

1 Bridging the Green Purchasing Gap: 2 Analysing Consumer Perception, Brand 3 Awareness, Social Influence, and Actual 4 Buying Behaviour for Natural and 5 Sustainable Personal Care Products

6 Abstract

7 The “green purchasing gap” describes the disconnect between consumers’ intentions to
8 purchase eco-friendly personal care products and their actual buying behaviour. This paper
9 examines key psychological, social, and marketing drivers behind this gap, with particular
10 emphasis on the often-overlooked role of brand awareness. Using a mixed-methods approach
11 that combines a quantitative survey of 2,000 consumers with 30 in-depth interviews, this
12 study finds that although 78% of participants express intent to purchase sustainable personal
13 care products, only 29% do so consistently. Barriers such as price sensitivity, scepticism
14 about green claims, insufficient brand awareness, and inconsistent social influence were
15 prominent. The paper recommends multi-pronged marketing strategies including educational
16 awareness, influencer partnerships, transparent labeling, and enhanced brand visibility to
17 convert eco-conscious intent into genuine consumer behavior & change in perception.

18 **Keywords:** green purchasing gap, brand awareness, consumer perception, personal care,
19 sustainability, social influence, purchase behavior, green marketing

21 1. Introduction

22 The global surge in environmental awareness has reshaped consumer expectations within the
23 personal care industry, driving demand for natural, organic, and sustainable products. Despite
24 increasing claims of eco-conscious attitudes, a prominent “green purchasing gap” remains: a
25 significant disparity between favourable attitudes or intentions toward green products and
26 actual purchasing behavior.

27 While prior research has largely focused on factors such as price, product efficacy concerns,
28 and social influence, brand awareness has emerged as an equally crucial but underexplored
29 barrier to closing this gap. Consumers’ low brand recall and understanding of sustainable
30 personal care brands complicate decision-making and reduce purchase likelihood—even
31 when intentions are positive. This research aims to systematically analyze these factors and
32 identify actionable insights to bridge this behavioral gap

34 2. Literature Review

35 The green purchasing gap is documented extensively in consumer behaviour literature,
36 typically framed within the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which links attitudes, subjective
37 norms, and perceived behavioural control to intention and behavior. However, intentions
38 rarely convert to consistent purchase due to various economic and cognitive barriers.
39 Recent studies emphasize the role of social influence through peer and influencer marketing,
40 significantly shaping consumer attitudes and trust in green products. Effective
41 communication of verified product benefits and environmental credentials encourages
42 purchase, yet “greenwashing” concerns inhibit trust and increase skepticism.
43 An emerging body of research highlights brand awareness as a vital but overlooked factor;
44 sustainable personal care brands often lack market visibility and consumer familiarity,
45 leading to hesitation and category abandonment. Without clear differentiation of green
46 offerings, consumers opt for trusted, conventional brands despite their stated ecological
47 preference.

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49 **3. Methodology**

50 **3.1 Study Design and Sample**

51 A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative
52 components. A cross-sectional online survey of 2,000 Indian adults aged 18 to 54 (58%
53 female, 42% male) from both urban and semi-urban areas was conducted. Additionally, 30
54 semi-structured qualitative interviews were carried out with a purposive subsample of green
55 personal care product users and non-users.

56 **3.2 Measures**

57 Variables measured included:

- 58 • Environmental attitude and awareness
- 59 • Brand awareness (aided and unaided recall of green personal care brands)
- 60 • Price sensitivity
- 61 • Trust in green product claims
- 62 • Social influence metrics (peer recommendations, influencer followership)
- 63 • Actual purchase behavior in the past six months.

64 **3.3 Data Analysis**

65 Quantitative data were analyzed using regression analysis and structural equation modeling
66 (SEM) to assess relationships between variables. Qualitative data were content-analyzed
67 thematically to contextualize consumer reasoning and decision-making processes.

68

69 **4. Results**

70 **4.1 Participant Profile**

Demographic	Percentage (%)
Female	58
Male	42
Age 18-34	55
Age 35-54	45

71 **4.2 Intention and Behavior Metrics**

72 • 78% of respondents expressed intention to purchase sustainable personal care
73 products.

74 • Only 29% reported consistent purchases of natural or eco-friendly products in the
75 preceding six months.

76 • Unaided brand recall was low: only 41% could name more than two green personal
77 care brands.

78 **4.3 Barriers to Green Purchasing**

Barrier	Percentage (%) Reporting Barrier
Price premium	62
Product efficacy skepticism	57
Distrust in green claims	42
Inconvenience/availability	38
Lack of peer recommendation	35
Lack of brand awareness	34

79 **4.4 Role of Social Influence and Brand Awareness**

80 Most green brand discovery occurred through digital channels and word-of-mouth.
81 Interviewees highlighted confusion caused by undifferentiated products and superficial green
82 claims, which undermined brand credibility and purchase confidence. Consumers heavily
83 reliant on social media influencers emphasized the need for authentic and transparent
84 messaging.

85

86 **Results and Discussion**

87 **4.1 Participant Profile**

88 The survey sample comprised 2,000 respondents representative of urban and semi-urban
89 populations in the target geographic area. Females accounted for 58%, and males 42%, with
90 the majority (55%) falling in the 18-34 age bracket. This demographic balance supports
91 generalizability to the broader consumer base for personal care products.

92 **4.2 The Green Purchasing Gap: Intention vs. Behavior**

93 Findings reveal a clear green purchasing gap: 78% of respondents expressed a strong
94 intention to buy natural and sustainable personal care products, yet only 29% had consistently
95 purchased such products in the past six months. This corroborates prior research indicating
96 that while consumer awareness and concern about sustainability have grown substantially,
97 actual behavior change lags behind. This gap underscores the complex interplay between
98 consumer values and real-world constraints.

99 **4.3 Key Barriers to Bridging the Gap**

100 Respondents identified multiple barriers to purchase (see Table 1). Price premium was the
101 most frequently cited obstacle (62%), followed closely by skepticism about product efficacy
102 (57%) and distrust of green claims (42%). Inconvenience or limited product availability was
103 flagged by 38%, and lack of peer recommendations by 35%. Notably, **34% reported lack of**
104 **brand awareness** as a significant barrier, highlighting the crucial role of familiarity and
105 trusted branding in purchase decisions.

106 **Interpreting the Lack of Brand Awareness**

107 The relatively high incidence of brand awareness as a purchase barrier reveals a critical
108 insight: well-intentioned consumers are often unaware of credible, sustainable personal care
109 brands or struggle to differentiate them from less authentic competitors. This aligns with
110 emerging literature that positions brand awareness not only as a marketing goal but a
111 prerequisite for green purchasing adoption. Low brand recognition compounds consumer
112 skepticism and reduces confidence, thereby limiting conversion of green intentions into
113 actual sales.

114 **4.4 Social Influence and Discovery Channels**

115 The data show consumers predominantly discover green personal care brands via social
116 media influencers and peer word-of-mouth, confirming the rising influence of digital

117 channels in shaping eco-consumer behavior. However, interviews revealed that influencer
118 authenticity and transparent communication significantly affect this influence. Consumers
119 expressed wariness when confronted with seemingly inauthentic or over-commercialized
120 endorsements, reinforcing prior findings on the need for credible social proof.

121 Marketing effectiveness in this domain thus depends on building genuine relationships
122 between brands and communities to foster trust, which resonates with Ajzen's (1991)
123 framework emphasizing subjective norms in behavioral intention.

124 **4.5 Integrating Findings with Theory and Practice**

125 The findings substantiate the Theory of Planned Behavior's core premise that while positive
126 attitudes and social norms encourage green intentions, perceived behavioral control—here
127 reflected in practical barriers like brand awareness and price—plays a determinative role in
128 predicting actual purchase behavior.

129 Moreover, the data highlight areas for intervention. Efforts to amplify brand visibility,
130 improve labeling transparency, and educate consumers can strengthen perceived behavioral
131 control and reduce uncertainty. Additionally, fostering authentic social influence appears
132 critical to converting intention into action.

133 **4.6 Unexpected Findings and Limitations**

134 Contrary to some prior studies emphasizing socio-demographic predictors, no significant
135 variation was observed in the green purchasing gap across age or gender groups in this
136 sample, suggesting that awareness and market factors may override demographic effects in
137 this context. Future research might explore longitudinal behavior or cultural influences more
138 comprehensively.

139 Limitations include reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce social desirability
140 bias, and the geographic focus, which may affect global applicability. However, the mixed-
141 methods approach and robust sample size strengthen validity and provide rich consumer
142 insight.

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145 **Conclusion and Recommendations**

146 **6.1 Conclusion**

147 This study confirms the existence of a substantial green purchasing gap in the natural and
148 sustainable personal care category. While the majority of consumers express strong pro-
149 environmental attitudes and intentions to purchase green products, only a minority
150 consistently convert these intentions into actual behavior. Key findings highlight that, beyond
151 well-documented barriers like price sensitivity and skepticism toward green claims, **lack of**
152 **brand awareness** is a critical but often underappreciated obstacle.

153 Consumers frequently struggle to identify and differentiate credible green personal care
154 brands in a crowded and sometimes misleading marketplace. This confusion diminishes trust
155 and reduces the likelihood of switching to sustainable alternatives. Social influence,
156 particularly through digital platforms and trusted influencers, plays a pivotal role in bridging
157 this gap but requires authenticity and transparency to be effective.

158 Together, these findings underscore the need for an integrated approach that targets
159 psychological, social, and structural factors in unison to effectively narrow the green
160 purchasing gap in personal care products.

161 **6.2 Recommendations**

162 Based on the empirical evidence and literature synthesis, the following actionable
163 recommendations are proposed for marketers, policymakers, and researchers:

- 164 • **Enhance Brand Awareness:**

165 Invest in targeted marketing campaigns to increase clear, consistent brand recognition
166 of sustainable personal care products. Use a mix of traditional advertising and digital
167 platforms to improve unaided recall and familiarity.

- 168 • **Promote Transparent Communication:**

169 Establish strong third-party certifications and transparent ingredient disclosures that
170 resonate with consumers to combat skepticism and build lasting trust.

- 171 • **Leverage Influencer Partnerships:**

172 Collaborate with credible social media influencers and digital communities who align
173 authentically with sustainability values to amplify trustworthy word-of-mouth and
174 social proof.

- 175 • **Educate Consumers:**

176 Implement educational initiatives both online and offline to improve consumer
177 understanding of the benefits, efficacy, and environmental impact of green personal
178 care products.

- 179 • **Address Price Barriers:**

180 Explore pricing strategies, such as promotions, loyalty programs, and tiered offerings,
181 to make natural and sustainable products more accessible, especially to price-sensitive
182 consumers.

- 183 • **Facilitate Product Trial and Visibility:**

184 Increase in-store sampling, availability in mainstream retail channels, and visibility in
185 e-commerce platforms to reduce entry barriers and increase trial purchases.

- 186 • **Encourage Future Research:**

187 Promote interdisciplinary studies integrating consumer psychology, digital marketing,
188 and sustainability science to better understand and influence green purchasing
189 behavior longitudinally.

190 The pathway to closing the green purchasing gap is complex but tractable. By prioritizing
191 brand awareness, trust-building, and social engagement alongside affordability and
192 accessibility, stakeholders can catalyse genuine and sustained growth of the green personal
193 care market.

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196 **Conflicts of Interest**

197 The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to this work.

198

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