

Eco-Paths of Himachal: A Dual Lens Study of Customers and SHGs in the Green Marketing Mix

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Abstract - Green marketing has emerged as a prominent concept due to increasing consumer awareness and demand for eco-friendly products. It includes strategies to meet consumer needs while dealing with environmental conservation. Himachal Pradesh (HP) has significant potential for the development of products under green labels due to its rich biodiversity, cultural heritage and traditional craftsmanship. Items like leaf plates (dona-pattal), bamboo products, herbal tea, woollen shawls, pottery and other handicrafts represent the eco-friendly and cultural heritage goods of the state.

This research aims to explore the awareness, attitudes and perceptions of customers towards the marketing of green products in HP. It also explores the involvement of SHGs in manufacturing and promoting green products. The data is collected through a mixed method approach, combining quantitative analysis of a consumer survey of 118 respondents with qualitative insight from the five self-help groups of District Kangra of Himachal Pradesh.

The research findings showed that the SHGs of District Kangra are actively involved in the manufacturing of traditional products. The pricing strategy and channel of distribution need to be reworked. The visibility and promotion of products are in a very precarious state. The study inferred that the lack of legal compliance of the goods manufactured is a strong reason behind the lack of online visibility of these products. The effective promotion of products can be ensured through robust branding and adherence to legal compliance.

Key Words: Green Products, Awareness, Perception, Attitude, Purchasing Behaviour, Self-Help Groups, Green Marketing Mix

INTRODUCTION The global shift towards environmental consciousness has prompted businesses to embrace sustainable practices, including the adoption of green marketing strategies (Chandra & Kumar, 2021). Green marketing came into being in the 1980s and 1990s as a separate entity from core term marketing (Polonsky, 1994; Mawardi et al., 2024). From the previous studies carried out in the area of Green Marketing, it is clear that businesses are trying to include sustainable practices in their day-to-day practices to gain the faith and loyalty of eco-conscious consumers (Panigrahi, 2015; Sehgal, 2017). ‘Green marketing’ includes a broad range of activities, including raw material acquisition, production process, packaging, advertising, delivery, and disposal of goods and services, with the minimum detrimental impact on the environment and ecology (Shabbir et al, 2020; Kumar & Ghodeswar, 2015). Businesses are modifying their marketing strategies, product features, production processes, and packaging to align with the increasing environmental concerns of their target audience (Polonsky, 1994; Sehgal, 2017; Shabbir et al., 2020). Businesses are advised to consider both environmental sustainability and profit while creating green products and when seeking market opportunities following production (Tseng & Hung, 2013). Green products, also known as environmentally friendly or environmentally conscious products, are made to use fewer natural resources and have fewer negative effects on the environment over the course of their whole life cycles. (Tseng & Hung, 2013)

In the context of rural India, the state of Himachal Pradesh offers a unique opportunity to explore the integration of green marketing and legal frameworks to promote heritage and rural goods. Himachal Pradesh, a picturesque state in northern India, is renowned for its natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, and diverse agricultural produce (Akhil & M.D., 2017; Dutta, 2012; Garg, 2015). Self-help groups in Himachal Pradesh have been playing a crucial role in empowering rural women and promoting sustainable livelihoods through the production and marketing of traditional handicrafts, organic foods, and other rural products (Prabhakar, 2016; Agnihotri & Singh, 2014). While these self-help groups have been instrumental in fostering

rural entrepreneurship and preserving cultural traditions, they often face significant challenges in effectively marketing and distributing their products to wider audience (Garg, 2015; Ghodeswar & Kumar, 2014).

1.1 Consumer Behaviour and Green Marketing

Consumer demand for green products has increased because of their growing concern about the environment. Studies show that consumers are willing to pay higher prices for environmentally friendly products and services that match their values and beliefs about sustainability (Rusyani et al., 2021; Garg, 2015; Sahetapy & Noach, 2021). As a result of being more aware of how their purchase choices affect the environment, consumers currently prefer to purchase from companies that create environmentally responsible products. While consumers now want sustainable products, companies and consumers face challenges in matching up the consumer's desire for sustainable products with the availability of these products. Additionally, companies and consumers must overcome the consumer's mistrust of the green marketing claims made by companies about their environmentally sustainable products and services (Sahetapy & Noach, 2021). Prior research supports the notion that consumer knowledge and attitude toward environmental issues will play an important part in influencing the behaviour of consumers' purchasing of environmentally friendly products or services. Researchers have found that materialism relates negatively to environmentally friendly behaviours and that cultural differences, the reason for buying, and environmental concerns influence the relationship between materialism, environmental concern, and green products (Sreen et al., 2020).

1.2 Self-Help Groups and Green Marketing in Himachal Pradesh

In Himachal Pradesh, self-help groups (SHGs) are leading the way in building sustainable livelihoods as well as preserving the region's valuable culture and heritage. Most of these groups are comprised of rural women who have made significant contributions to the production and marketing of traditional handicrafts, organic food and other rural goods while promoting environmentally sustainable practices. (Liao et al., 2020) (Sahetapy & Noach, 2021; Rusyani et al., 2021; Sreen et al., 2020). A wide variety of green marketing activities have been undertaken by SHGs in Himachal Pradesh to support their objectives, including using biodegradable and/or renewable materials as raw materials, utilizing sustainable production techniques and developing eco-friendly packaging solutions. The environmental impact resulting from these practices has been lessened by the efforts of self-help groups to create awareness among consumers regarding the environmentally friendly benefits of products produced in the local area. (Liao et al., 2020) (Garg, 2015)

2. Literature Review

In recent years, the concept of "Green Marketing" has developed substantially due to an increasing awareness across society regarding man's consumption of limited resources and how his behaviour is contributing to the environmental damage of our planet (Kumar & Ghodeswar, 2015). At first, as the

concept of green marketing emerged, most of the research was aimed towards exploring differences in theoretical approaches towards green marketing strategies and how they have affected customer behaviour in making purchasing decisions (Nair & Aithal, 2023). As consumers' perceptions towards green marketing have shifted from a view on green marketing towards a focus on being a sustainable consumer, many companies have developed green products and services in response to the needs of consumers as the impact of environmental issues continues to grow (Shanmugam et al., 2024). To meet the demands of a changing market landscape, Indian companies are now being forced to adopt environmentally sustainable practices within their operations (Bharti et al., 2024).

2.1 Awareness of Green Marketing and Purchasing Behaviour

Increasingly, consumers have expressed concern over the effects of climate change, depleting natural resources, and various other environmental issues that affect people everywhere. For this reason, the awareness of consumers regarding environmentally friendly, sustainable products has a considerable role in forming a pattern of sustainable consumption and conserving the environment (Dua & Yadav, 2024). More companies are beginning to integrate sustainable business practices into their marketing strategies, including products, pricing, promotions, and distribution methods, in order to respond to consumer demand for these products and services (Rustagi & Prakash, 2022). To determine the consumer profile and whether or not consumers will spend additional money on these types of products, even if these products are priced higher or require them to change their lifestyle (Sharadhi et al, 2023), it is essential to have a better understanding of this consumer group. Evidence has shown that consumers in India are willing to pay a premium for purchasing green products, indicating that there is a market for green products (Devi & Hema, 2021). The increasing acceptance of environmentally friendly products provides a tremendous opportunity for companies to innovate and for government agencies to develop policies and regulations to support and promote sustainable consumption (Dua & Yadav, 2024).

Hypothesis H1.1: Higher awareness of green marketing positively influences green purchasing behaviour towards green and rural products of Himachal Pradesh.

2.2 Attitude Toward Green Marketing and Purchasing Behaviour

The changes in consumer attitudes toward green products & services are referred to as green consumerism. Consumers are influenced by the growing concern & awareness of the environment, therefore making their purchasing decisions more towards green & eco-friendly purchases (Yadav & Pathak, 2016). Thus, numerous researchers have conducted extensive studies that look to understand the motivation, perception, and behaviour of green consumers, compared with non-green consumers (Chockalingam & Isreal, 2016). With the above-mentioned changes occurring in the marketplace, marketers must develop successful marketing strategies that will create awareness and ultimately change consumer buying patterns to sustainable products (Nedumaran & Manida, 2019; Manju & Latha, 2023). Many in the marketplace still do not know or understand green products and their positive effects on the

environment, indicating that there is a need for more educational programs regarding green products (Singh et al., 2023). Even though there is still a lack of understanding among consumers about green products, research indicates that the response from consumers to environmental marketing is affected positively by the perception of the marketer's commitment to protecting and preserving the environment (Mishra, 2025). In addition, observations made in emerging markets have shown that consumers are willing to pay more for eco-friendly products in increasing numbers, despite the financial challenges many consumers face, due to an increase in awareness of environmental issues, health concerns, and changing preferences (Kuria, 2024).

Hypothesis H1.2: Attitude Toward Green Marketing positively influences green purchasing behaviour towards green and rural products of Himachal Pradesh.

2.3 Perceptions of Marketing Strategies and Purchasing Behaviour

While consumers are becoming more familiar with ecological issues, the next step – switching their purchasing patterns over to environmentally friendly products – remains somewhat difficult. This may be especially true in emerging markets, where consumers typically focus on the functional product benefits, rather than its ecological features (Jaiswal et al., 2020). Thus, it appears that the higher prices associated with green products will generally result in consumers choosing to buy less expensive products with lower quality. As a result, providing additional elements of support, such as pro-environmental attitudes, risk awareness, and the availability/accessibility of eco-friendly products, must happen along with an overall rethinking of product design and manufacturing to help break down barriers through lowering costs of eco-friendly products (Pirzada et al., 2023; Kumar & Ghodeswar, 2015). In doing so, consumers will be able to build positive associations based on their previous experiences with eco-friendly products, thus creating further positive motivation to purchase these types of products (Kumar & Ghodeswar, 2015). This disconnect between environmental attitudes and actual purchase decisions is known as the "green purchasing mismatch," illustrating the complexity of the consumer's decision-making process regarding sustainability (Aghayev & Israfilzade, 2022).

Hypothesis H1.3: Perceptions of Marketing Strategies positively influences green purchasing behaviour towards green and rural products of Himachal Pradesh.

The objectives of the study aimed at addressing the identified research gaps and problems including:

- To explore the awareness, attitude and perception of customers towards the marketing of green products in Himachal Pradesh.
- To explore the involvement of SHGs in manufacturing and promoting green products.

3. Research Methodology

There are two types of methods used in this study, which are quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative method consists of a survey of consumers of green and rural products conducted by using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was circulated using online mode and the response came from 122 respondents all over Himachal Pradesh. Out of these 122 responses, 118 are considered valid for further analysis. The data is analysed using regression analysis in SPSS. The qualitative method was in-depth interviews of Self-Help Groups of District Kangra of Himachal Pradesh, who are involved in the production and marketing of green and rural products of Himachal Pradesh. The data collected from the interview are coded, and similar themes are derived from the data.

3.1. Quantitative Data analysis

Table -1: Cronbach Alpha for Reliability of the Variables

	Variables	Cronbach Alpha
Independent Variables	Awareness of Green Marketing	.637
	Attitudes Toward Green Marketing	.721
	Perceptions of Marketing Strategies for Green Products	.766
Dependent Variables	Green Purchasing Behavior	.735

Table -2:

Model Summary

Model	R	R Sq.	Adj. R Sq.	Std. Err. of the Est.
1.1	.535 ^a	.286	.280	.46978

a. Predictors: (Constant), Awareness of Green marketing

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Sq.	df	Mean Sq.	F	p-value
1.1	Regression	10.433	1	10.433	47.272	.000 ^b
	Residual	26.042	118	.221		
	Total	36.474	119			

a. Dependent Variable: Green Purchasing Behaviour

b. Predictors: (Constant), Awareness of Green Marketing

Coefficients

Model		Unstd. Coeff.		Std. Coeff.	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1.1	(Constant)	1.614	.289		5.591	.000
	Awareness of Green Marketing	.526	.076	.535	6.875	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Green Purchasing Behaviour

From the results, higher awareness of green marketing was found to have a positive correlation with green purchasing behaviour towards products of Himachal Pradesh. ($r=.535$ and $p<.05$). About the influence of Higher awareness of green marketing towards green purchasing behaviour, the p-value was found to be significant ($p<.05$). It was stated that awareness of green marketing was found to be a neutral predictor of green purchase behaviour. The R2 for green consumer behaviour as a dependent variable was .286 which indicates that approximately 28.6 % of the variation in green purchasing behaviour is

explained by awareness of green marketing. Therefore, the alternate hypothesis, Higher awareness of green marketing positively influences green purchasing behaviour towards green and rural products of Himachal Pradesh is accepted.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Sq.	Adj. R Sq.	Std. Err. of the Est.
1.2	.665 ^a	.442	.438	.41517

a. Predictors: (Constant), Attitude toward Green Marketing

ANOVA

Model		Sum Sq.	df	Mean Sq.	F	p-value
1.2	Regression	16.135	1	16.135	93.608	.000 ^b
	Residual	20.339	118	.172		
	Total	36.474	119			

a. Dependent Variable: Green Purchasing Behaviour

b. Predictors: (Constant), Attitude toward Green Marketing

Coefficients

Model		Unstd. Coeff.		Std. Coeff.	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1.2	(Constant)	.858	.284		3.026	.003
	Attitude toward Green Marketing	.701	.072	.665	9.675	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Green Purchasing Behaviour

From the results, a favourable attitude towards green marketing was found to have a positive correlation with the willingness to pay a premium for green and rural products. ($r=.665$ and $p<.05$). Concerning the influence of a favourable attitude toward Green Marketing towards green purchasing behaviour the p-value was found to be significant ($p<.05$). It was stated that attitude towards green marketing was found to be a neutral predictor of green purchase behaviour. The R2 for green purchasing behaviour as a dependent variable was .442 which indicated that approximately 44.2 % of the variation in green purchasing behaviour is explained by attitude towards green marketing. Therefore, the alternate hypothesis, favorable attitudes towards green marketing increase the willingness to pay a premium for green and rural products is accepted.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Sq.	Adj. R Sq.	Std. Err. of the Est.
1.3	.545 ^a	.296	.291	.46633

a. Predictors: (Constant), Perception of Marketing Strategies for Green Products

ANOVA

	Sum Sq.	df	Mean Sq.	F	p-value
Regression	10.814	1	10.814	49.729	.000 ^b
Residual	25.660	118	.217		
Total	36.474	119			

a. Dependent Variable: Green Purchasing Behaviour

b. Predictors: (Constant), Perception of Marketing Strategies for Green Products

Coefficients

Model		Unstd. Coeff.		Std. Coeff.	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1.3	(Constant)	1.624	.280		5.795	.000
	Perception of Marketing Strategies for Green Products	.526	.075	.545	7.052	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Green Purchasing Behaviour

From the results, Perception of Marketing Strategies for green products was found to have a positive correlation with green consumer behaviour towards green and rural products of Himachal Pradesh. ($r=.545$ and $p<.05$). Concerning the influence of, Perception of marketing strategies for green products towards green purchasing behaviour the p-value was found to be significant ($p<.05$). It stated that perception of

marketing strategies for green products was found to be a neutral predictor of green purchase behaviour. The R2 for green consumer behaviour as a dependent variable was .296 which indicated that approximately 29.6 % of the variation in green consumer behaviour is explained by perception of marketing strategies for green products. Therefore, the alternate hypothesis, Consumers with a positive perception of green marketing strategies are more likely to exhibit green purchasing behaviour is accepted.

3.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

SHG Activities and Products

The interview is conducted in a semi-structured way. In this method, data is collected from the Self Help Groups of Kangra district, with more than 7900 self-help groups. From this huge number of SHGs associated with the Chinmaya Organisation for Rural Development (CORD) in Kangra district engage in a wide range of socio-economic and cultural activities. These SHGs contribute significantly to rural development by empowering women, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting eco-friendly products.

Key Observations from the interview

Product Categories and Features

- The SHGs produce a diverse range of products such as food items, eco-friendly handcrafted decor, garments, and traditional utility items such as semiya, amchur, herbal shampoos, Kangra paintings, wool shawls, and pottery items.
- The products reflect the cultural heritage of Himachal Pradesh and are largely eco-friendly, crafted with sustainable practices. For example leaf plates (dona- pattal), bamboo products, pine needle products, herbal tea, woollen shawls, pottery and other handicrafts.
- Abhilasha Gram Sangathan and Ekta Gram Sangathan, are among those organisations that have embraced proper branding, packaging, and compliance with certifications like FSSAI, enhancing their visibility and credibility in the market.

Marketing and Challenges

- **Visibility and Branding Issues:** While organisations like Abhilasha Gram Sangathan and Ekta Gram Sangathan excel in branding, most SHGs face challenges due to unbranded packaging, especially for food products, due to poor knowledge and cumbersome processing to attain certification.
- **Limited Reach:** The market for these products is primarily local, with low visibility in urban or national markets.
- **Cost Concerns:** Feedback indicates that the products are perceived as overpriced compared to competitors, which affects sales despite their eco-friendly appeal.
- **Consumer Awareness:** Demand remains limited as consumer preferences for eco-friendly products are still evolving.

Role of Training and Support

- CORD provides training programs in various crafts such as sewing, knitting, pottery making, and wool weaving, enabling SHG members to diversify their skills and abilities.

➤ CORD also provide leadership training for women in panchayat elections and financial literacy initiatives to further enhance empowerment.

➤ Initiatives like Bal Vihar Groups and Yuvti Samuh focus on cultural and health education for children and adolescents.

Cultural and Community Role

➤ SHG meetings incorporate religious rituals, folk songs, and cultural preservation activities.

➤ Members of SHGs address domestic violence cases and, when required, seek support from CORD's legal cell.

➤ Engagement in agricultural education and community support initiatives like Kisan Clubs enhances rural development.

Consumer Feedback and Suggestions

➤ Customers appreciate the eco-friendly nature and quality of the products, but suggest improvements in affordability and visibility of the products in the market.

➤ There is a need for enhanced advertising, promotion, and digital marketing to tap into urban markets.

➤ Customers also lacks trusts due to non-compliance with credible certification and branding.

Success Stories

➤ *Abhilasha Gram Sangathan (Chamunda, Kangra):* Produces herbal products using raw materials from organic farming. Their branding and eco-certifications contribute to better market reception.

➤ *Ekta Gram Sangathan (Dharamshala, Kangra):* Operates a permanent shop at the DC office and participates in national exhibitions, significantly improving product reach. Their products are FSSAI- certified and display key logos for authenticity.

➤ *Surya Uday Charitable Trust (Kaniyara, Kangra):* A unique initiative involving specially-abled children in production, offering them livelihood opportunities after training in camps.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study have two perspectives: one is the consumer perspective, in which the awareness, attitude and perception of the consumers towards green marketing are observed, and the other perspective is from the SHG of District Kangra, which is involved in the production and selling of green and rural products which are produced with sustainable practices by the women.

In District Kangra, Self Help Groups (SHGs) create traditional products that reflect the ecosystem and the cultural tradition of Himachal Pradesh. Supported by CORD, SHGs develop skillsets among rural women, encourage the development of more sustainable methods, and provide financial assistance. However, pricing strategies and distribution methods limit the ability of these traditional products to reach markets. Insufficient promotion and visibility are major barriers for these traditional products, and they also suffer from issues related to branding and legal compliance (especially for food products). Implementing eco-labels and certifications (such as FSSAI) is very important for improving consumer confidence and product marketability. SHGs have received positive

responses from consumers who have eco-friendly products, which provides evidence that there is an opportunity to take advantage of the current green marketing trends. Still, demand for SHGs' products is limited due to a lack of advertising and general consumer awareness. Improving branding, ensuring compliance with legal regulations, and building promotional campaigns at both the local and block levels will improve visibility and sales for SHGs products. This strategy will not only increase the market value of these goods but also establish a distinctive identity for the region, contributing to sustainable livelihoods for rural communities.

5. SUGGESTION

5.1 Legal Compliance

Using green marketing strategies with the existing laws will help promote rural and heritage products from Himachal Pradesh. The Indian Government has put many schemes, policies and laws in place to encourage sustainable development like Participatory guarantee continues to work towards the goals of organic farming, Eco- Mark for green labelled products, FASSI Norms for food safety and the Plastic Waste Management Rules of 2016. Using these laws as tools, self-help groups in Himachal Pradesh can increase the marketability of their products. These groups can use these particular laws to gain certain certifications and eco-labels and use this to convey the environmental and social sustainability of their products through green marketing campaigns. The Himachal Pradesh State Government also assisted self-help groups by creating new initiatives like "One District, One Product" to help promote the unique products of each district, which can also further enhance the promotion of these products through targeted green marketing. Through the synergy created by implementing existing policy and legal frameworks into their marketing strategies, self-help groups in the State of Himachal Pradesh will have more success in their attempts to promote their rural and heritage products. At the same time they will also be able to contribute to the overall goal of sustainable development of the State of Himachal Pradesh and the country of India.

5.2 Branding

In order to promote their rural and green products effectively, self-help groups and local business owners in Himachal Pradesh should utilize the power of branding. Branding will enable them to create an identity for their products which cannot be replicated by competitors, develop a connection with customers on an emotional level and raise the perceived value of their product offerings.

Effective branding strategies for green rural and heritage products from Himachal Pradesh may include:

➤ Highlighting the unique cultural and environmental narratives associated with the products

➤ Emphasising the sustainability and eco-friendly attributes of the production processes

➤ Use the state's rich resources (natural heritage and biodiversity) to attract buyers.

➤ Incorporating local traditional designs, motifs, and storytelling elements into the product packaging and marketing collateral

➤ There is potential for further strengthening the branding of rural and green products from Himachal Pradesh through legal/policy means. Certification and license schemes, such as the Geographical Indication tag, can help authenticate the provenance and quality of these products

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