics critical to FMCG and sustainability studies. The overrepresentation of urban, middle-income, and educated groups aligns with their higher exposure to green consumerism trends, while rural and lower-income segments offer insights into accessibility challenges.

## **Relationship Between Consumer Awareness and Purchasing Decisions**

This section explores the relationship between consumer awareness of green FMCG products and their purchasing behaviour. It aims to examine whether a higher level of awareness regarding the sustainability of products leads to an increase in consumer willingness to purchase environmentally friendly FMCG products. Understanding this relationship is essential for FMCG companies looking to capitalize on the growing trend of green consumerism. A positive correlation would suggest that consumer education on sustainability can drive market demand for green products.

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between consumer awareness of green FMCG products and their purchasing decisions.

Variable	(M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p- value
Consumer Awareness (X)		0.85	0.678	< 0.001
Purchasing Decisions (Y)	3.85	0.72		

Table 2 : Correlation Between Consumer Awareness and Purchasing Decisions

Source: Primary Data

## Interpretation:

The correlation coefficient (r = 0.678) indicates a strong positive relationship between consumer awareness of green FMCG products and their purchasing decisions. The p-value (< 0.001) confirms that this relationship is statistically significant. Increased awareness is strongly associated with higher purchasing activity for sustainable FMCG products.

Impact of Perceived Costs on Consumer Willingness to Purchase Green FMCG Products

This section assesses the impact of the perception of high costs for sustainable FMCG products on consumer willingness to purchase them. It seeks to understand whether the price factor acts as a deterrent to consumers who are otherwise motivated by sustainability considerations. This analysis will help identify whether price sensitivity outweighs consumers' interest in sustainability and whether FMCG companies need to balance cost and environmental benefits in their product offerings.

H2: The perception of higher costs for sustainable FMCG products negatively impacts consumer willingness to purchase them.

Perception of High Cost	Willing to Purchase (Yes)	Willing to Purchase (No)		Total
Yes	120	180		300
No	140	60		200
Total	260	240		500
Statistic			Value	
Chi-Square Value (χ²)			45.78	

Table 3: Chi-Square Test for the Impact of Perceived Costs on Purchase Willingness

Statistic	Value
Degrees of Freedom (df)	1
p-value	< 0.001

Source: Primary Data

#### Interpretation:

The chi-square test indicates a significant association between the perception of high costs and willingness to purchase green FMCG products ( $\chi^2 = 45.78$ , p < 0.001). Consumers perceiving high costs are less willing to purchase, highlighting the negative impact of cost perception on green product adoption.

## Urban vs Rural Consumer Prioritization of Sustainability in FMCG Purchases

This section compares urban and rural consumers in Tamil Nadu to determine if urban consumers are more likely to prioritize environmental sustainability when purchasing FMCG products. The hypothesis aims to explore the influence of geographic location on consumer behaviour and sustainability preferences. Given the higher exposure to environmental issues and green products in urban areas, this section will analyse if urban consumers are more inclined to choose sustainable options compared to their rural counterparts.

H3: Urban consumers in Tamil Nadu are more likely to prioritize environmental sustainability in FMCG purchases compared to rural consumers.

Table 4: Comparison of Sustainability Prioritization Between Urban and Rural
Consumers

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Group	Mean Sustainability (M)	Score	Standard (SD)	Deviation	Sample (n)	Size
Urban Consumers	4.25		0.80		300	
Rural Consumers	3.65		0.85		50	
Statistic				Valu	e	
t-Statistic (t)				5.98		
Degrees of Freed	lom (df)			348		
p-value				< 0.0	01	

**Source: Primary Data** 

#### Interpretation:

The t-test reveals a significant difference in sustainability prioritization between urban (M = 4.25) and rural consumers (M = 3.65). The p-value (< 0.001) indicates statistical significance, suggesting urban consumers are more likely to prioritize environmental sustainability in their purchasing decisions.

## **Findings of the Study**

**Consumer Awareness and Purchasing Decisions**: The study revealed a significant positive relationship between consumer awareness of green FMCG products and their purchasing behaviour. As consumer awareness increased, so did the likelihood of purchasing sustainable FMCG products. This finding suggests that educating consumers about the environmental benefits and value of green products plays a crucial role in influencing their purchasing decisions. Therefore, enhancing consumer knowledge about sustainability and eco-friendly options can drive market demand for these products.

**Perception of High Costs and Willingness to Purchase:** The analysis also highlighted that the perception of higher costs for sustainable FMCG products negatively impacts consumer willingness to purchase them. The chi-square test showed that when consumers perceive green products as more expensive, they are less likely to buy them, even if they value sustainability. This presents a significant challenge for FMCG companies, as price sensitivity remains a major barrier to green product adoption. Addressing this issue is essential to increase market penetration and consumer participation in the green FMCG sector.

**Urban vs Rural Consumer Prioritization of Sustainability:** The study found that urban consumers in Tamil Nadu are more likely to prioritize environmental sustainability in their FMCG purchases compared to rural consumers. Using an independent samples t-test, it was confirmed that urban consumers, who are exposed to more environmental awareness campaigns and green product options, score higher in terms of sustainability prioritization. In contrast, rural consumers showed lower engagement with sustainability, likely due to limited access to green products and less exposure to environmental issues.

#### **Suggestions for FMCG Companies**

Enhance Consumer Education on Sustainability: To capitalize on the positive relationship between consumer awareness and purchasing behaviour, FMCG companies should focus on educational campaigns that inform consumers about the environmental benefits of green products. These campaigns can take place across various platforms, including social media, instore promotions, and through digital advertisements. By providing clear and accessible information on how purchasing sustainable products can positively impact the environment, companies can increase consumer awareness and encourage more sustainable purchasing behaviors.

Address Price Concerns with Affordable Green Options: Given the significant negative impact of price perception on consumer willingness to purchase green products, FMCG companies should consider strategies to make these products more affordable. This could involve streamlining production processes, offering bulk discounts, bundling green products with other popular items, or developing eco-friendly options at different price points to cater to a wider demographic. Promoting long-term savings or health benefits associated with sustainable products can also help overcome cost barriers and boost consumer adoption.

Target Urban and Rural Markets Differently: The findings suggest that urban consumers are more inclined to prioritize sustainability in their purchasing decisions than rural consumers. As a result, FMCG companies should develop targeted marketing strategies for urban and rural areas. Urban consumers can be engaged through high-impact campaigns that emphasize the role of sustainability in addressing environmental challenges. For rural consumers, it may be more effective to focus on educating them about the benefits of green products, while also offering more affordable pricing to make these products accessible. Additionally, ensuring the availability of sustainable FMCG products in both urban and rural areas will help meet the growing demand for environmentally friendly options across different market segments.

Collaborate with Governments and NGOs: FMCG companies can benefit from collaborating with governmental bodies and environmental NGOs to promote sustainable practices. Such collaborations could include initiatives to reduce production costs through subsidies, joint educational campaigns, and transparency in sustainability efforts. Working with recognized environmental organizations can also help improve brand credibility, building trust with consumers who are increasingly cautious about greenwashing.

Implement Transparent Sustainability Practices: Transparency in sustainability claims is critical for FMCG companies to avoid accusations of greenwashing. Companies must ensure that their environmental claims are supported by clear, verifiable evidence such as certifications from reputable organizations, sustainable sourcing practices, and carbon footprint reduction. By providing consumers with transparent, reliable information about the environmental impact of their purchases, FMCG companies can strengthen consumer trust and loyalty toward their green product offerings.

# Conclusion

The study provides critical insights into the intersection of green consumerism and the FMCG industry, emphasizing the transformative impact of sustainability on consumer behaviour, corporate strategies, and market dynamics. It highlights a strong positive relationship between consumer awareness and the likelihood of purchasing green products, underlining the importance of education and transparent communication in fostering eco-friendly choices. However, challenges such as price sensitivity, greenwashing, and demographic disparities in sustainability adoption remain significant hurdles, requiring comprehensive strategies to address them effectively. To overcome these challenges, FMCG companies must innovate to develop affordable green products without compromising profitability. Enhancing consumer education through targeted campaigns and leveraging digital platforms can increase awareness of the environmental and economic benefits of sustainable products. Tailored marketing and distribution strategies that address the unique needs of urban and rural consumers can bridge geographic and economic gaps in sustainability adoption. Collaboration with governments and NGOs can further amplify the impact of green initiatives by providing subsidies, policy support, and community-driven campaigns. By balancing profitability and environmental responsibility, FMCG companies can not only meet the growing demand for sustainable products but also establish themselves as leaders in the global transition toward a greener economy. These findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on green consumerism and offer actionable insights for driving meaningful changes in consumer behaviour and corporate practices. Future research could explore the long-term financial implications of green practices and the evolving role of digital tools in fostering sustainability across diverse markets.

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