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Green Marketing and Rural Consumer Behaviour: Awareness of Eco-Friendly Products in Poondi, Thanjavur

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Abstract

Recent shifts in environmental campaigns and market policies are gradually making rural shoppers more aware of green products and the concept of sustainable purchasing. In emerging villages such as Poondi in the Thanjavur district, green marketing has begun to influence consumer habits, offering a valuable lens through which to study this group. The present research examines how rural consumers interpret firms' messages, how effectively they recognise eco-friendly products, and how willing they are to translate that awareness into purchasing behaviour. Based on data from 412 respondents, the findings indicate that concern for the environment, confidence in eco labels, effective promotional efforts, and ready access to products each enhance buying behaviour, whereas high price sensitivity discourages it. Furthermore, education and regular exposure to the media strengthen the impact of green marketing efforts on rural consumers' decision-making. Collectively, the results confirm all seven hypotheses and highlight the complex forces shaping sustainable consumption in rural India.

Key Words: *Green Marketing, Consumer Behaviour, Rural Consumers.*

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1. Introduction

Green marketing is the marketing of products that are perceived as environmentally safe. In the current global context, environmental concerns have become a crucial factor in business strategy and consumer decision-making (Ottman, 2011). The shift in consumer preference towards green products is being witnessed not only in urban but also in rural markets, driven by rising awareness and lifestyle changes. In India, the rural market is gradually transforming with an increased presence of green product offerings and green marketing practices through various public and private initiatives.

Traditionally, rural consumers have been regarded as price-sensitive and less brand-conscious, but the increasing reach of digital media and government-led sustainability campaigns have altered their exposure to environmental issues (Singh & Pandey, 2020). Consumers in rural locations such as Poondi in the Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu are increasingly encountering green advertisements and eco-labels, which is influencing their purchase intentions. However, the adoption of green products remains a challenge due to socio-economic constraints and limited availability of eco-friendly alternatives in the rural retail network.

Green marketing influences consumer behaviour through awareness-building and psychological appeal (Rahbar & Wahid, 2011). However, the actual behavioural response to green messages is not uniform. Rural consumers are influenced by trust in claims, perceived product benefits, peer recommendations, and perceived pricing. Many rural households in Tamil Nadu rely on traditional knowledge and local preferences when making buying decisions and may not respond to green marketing unless it aligns with their personal, economic, and cultural values.

Poondi, a semi-rural village in the Thanjavur district, is witnessing changing consumption patterns due to improved education, exposure to urban markets, and better infrastructure. Yet, academic literature and empirical studies focusing exclusively on green marketing and rural consumer behaviour in this region remain limited. While major studies in green marketing have been conducted in urban settings (Prakash & Pathak, 2017; Saxena & Khandelwal, 2012), there exists a research gap in understanding how green marketing strategies affect rural consumer perception and behaviour, particularly in South Indian villages.

Therefore, the present research is carried out in Poondi village of Thanjavur district, Tamil Nadu, with the objective of examining the factors influencing green product awareness and rural consumer behaviour, and to understand the mediating role of trust and environmental concern in this context. The study aims to provide deeper insights into rural consumer psychology and to offer strategic directions to marketers to enhance the reach and effectiveness of green marketing campaigns in rural India.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Green Marketing and Environmental Concern

Environmental concern is the overall awareness people have of nature-related problems and the extent to which they act to protect the environment. Even in rural areas, shoppers who care about the environment will choose green goods, as long as the items still meet their basic needs (Mostafa, 2007). In villages, this concern often comes from local farming customs, lessons taught in school, and news or films that show the damage done by pollution and climate change. Research shows that such concern strongly pushes consumers to buy green products and to welcome marketing campaigns that highlight their ecological benefits (Kumar & Ghodeswar, 2015; Joshi & Rahman, 2015).

2.2 Green Marketing and Trust in Eco Labels

Trust is simply believing that a product does what its label says it does. In green marketing, eco labels and third-party seals serve as handy, visible proof of a product's environmental friendliness. In rural villages, consumers who can spot and accept these signs are much more likely to buy the item. When trust is low or false information spreads, even well-funded green campaigns struggle to make an impact. Research shows that shoppers routinely check reliable sources—government-approved stickers, well-known shops, and friends—before accepting

any green promise (Rahbar & Wahid, 2011; D-Souza et al., 2006). In Poondi, local trust in labels is probably strengthened by neighbour approval, guidance from respected groups, and ongoing community education.

2.3 Green Marketing and Promotional Effectiveness

Promotional effectiveness refers to how well green marketing messages spark awareness and interest in planet-friendly products. In many rural settings, including Poondi, promotion leans on local channels: village fairs, hand-painted posters, classroom skits, and gatherings at the community centre. When carefully crafted, such outreach does more than inform—it shifts how villagers see eco-products and strengthens their trust in the brands behind them (Saxena & Khandelwal, 2012). Yet traditional media can only reach a small audience, timing may clash with harvest seasons, and few places offer live demonstrations, all of which blunt the campaigns' punch. Consequently, any tool employed needs to match local language, culture, and income level if it is to break through.

2.4 Green Marketing and Price Sensitivity

Price sensitivity measures how strongly a product's cost sways a buyer's decision to purchase or walk away. Across rural India—and especially in Poondi—most shoppers from low- and middle-income households treat price as the first — and sometimes the only— hurdle before any purchase. Because eco-friendly lines often carry a premium linked to greener materials and cleaner production, they encounter pushback unless people can clearly see an added benefit or long-term savings (Kaur & Sandhu, 2019). Research shows that this quest for the best price still outweighs even the most persuasive advertising, and it hits hardest when cheaper alternatives offer the same basic function.

2.5 Green Marketing and Product Availability

Product availability speaks to how easily consumers can find and buy eco-friendly goods. Awareness and purchase intent mean little if shelves remain bare, and rural shoppers in villages such as Poondi experience this gap daily. Logistics bottlenecks, low volume, and dispersed demand slow green supply chains, so many green offerings never reach small local markets. Research confirms that availability shapes buying habits, amplifying or softening the impact of green marketing appeals in any region (Yadav & Pathak, 2016; Gupta & Ogden, 2009).

2.6 Education and Media Exposure as Mediators

Education and media exposure serve as important bridges between green marketing and consumer behaviour. People with higher levels of schooling are better at decoding sustainability claims and deciding to act on them. Access to smartphones, radio shows, or simple pamphlets also keeps Poondi's residents updated on environmental topics and new green products. Evidence shows that together, these factors boost eco-knowledge, shift attitudes and nudge more rural households toward planet-friendly purchases (Ottman, 2011; Lee, 2008; Tanushree & Singh, 2020).

3. Hypotheses of the Study

The study advances the following testable propositions:

- H1: Concern for the environment shapes rural shopping habits in a favourable direction towards green products.
- H2: Confidence in eco labels steers rural shoppers to choose green products more often.
- H3: Well-crafted promotions nudge rural consumers to buy green products more regularly.
- H4: Strong sensitivity to price discourages rural consumers from opting for green products.
- H5: Ready access to green goods boosts rural households' willingness to include them in purchases.
- H6: Higher education strengthens the link between green marketing efforts and rural consumer behaviour.
- H7: Greater exposure to media reinforces the connection between green marketing efforts and rural purchasing choices.

4. Methodology

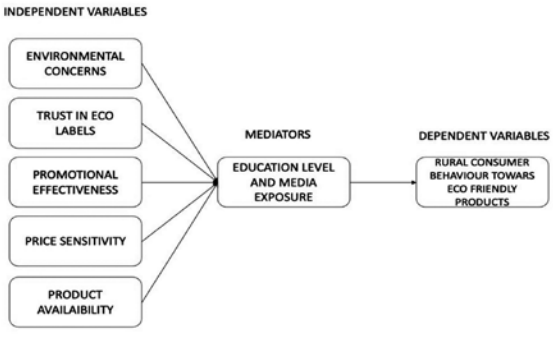
The study is focused on Poondi Village. A household listing was used as the sampling frame, provided by the local panchayat. Through this household listing, 600 heads of households were selected via a designed systematic procedure that approximated sampling. It was a system designed to sample as randomly as possible. It was a field study conducted in the rural areas. To determine the respondents, rural consumers from the surrounding areas of Poondi who purchased domestic goods were selected. All respondents underwent multiple rounds of scrutiny to identify those who had thoughtfully completed the questions. The selected completed records comprised 412 hard copies. The selected set of records was then used for statistical analysis. The questionnaire set used was designed to measure a person's concern, attitude, and willingness to buy 'Green' products. The respondents were selected based on trust, effectiveness, price, and product availability. The rest included demographic information, which, along with potential mediators, was collected to determine rural purchasing behaviour.

5. Measurement of Scale

The survey items examining environmental concern, trust in eco-labels, and promotional effectiveness follow the scales developed by Mostafa (2007) and by Rahbar and Wahid (2011). Price sensitivity draws on the work of Kaur and Sandhu (2019), while product availability is anchored in Gupta and Ogden's (2009) framework. Education level and media exposure are coded as binary and ordinal variables according to local classification guidelines. The complete structural model can be seen in Table 1.

Figure 1:

Model for this Research



Note: In the model, a direct arrow runs from each independent variable straight to the dependent variable. Education level and media exposure further act as mediators between the green marketing elements and rural consumer behaviour.

6. Results

6.1 Personal Information on Rural Consumers

Of the 412 survey participants, 51.7% identify as female and 48.3% as male. Most respondents, 42.96%, fall within the 31-to-40-year age bracket, while only 8.5% are aged 21 to 30. In terms of education, 35.19% have completed an undergraduate degree, and another 11.65% finished only secondary school. Regarding household income, 39.32% report earnings below Rs 300,000 per year, yet 12.38% earn above Rs 600,000 annually. Finally, 88.11% of the sample is married, leaving 11.89% unmarried (see Table 1).

Table 1

Personal Information of Respondents

Personal Information	Number	%
Gender		
Male	199	48.3
Female	213	51.7
Age (Years)		
21 – 30 years	35	8.5
31 – 40 years	177	42.96
41 – 50 years	121	29.37
51 – 60 years	79	19.17
Education		
Secondary	48	11.65
Higher Secondary	66	16.02
Diploma	68	16.5
Under-Graduation	145	35.19
Post-Graduation	85	20.63
Income Per Annum		
Less than Rs.3,00,000	162	39.32
Rs.3,00,001– Rs.4,50,000	103	25
Rs.4,50,001 – Rs.6,00,000	96	23.3
More than Rs.6,00,000	51	12.38
Marital Status		
Unmarried	49	11.89
Married	363	88.11

6.2 Descriptive Statistics of Constructs

Media exposure and rural consumer behaviour are positively and highly correlated, with an R-value of 0.69. All other pairwise correlation coefficients between the constructs fall below 0.70, indicating that multicollinearity is not a concern in the data.

Table 2

Mean, SD and Coefficients of Correlation

Particulars	**M**	**SD**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
1. Environment Concern	3.92	0.44	1						
2. Trust in Eco Labels	3.85	0.51	0.36**	1					
3. Promotional Effectiveness	3.78	0.49	0.29**	0.33**	1				
4. Price Sensitivity	3.63	0.42	-0.27**	-0.24**	-0.19**	1			
5. Product Availability	3.74	0.46	0.31**	0.28**	0.30**	-0.21**	1		
6. Education Level	3.69	0.39	0.41**	0.35**	0.38**	-0.26**	0.29**	1	
7. Media Exposure	3.81	0.47	0.43**	0.37**	0.40**	-0.31**	0.36**	0.42**	1
8. Rural Consumer Behaviour	4.04	0.33	0.56**	0.59**	0.61**	-0.48**	0.57**	0.62**	0.69**

Note*: ** Significant at 1% level*

6.3 Reliability and Validity

The reliability and validity of constructs are disclosed in Table 4.

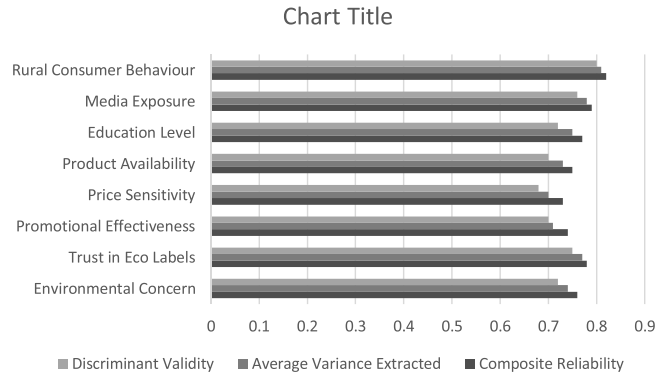
Table 3

Reliability and Validity

Constructs	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted	Discriminant Validity
Environmental Concern	0.76	0.74	0.72
Trust in Eco Labels	0.78	0.77	0.75
Promotional Effectiveness	0.74	0.71	0.7
Price Sensitivity	0.73	0.7	0.68
Product Availability	0.75	0.73	0.7
Education Level	0.77	0.75	0.72
Media Exposure	0.79	0.78	0.76
Rural Consumer Behaviour	0.82	0.81	0.8

Figure 2

Reliability and Validity



Examination of the preceding table indicates that composite reliability scores for each construct exceed the generally accepted threshold of 0.70. Similarly, average variance extracted scores surpass the 0.50 benchmark, while the discriminant validity coefficients exceed 0.60. Collectively, these findings provide strong evidence that the study's constructs demonstrate robust convergent validity.

6.4 Influence of Green Marketing Factors on Rural Consumer Behaviour

To study the influence of green marketing factors on rural consumer behaviour, regression analysis is used, and the outcomes are disclosed in Table 5.

Table 4:

Outcomes of Regression

Particulars	Partial Regression Coefficient (Unstandardized)	t-Value	Sig.
Intercept	29.742**	15.682	0
Environmental Concern	.482**	9.326	0
Trust in Eco Labels	.419**	8.473	0
Promotional Effectiveness	.375**	7.915	0
Price Sensitivity	-.403**	8.188	0
Product Availability	.354**	7.122	0

R^2 = 0.54 **Adjusted R^2** = 0.52 **F-Value** = 36.219** **Sig.** = .000

Note: Significant at 1% level

The regression analysis reveals that the coefficients for environmental concern (β = 0.482), trust in eco-labels (β = 0.419), promotional effectiveness (β = 0.375), and product availability (β = 0.354) are all significant at the 1 per cent level, and each pulls rural purchasing behaviour upward in a statistically meaningful way. In contrast, price sensitivity exerts a notable negative influence, with a coefficient of β = -0.403 that is likewise significant at the same stringent level. Overall, the model is moderately strong—its omnibus test yields F = 36.219 at 1 per cent, yielding an R^2 of 0.54 and an adjusted R^2 of 0.52, indicating that the selected predictors account for approximately 52 per cent of the observed variation in rural consumer behaviour.

6.5 Green Marketing Factors, Mediators and Rural Consumer Behaviour

The Structural Equation Model is used to examine structural relations amongst green marketing factors, mediators and rural consumer behaviour and the outcome is disclosed in Table 6.

Table 5

Standardized Coefficients

Path	Standardized Coefficients	CR	P-Value
ME ← PS (Price Sensitivity)	-0.547	10.638	***
ME ← EC (Environmental Concern)	0.468	9.784	***
ME ← TE (Trust in Eco Labels)	0.439	8.821	***
ME ← PE (Promotional Effectiveness)	0.394	8.093	***
ME ← PA (Product Availability)	0.415	7.966	***
RCB ← ME (Media Exposure)	0.794	16.417	***
RCB ← EL (Education Level)	0.772	15.906	***

Note: ME = Media Exposure; EC = Environmental Concern; TE = Trust in Eco Labels; PE = Promotional Effectiveness; PS = Price Sensitivity; PA = Product Availability; EL = Education Level; RCB = Rural Consumer Behaviour

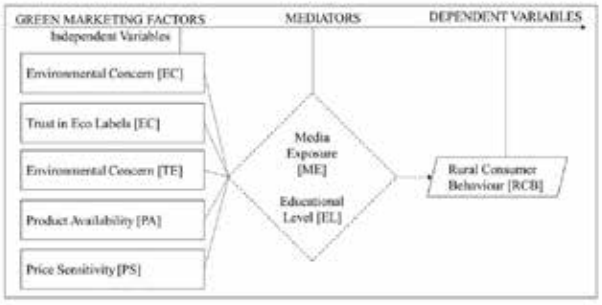
*** Significant at the 1% level

Structural equation modelling reveals that environmental concern (β = .468), trust in eco-labels (β = .439), promotional effectiveness (β = .394), and product availability (β = .415) each shape media exposure directly and positively. In sharp contrast, price sensitivity significantly and negatively depresses media exposure (β = -.547), again at the 1% threshold. Turning to the rural market, standardised coefficients show that education level also correlates strongly with media exposure (β =.772) and ultimately with rural consumer behaviour (β =.794), both significant at the same 1% level. Collectively, these results underscore that greater exposure to media, coupled with higher educational attainment, drives rural consumer behaviour in a positive, direct

manner. A path diagram illustrating this sequence for rural consumers appears in Table 7.

Figure 3

Path Structure for Rural Consumer Behaviour



Note: Each dimension of green marketing directly influences the extent of media exposure.

Both media exposure and consumers' educational attainment directly shape purchasing behaviours among rural shoppers. Higher price sensitivity, however, reduces the time and attention these consumers devote to green messages. In the structural model, the arrows (→) mark the significant, direct paths verified through structural equation modelling.

7. Discussion

The present study indicates that concern for the environment shapes rural buying patterns in a positive direction. Within the context of Poondi village, this finding is consistent with earlier work by Mostafa (2007), Kumar and Ghodeswar (2015), Joshi and Rahman (2015), and Yadav and Pathak (2016). Likewise, trust in eco-friendly labels emerged as a significant influence, aligning with the findings of Rahbar and Wahid (2011), D'Souza et al. (2006), and Gupta and Ogden (2009).

Promotional messages that emphasise green credentials were also found to encourage consumption, reflecting trends noted by Saxena and Khandelwal (2012), Lee (2008), and Ottman (2011). Conversely, price sensitivity discouraged the uptake of sustainable goods, echoing the observations of Kaur and Sandhu (2019), Tanushree and Singh (2020), and Jain and Kaur (2022). Availability of green products further shaped favourable responses among rural households, consistent with prior research by Gupta and Ogden (2009), Yadav and Pathak (2016), and Sharma and Choudhury (2021).

In addition, the analysis shows that environmental concern, confidence in green labels, promotional campaigns, and product availability are all positively associated with media exposure, whereas price sensitivity reduces it. Media exposure and educational attainment then act as mediating variables, linking these green-marketing drivers to observable behaviour. Although this pattern reflects a localised context, it supports broader theoretical perspectives documented in prior studies by Ottman (2011), Lee (2008), Tanushree and Singh (2020), and Sharma and Dwivedi (2023).

8. Conclusion

This investigation provides localised insights into the link between green marketing and the purchasing habits of rural shoppers, with specific reference to Poondi village in Thanjavur. Four factors, environmental concern, faith in eco-labels, the strength of promotional messages, and the ease with which green goods can be found, were observed to positively influence willingness to purchase eco-friendly products in this setting. Price sensitivity, however, emerged as a significant constraint. Households with limited disposable income perceived cost as the main barrier, often rejecting eco-friendly goods despite favourable attitudes. This highlights the persistent trade-off between ecological aspirations and economic realities in semi-rural markets such as Poondi. The study further found that access to media and higher levels of education enhance the effectiveness of green marketing by improving consumers' ability to interpret, evaluate, and act on sustainability claims. While these findings are specific to Poondi, they point to potential patterns that may hold in similar rural contexts, though generalisations to all of rural India should be made with caution. Overall, confirmation of the proposed hypotheses strengthens the view that rural consumers are not indifferent to sustainability but require credible, affordable, and contextually meaningful messages to translate awareness into practice.

This study extends the green marketing literature by highlighting rural consumers' awareness and

responsiveness in an under-researched context, demonstrating how environmental concern, eco-label credibility, and promotional messaging interact with socio-economic factors to shape sustainable purchasing behaviour. It contributes to consumer behaviour theory by showing that economic constraints and educational exposure jointly mediate the translation of pro-environmental attitudes into actual purchase decisions.

For practitioners, these findings suggest that marketers targeting rural consumers should emphasise affordability and the credibility of eco-labels, while tailoring promotional messages to local media and literacy levels. Strategies such as transparent pricing, accessible distribution channels, and culturally relevant messaging can strengthen trust and enhance the adoption of green products. Firms should also consider educational campaigns to raise awareness and facilitate the interpretation of sustainability claims.

9. Limitations

The investigation faces several methodological and contextual constraints. First, the analyses depend on 412 participants from a single village in the Thanjavur district, Poondi. Though Poondi was chosen for its semi-rural features and a burgeoning consumer class, any conclusions drawn here apply only to similar enclaves, not to the rural hinterlands of Tamil Nadu or India. Rural markets differ in culture, dialect, economies, and infrastructure, and each one may respond differently to green marketing stimuli. Also, while the Panchayat's household lists formed the basis of the sampling frame, in rural areas achieving total randomness in unit selection in the absence of geographical and temporal constraints is unrealistic or impossible.

Second, the analysis focuses on five predictors—environmental concern, trust in eco-labels, effectiveness of promotion, price sensitivity, and product availability—and two mediators: media exposure and education. Factors such as peer influence, brand recognition, religious beliefs, and health benefits are not considered. Furthermore, the research is cross-sectional and thus captures a single moment in time, which may shift as attitudes towards and policies on the markets develop or as new policies are introduced.

Third, while the study utilised a fixed-form questionnaire, self-reported answers can still be prone to social desirability bias, particularly when the questions address environmental concerns and awareness. Rural respondents may overstate their support of green products because they think that is the answer the researchers want to hear, or because they are aware of how they are perceived by others in the community. Since data is drawn from a single village, caution should be exercised in generalising findings across all of rural India. Future studies may compare multiple rural regions across different states to capture cultural, economic, and demographic diversity. Longitudinal research could further examine how consumer attitudes evolve as rural markets mature and as green products become more widely available and affordable. Additionally, future work may explore the role of social influence, local community networks, and evolving policy incentives in shaping rural green consumption patterns.

10. Agenda for Future Research

Subsequent studies should broaden their scope by comparing several rural and peri-urban sites, enabling scholars to examine how green shopping habits differ across economic and cultural contexts. That broader perspective could uncover regional trends and guide the design of realistic, inclusive marketing strategies. Another worthwhile approach is to track how community groups, such as self-help organisations, cooperatives, and local NGOs, increase awareness of green products and encourage people to buy them. Because trust in new items often spreads through friends, neighbours, and casual talks in villages, researchers need richer, qualitative data on informal word-of-mouth before drawing firm conclusions. Longitudinal research could therefore track how rural shoppers change their habits in response to ongoing green marketing over months or years. It might also connect nationwide campaigns like Swachh Bharat Abhiyan or the Green India Mission to shifts in eco-literacy and purchasing patterns, showing whether policies drive greener baskets in villages. Beyond this, scholars should examine the gap between intention and action in rural green

buying—consumers often say they back eco-friendly products but fall short at the checkout. Pinpointing the hurdles—limited access, higher prices, or trust that still separate green attitudes from green deeds—will guide marketers and policymakers as they craft more effective interventions. Taken together, the current study maps fresh territory for research on rural green marketing in India and beyond. Given deepening environmental stress and the rising buzz around sustainable consumption, learning how to win over rural consumers to the green path remains vital for researchers and firms that seek both profit and a planet-friendly impact.

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