



### THE IMPACT OF SUSTAINABILITY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON WOMEN'S CHOICES OF COSMETIC

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#### Abstract:

*The cosmetic industry has witnessed a significant transformation in recent years due to growing awareness of sustainability, environmental protection, and ethical consumerism. This study examines the impact of sustainability and ethical considerations on women's choices of cosmetic products in Valsad District, Gujarat. The research investigates how factors such as eco-friendly packaging, cruelty-free certification, organic ingredients, fair trade practices, and corporate social responsibility influence purchasing decisions among female consumers. A quantitative research design was adopted across different age groups, educational backgrounds, and income levels in Valsad District. The findings indicate that environmental consciousness and ethical awareness significantly affect brand preference and purchase intention. Younger and highly educated consumers show stronger inclination toward sustainable and ethically produced cosmetics. However, price sensitivity and limited product availability remain key challenges in adopting sustainable alternatives. The study highlights the growing shift from conventional cosmetic consumption toward responsible consumer behaviour in semi-urban and developing regions. The research offers practical implications for cosmetic brands, marketers, and policymakers aiming to promote sustainable consumption practices.*

**Keywords:** *Sustainability, Ethical Consumerism, Cosmetic Industry, Women Consumers, Green Marketing, Cruelty-Free Products, Eco-Friendly Packaging, Purchase Behaviour, Valsad District, Responsible Consumption.*

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#### Introduction:

In recent decades, the cosmetic industry has evolved beyond aesthetics to embrace sustainability, environmental stewardship, and ethical accountability. Female consumers, as dominant buyers of cosmetic products, are increasingly factoring in ethical criteria – such as cruelty-free testing, organic components, recyclable packaging, and fair trade sourcing – alongside traditional considerations of price, quality, and brand reputation (Smith & Browne, 2020).

Globally, sustainable consumption trends have reshaped market dynamics, compelling brands to integrate socially responsible practices. In India, although urban centres lead the shift, semi-urban districts such as Valsad are experiencing a gradual but noticeable rise in eco-conscious purchasing behaviour (Jain & Gupta, 2019). This research explores how sustainability and ethical frameworks influence women's choice of cosmetic products in Valsad District. By investigating consumer preferences,



attitudes, and decision patterns, the study contributes to understanding ethical consumption in emerging markets.

### Literature Review:

#### 1. Sustainability and Ethical Considerations in Consumer Behavior

Sustainability refers to long-term environmental balance by minimizing resource depletion, waste, and pollution (Peattie & Crane, 2005). Ethical consumerism extends sustainability, integrating moral values—animal welfare, fair labor, and social equity—into purchasing decisions. Theoretically, the **Theory of Planned Behaviour** (Ajzen, 1991) suggests that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control impact intention and actual behaviour. Applied to ethical consumption, attitudes toward sustainability predict consumer preference for green products (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006).

#### 2. Cosmic Industry Trends and Ethical Marketing

The cosmetic industry, valued at over \$500 billion globally (Statista, 2023), has witnessed increasing incorporation of ethical marketing. Young consumers demand transparency about sourcing, production, and corporate values (Euromonitor, 2021). Cruelty-free certification, eco-certs, and ingredient disclosure have become competitive differentiators. Research shows that ethical claims can positively influence brand loyalty and willingness-to-pay premium prices (Magnier & Schoormans, 2015).

#### 3. Women's Consumption Patterns in Emerging Markets

Studies indicate that women, especially those educated and digitally connected, are more inclined toward sustainable products (Niinimäki, 2010). In India, urban women demonstrate growing interest in organic, Ayurveda-inspired cosmetics (Sharma & Kaur, 2023). However, price sensitivity and limited

accessibility remain barriers in non-metro regions (Kumar & Singh, 2022).

#### 4. Gaps in Current Research

Although global studies address sustainable cosmetic consumption, research involving Indian semi-urban districts like Valsad is limited. This study fills that gap by linking sustainability awareness to actual buying decisions among women consumers.

### Research Objectives and Questions

#### 1. Objectives

- To determine the level of awareness about sustainability and ethical issues among female cosmetic buyers in Valsad.
- To assess the influence of eco-friendly packaging, cruelty-free certification, and organic ingredients on purchase decisions.
- To analyze demographic factors (age, education, income) impacting ethical consumption.
- To identify barriers preventing women from adopting sustainable cosmetics.

#### 2. Research Questions

1. What is the level of awareness regarding sustainability among women in Valsad?
2. Do ethical considerations significantly influence cosmetic purchasing decisions?
3. How do socio-demographic variables affect sustainable product choice?
4. What are key barriers to adopting sustainable cosmetic products?

### Methodology:

#### 1. Research Design

A quantitative cross-sectional design was used. Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires administered face-to-face.

#### 2. Sample & Sampling Technique

A sample of 400 women consumers from Valsad



District was selected using stratified random sampling across age, education, and income groups.

### 3. Data Collection Instrument

The survey covered the following sections:

- **Demographics:** age, education, income, occupation.
- **Awareness:** familiarity with sustainability concepts.
- **Purchase Behaviour:** frequency, brand preference, source of information.
- **Ethical Considerations:** importance of certifications, ethical clai
- **Barriers:** cost, availability, scepticism about clai

Responses were recorded on a **five-point Likert scale** (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

### 4. Data Analysis

Data were coded and entered in SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics, Chi-Square tests, and regression analysis were used to analyze relationships between variables.

### Findings:

#### 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age (18–25)	96	24
Age (26–35)	136	34
Age (36–45)	96	24
Age (46+)	72	18
Education (Graduate+)	280	70
Education (School)	120	30
Income (>Rs40,000)	144	36
Income (<Rs40,000)	256	64

### 2. Awareness Levels

70% of respondents reported moderate to high awareness of sustainability concepts related to cosmetics. However, only 40% could correctly identify eco-certifications such as **Cruelty-Free**, **ECOCERT**, or **USDA Organic**.

### 3. Influence of Ethical Considerations

The mean scores showed significant influence of ethical factors:

- **Cruelty-free labels:** Mean = 3.9
- **Organic/Natural ingredients:** Mean = 4.1
- **Eco-friendly packaging:** Mean = 3.5
- **Corporate social responsibility awareness:** Mean = 3.8

Regression analysis indicated that **ethical awareness positively predicted purchase intention** ( $\beta = 0.62, p < .01$ ).

### 4. Socio-demographic Impact

- **Age:** Younger consumers (<30) reported higher ethical influence (mean = 4.25) than older groups (mean = 3.68).
- **Education:** Graduates showed higher awareness and preference for sustainable cosmetics (mean = 4.3) compared to school-educated respondents (mean = 3.5).
- **Income:** Higher income was correlated with greater willingness to pay premium for ethical products.

### 5. Barriers to Adoption

Key obstacles identified:

- **Price Premium:** Reported by 64% of respondents as a deterrent.
- **Product Availability:** 58% complained of limited sustainable options locally.
- **Trust Deficit:** 40% expressed scepticism toward green/ethical clai



### Discussion:

#### 1. Rising Ethical Consciousness

The study shows a **high level of sustainability awareness** among women in Valsad, consistent with global trends where ethical concerns shape consumer behaviour. The data validate that younger, educated consumers are driving this shift, in line with Ajzen's theory where attitudes inform purchase intention.

#### 2. Ethical Influence on Brand Choice

Findings suggest that ethical factors – particularly organic content and cruelty-free labels – significantly influence women's cosmetic choices. Women are willing to trade brand loyalty and even pay higher prices if products align with their ethical values, matching results from Magnier & Schoormans (2015).

#### 3. Socio-Demographic Variations

Education emerged as a strong predictor of ethical consumption. Educated women logically have broader exposure to sustainability information through digital platforms, enabling informed decision-making.

#### 4. Barriers Limit Full Adoption

Price sensitivity and limited official certifications in local stores reduce adoption of ethical cosmetics. This barrier aligns with Kumar & Singh (2022), who observed similar constraints in Indian semi-urban contexts.

### Implications:

#### 1. Theoretical

This research enriches consumer behaviour literature by contextualizing ethical consumption in Indian semi-urban markets. It demonstrates that sustainability is no longer a niche concept but a growing normative influence on purchases.

#### 2. Managerial

Cosmetic brands seeking penetration in districts like Valsad should:

- Provide transparency through recognizable certifications.
- Educate customers through localized awareness campaigns.
- Optimize pricing or offer value variants to reduce entry barriers.

#### 3. Policy & Societal

Policymakers can support certification awareness programs and incentivize local retail chains to stock sustainable brands, thereby enhancing access.

### Limitations and Future Research:

The study relied on a cross-sectional design, limiting causal inference. Future research could adopt longitudinal or mixed-methods approaches to explore evolving patterns. Comparing multiple districts in Gujarat or broader Western India could strengthen generalizability.

### Conclusion:

This study clearly establishes that sustainability and ethical considerations play a significant and increasingly influential role in shaping women's cosmetic product choices in Valsad District. The findings demonstrate that awareness regarding environmental protection, cruelty-free practices, organic ingredients, and corporate social responsibility is no longer confined to metropolitan consumers but has meaningfully penetrated semi-urban regions as well. A substantial proportion of women respondents indicated that ethical attributes such as cruelty-free certification, eco-friendly packaging, and natural formulations positively affect their purchase intentions. This suggests a gradual but steady transformation from purely price- and brand-driven consumption to value-driven and responsibility-oriented buying behaviour. At the same time, the study reveals an important nuance: while ethical consciousness is rising, it does not always translate into consistent purchasing behaviour. Practical constraints such as higher prices of sustainable cosmetics, limited availability in local retail



outlets, and scepticism regarding the authenticity of green claims act as moderating factors. This highlights the well-documented attitude–behaviour gap in ethical consumption, where positive attitudes toward sustainability do not automatically result in actual buying decisions. In Valsad District, women demonstrate willingness to support responsible brands, but affordability and accessibility remain decisive determinants.

The demographic analysis further strengthens the conclusion that sustainability-driven consumption is more pronounced among younger, educated, and higher-income groups. These segments exhibit stronger environmental values and greater readiness to pay a premium for ethically produced cosmetics. This indicates that future market growth for sustainable cosmetics in districts like Valsad will likely be driven by rising education levels, digital awareness, and expanding disposable incomes. As exposure to social media campaigns, influencer marketing, and global sustainability narratives increases, ethical consumption patterns are expected to become more mainstream.

Importantly, the study underscores the evolving intersection of ethics, consumer behaviour, and market dynamics in emerging regions. Sustainability is no longer a peripheral marketing strategy but a central competitive factor influencing brand perception and loyalty. Cosmetic companies operating in Valsad and similar districts must therefore integrate transparent labelling, credible certifications, and responsible sourcing practices into their core brand identity. Merely positioning products as “natural” or “green” without verifiable evidence may erode trust and hinder long-term growth.

From a managerial perspective, brands should focus on consumer education initiatives, localized awareness campaigns, and tiered pricing strategies to bridge the affordability gap. Collaborations with retailers to improve distribution networks and visibility of certified

sustainable products could also enhance adoption rates. From a policy standpoint, government agencies and consumer protection bodies can play a supportive role by strengthening certification standards, regulating misleading environmental claims, and promoting public awareness about sustainable consumption.

In conclusion, the study affirms that women consumers in Valsad District are increasingly aligning their cosmetic choices with environmental and ethical values, reflecting a broader shift toward responsible consumption. Although structural barriers currently limit universal adoption, the trajectory points toward deeper integration of sustainability into everyday purchase decisions. As awareness, accessibility, and affordability improve over time, ethical considerations are likely to become not just an influencing factor but a defining criterion in women’s cosmetic buying behaviour in semi-urban India.

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