

"Fostering Eco-Conscious Consumerism: The Impact of Customer Education on Sustainable Purchase Intention"

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Abstract

Customer education serves as a crucial communication strategy to enhance sustainable purchase intentions. This study investigates the elements that customer education can amplify to promote sustainable purchasing of eco-friendly products. By analyzing existing customer education practices, the study identifies key areas to focus on fostering sustainable purchase intentions. A survey was designed following the research model and given to 480 consumers in Cochin City. Regression and mediation analyses reveal that customer education has a significant impact on sustainable product intentions. Moreover, awareness regarding food waste, environmental concerns, and subjective product knowledge plays a mediating role in linking customer education to sustainable purchase intentions. These results hold significant implications for marketers of sustainable products, addressing gaps identified in prior literature reviews. This study presents original research conducted in the Indian context.

Keywords: Environmental concern, Food waste awareness, Subjective product knowledge, green products, Intention to buy, Customer education

Introduction

The promotion of sustainable food consumption is critical for global sustainability (Nguyen, 2020; Rahman et al., 2020). The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals emphasize sustainable production and consumption, with a specific focus on the environmental impact of food consumption. However, while significant research has been conducted on factors influencing organic food purchases, limited attention has been paid to the role of customer education in promoting eco-friendly consumption.

This study aims to investigate the impact of customer education on the intention to purchase eco-friendly products, specifically within the Indian context. By understanding how consumer education influences sustainable purchasing behavior, this research aims to fill gaps in the existing literature and provide practical insights for marketers seeking to promote sustainable consumer practices.

Literature Review

Sustainable consumption behaviors, particularly regarding organic food purchases, are influenced by various psychological, social, and environmental factors (Hughner et al., 2007; Rana et al., 2017). While several studies have investigated the motivations behind sustainable consumption, customer education has been relatively underexplored. Early research highlighted the importance of educating consumers about eco-friendly products to improve purchase intentions (Ottman, 1998; Alwitt & Pitts, 1996).

Consumer education impacts sustainable consumption by increasing awareness about environmental concerns, food waste, and the benefits of eco-friendly products. According to Mehta and Chahal (2018), educating consumers through marketing strategies enhances their trust and satisfaction, leading to higher purchase intentions. Furthermore, awareness campaigns about food waste and sustainability have shown that educating consumers can significantly influence their purchasing decisions (Goldsmith & Piscopo, 2014; McNeal, 1978).

Research on sustainable purchase intention has found that consumers are more likely to buy eco-friendly products when they are informed about their environmental and social impacts (Young et al., 2010). However, the relationship between customer education and sustainable purchase intention remains under-researched, especially in the context of emerging markets like India. This study aims to address this gap by exploring how education on food waste, environmental issues, and subjective product knowledge can mediate the relationship between customer education and sustainable purchase intentions.

This study adopts a descriptive approach, focusing on consumers in Cochin City. A random sample of 480 participants was selected using a systematic survey. The research instrument consisted of a structured questionnaire with six sections: Customer Education, Food Waste Awareness, Environmental Concern, Subjective Knowledge Awareness, Sustainable Purchase Intention, and Demographic Information. Data was analyzed using regression and mediation analyses to examine the relationships between customer education and sustainable purchase intentions, along with the mediating effects of awareness variables.

Results

Reliability Analysis:

The internal consistency of the scales was strong. Cronbach's alpha values for Customer Education (0.839), Food Waste Awareness (0.734), Environmental Awareness (0.713), Subjective Knowledge Awareness (0.763), and Sustainable Product Purchase Intention (0.761) indicate reliability.

Correlation Analysis:

Relationship	Correlation (r)	p-value
Customer Education & Food Waste Awareness	-0.753	< 0.000
Customer Education & Environmental Awareness	0.578	< 0.000
Customer Education & Subjective Knowledge Awareness	0.472	< 0.000
Customer Education & Sustainable Product Purchase Intention	0.522	< 0.000
Food Waste Awareness & Sustainable Product Purchase Intention	0.568	< 0.000
Environmental Awareness & Sustainable Product Purchase Intention	0.563	< 0.000
Subjective Knowledge Awareness & Sustainable Product Purchase Intention	0.49	< 0.000

Significant positive correlations were found between all variables:

- Customer Education and Food Waste Awareness ($r = 0.753$, $p < 0.000$)
- Customer Education and Environmental Awareness ($r = 0.578$, $p < 0.000$)
- Customer Education and Subjective Knowledge Awareness ($r = 0.472$, $p < 0.000$)
- Customer Education and Sustainable Product Purchase Intention ($r = 0.522$, $p < 0.000$)

These results suggest that increased customer education leads to greater awareness of food waste, environmental concerns, and sustainability, which in turn influences purchasing intentions.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that customer education significantly influences sustainable purchase intentions. The regression and mediation analyses reveal that customer education enhances food waste awareness, environmental concern, and subjective knowledge, all of which mediate the relationship between education and sustainable consumption behavior.

The results are consistent with existing research, which highlights the importance of education in fostering pro-environmental behaviors (Mehta & Chahal, 2018; Young et al., 2010). Notably, food waste awareness emerged as a key mediator in the CE-SPI relationship, suggesting that consumers who are educated about the impacts of food waste are more likely to make sustainable purchase decisions. Environmental awareness and subjective knowledge also play critical roles in shaping consumer behavior.

While the study's scope is limited to Cochin City, its findings have implications for marketers aiming to promote sustainable products. The results emphasize the value of customer education as an effective tool for increasing sustainable purchase intentions in emerging markets.

Conclusion

This research underscores the importance of customer education in promoting sustainable consumption. By enhancing awareness of food waste, environmental issues, and sustainability, education can drive more informed purchasing decisions. Marketers should prioritize educational campaigns to foster eco-conscious consumerism and support the adoption of sustainable practices. Future research could explore additional mediators and extend the findings to other regions to generalize the impact of customer education on sustainable purchase intentions.

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