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Unlocking the Mechanism through which Emotional and Social Values affect Sustainable Consumption Behavior: The Role of Sustainable Consumption Intention and Pro-environmental Attitudes

¹ Rehmat Ullah Khan, ² Awais Khan **ABSTRACT**

Keywords:
Sustainable
Consumption,
Emotional Values,
Social Values,
Behavior,
Consumption
Intention, PreEnvironmental
Attitudes.

Sustainable consumption intention and behavior are critically important in food and beverage sector, as it has a direct and substantial impact on the environment, public health, and socio-economic systems. Research on the mechanism through which consumer values affect sustainable consumption intention and behavior is scant in food and beverage industry. This research study aims to find out the effect of emotional and social values on consumption intention and behavior. Moreover, the mediating effect of pro-environmental attitudes on the link between emotional and social values and sustainable consumption intention and behavior is also investigated. Data were collected through convenience sampling strategy from 428 consumers between the age of 30 and 50. Hierarchical regression analyses was used and results confirm that both emotional and social values positively affected sustainable consumption intention and behavior. Moreover, pro-environmental attitudes mediated the link between emotional and social values and sustainable consumption intention and behavior.

INTRODUCTION

Reduction in ecological footprint and carbon emissions has been among companies' top agenda. Due to increase in global warming, firms are trying to minimize environmental pollution and resource depletion. There is an ever increasing pressure on corporations to design products in a way that can encourage sustainable use of resources. In this regard, sustainable consumption behavior is what most of the companies are looking for (Anh et al., 2020). Sustainable consumption behavior refers to use of products and services that are not only economically but environmentally viable as well. Consumers chose products and services that could improve quality of life. Toxic materials and pollutants should be to the minimal level in manufacturing or designing products or services. Consumers are well-informed nowadays and they look for socially responsible organizations for products and services. Sustainable

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consumption behaviors are important from consumer as well as companies' perspectives (Duchin, 2005). By engaging frequently in these behaviors, environment can be protected. Other benefits associated with sustainable consumption are that they help in reducing carbon emissions, builds responsible consumer culture, encourages equity in resource utilization, promotes long-term economic viability. Moreover, green innovations become frequent and organizations are able to satisfy majority of stakeholders in this regard. Research shows that there are a number of individual level and organization level factors that determine consumers' choice of sustainable products and services (Tang, Han, & Ng, 2023; Wang et al., 2024). Among various individual level factors, the current literature lacks a comprehensive understanding of individual emotional and social influences on sustainable consumption behavior. This is especially relevant in food and beverage industry. This industry is always at the forefront of competing for sustainable patterns.

Values usually affect attitudes and intentions and that in turn influences the behaviors. Two of the most important values that consumers think of are emotional values and how society behaves towards the product or service. Emotional value is defined as an attachment to a product or service due to resonance with personal emotions. When a product is purchased, what emotional benefits it offers is emotional value (Biswas, 2017). The value associated with a product in terms of how close it is to heart is what consumers think first while deciding to buy a product. Usually in food choices, consumers do not only look for functional value or the utility of the purchase decision. It is more of a choice that springs from the emotional attachment and emotional value. A consumer wants to feel good and satisfied by consuming the food or beverage of his/her choice. Moreover, the food is to be enjoyed and feeling of pleasure is an emotion that is most important in deciding what to eat or drink. Another aspect of emotional value is moral and social reward that one feels as a result of consumption (Awuni & Du, 2016; Cao et al., 2022; Lavuri, Roubaud, & Grebinevych, 2023; Sivapalan et al., 2021; Suphasomboon & Vassanadumrongdee, 2022). This feeling also comes as a deciding factor in food and beverage choice. Emotional value encompasses the negative emotion of guilt that is more regressing if a product is chosen that is not pro-environmental. Care for future generations, care for the planet, and concern for animals is the emotion of compassion that is more pertinent in case of food and beverage products' consumption. Prestige is the emotional value that one derives by showing to the society about his/her sustainable and ethical choices. Social value is the value that is derived by consuming a product that supports a particular social class or strata along with social prestige and pride. Consumers make choices on the basis of social differences. They think that their choice should also be defined by social standing in a

group of people. Society pressure and ethics are also perceived to be important factors in sustainable choices (; Lavuri, Roubaud, & Grebinevych, 2023; Sivapalan et al., 2021). For example, when a consumer makes a choice of restaurant, he/she does it on social stature as well. Is the restaurant worthy of his/her class? What type of people visit these restaurants? How is my social class represented and treated there? and does the restaurant differs in social class are some of the social values on the basis of which an intent is developed towards a particular brand. The social value is important aspect in food and beverage industry because emotional and social value are what consumers usually look for while deciding a food or beverage.

This research fills two important gaps in current literature. First, the joint effect of emotional and social value in deciding sustainable consumption intention and behavior in food and beverage category is missing in current literature. There has been research on consumer values such as functional, egoistic, and altruistic but the effect of social and emotional value is most pertinent in food and beverage industry. The intent and its effect on behavior is tested in this research that adds to value-attitude-intent-behavior literature. Second, this study adds to the sustainable consumption literature by examining the mediating effect of pro-environmental attitude on these relationships. This research proposes that without having an attitude towards the environment, it is difficult to engage consumers in sustainable consumption behavior.

Hypotheses Development

Sustainability is being pursued by every corporation in order to survive and succeed in the marketplace. Consumers are also becoming more and more knowledgeable about their choices. They understand that society and their personal emotions play an important role in deciding what product to choose. Emotional value is the value of pride, guilt, pleasure, prestige, compassion, empathy, and social security that comes from a product consumption. In case of food and beverage, the emotional aspect of products and services matter the most (Antonetti & Maklan, 2014; Jiang, Jotikasthira, & Pu, 2022; Rizomyliotis et al., 2021; Taufique, 2022; Yoo, Divita, & Kim, 2013; Young et al., 2010). Consumption of food and beverage that is pleasurable is always a deciding factor. If products do not feel good to the heart, it is not preferred. The intent to buy a product or service is a prerequisite of actual behavior. This applies to sustainability pattern as well. When a consumer displays intention that this product is contributing to a better society, is socially responsible, minimizes waste and pollutants, is regarded as pro-environmental, and takes care of the planet, he/she shows thinking of buying that product (Rizomyliotis et al., 2021; Taufique, 2022; Yoo, Divita, & Kim, 2013). On the contrary, if product is contributing to environmental pollution, degrading society, disturbing natural ecological setting, has nothing for future generations, the intent would be negative. As



such, the actual consumption decision of buying the product is minimal. Intent in sustainable consumption is translated into actual behavior. Thus,

Hypothesis 1. Consumers' sustainable consumption attitude positively influences their sustainable consumption behavior.

Emotional values are regarded as pivotal when it comes to buying food and beverage of one's choice. When a product is purchased, what emotional benefits it offers is emotional value. The value associated with a product in terms of how close it is to heart is what consumers think first while deciding to buy a product. Usually in food choices, consumers do not only look for functional value or the utility of the purchase decision. It is more of a choice that springs from the emotional attachment and emotional value. A consumer wants to feel good and satisfied by consuming the food or beverage of his/her choice. Moreover, the food is to be enjoyed and feeling of pleasure is an emotion that is most important in deciding what to eat or drink. Another aspect of emotional value is moral and social reward that one feels as a result of consumption. This feeling also comes as a deciding factor in food and beverage choice (Barone, Grappi, & Romani, 2024; Guzmán Rincón et al., 2021; Holt, 2012; Ishaq, Sarwar, & Ahmed, 2021; Lehner, Mont, & Heiskanen, 2016). Emotional value encompasses the negative emotion of guilt that is more regressing if a product is chosen that is not pro-environmental. Care for future generations, care for the planet, and concern for animals is the emotion of compassion that is more pertinent in case of food and beverage products' consumption. Prestige is the emotional value that one derives by showing to the society about his/her sustainable and ethical choices. When a product offers prestige, pleasure, satisfaction, and compassion feelings, the consumer becomes readily willing to buy that product. This is particularly true in case of food and beverages (Barone, Grappi, & Romani, 2024; Guzmán Rincón et al., 2021). These products should be emotionally soothing and one should get maximum emotional benefits while consuming them. If a product is not pleasing to consume, the choice to buy that product is minimal. If food and beverage do not offer satisfaction, there is no point in consuming such products. Consumers do not buy food and beverage brands that do not offer compassionate value to the planet and future generations. Those products are usually avoided that are not proenvironmental and are unable to improve quality of life. Emotional value serves as a fundamental internal driver of consumers' willingness to engage in environmentally responsible behavior. Although consumers are generally expected to feel a sense of pride when purchasing environmentally friendly products (Tsarenko et al., 2013), we propose that emotional value can be a powerful motivator, encouraging consumers to choose green products out of ethical considerations and concern for the well-being of others and the broader

community. While the influence of positive emotions on green product consumption has been relatively underexplored, existing research has demonstrated their impact on responsible behaviors (Thanki et al., 2022). For instance, Hartman et al. (2023) found a positive relationship between emotional value and consumers' preference for green energy products. Similarly, Young et al. (2021) observed that when consumers experienced high levels of emotional happiness, they were more likely to evaluate fair trade food products positively. Thus,

Hypothesis 2. Consumers' emotional values positively influence their sustainable consumption intention.

Social values are also considered important while deciding to buy food and beverages. Consumers make choices on the basis of social differences. They think that their choice should also be defined by social standing in a group of people. Society pressure and ethics are also perceived to be important factors in sustainable choices. For example, when a consumer makes a choice of restaurant, he/she does it on social stature as well. Is the restaurant worthy of his/her class? What type of people visit these restaurants? How is my social class represented and treated there? and does the restaurant differs in social class are some of the social values on the basis of which an intent is developed towards a particular brand (Figueroa-García, García-Machado, & Perez-Bustamante Yabar, 2018; Lazaric et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2015; Sharma & Jha, 2017). The social value is important aspect in food and beverage industry because emotional and social value are what consumers usually look for while deciding a food or beverage. Generally, all products are designed on the basis of social classes and differences. This is done due to varying consumer preferences and segmentation. Each group of consumer has a different choice on the basis of many factors such as price, packaging, social class, income, age, gender, and ethnocentric beliefs. Products are usually designed to target each group of customers in a different way (Lazaric et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2015; Sharma & Jha, 2017). One factor that is most effective in making products and services is the social stature. Social class becomes more prevalent in case of food and beverage. For instance, there are variety of mineral water companies and taste and other features become irrelevant when it comes to social class. Similarly, to choose a particular food brand, deciding to dine out in a restaurant, staying in a particular hotel, and drinking juices are all designed on the basis of social classes. In sustainability context, consumers prefer to buy products that society approves as pro-environmental. Those products that do not contribute to environmental protection are usually avoided. When society thinks of a brand as socially, morally, and environmentally responsible, the trend to buy such brand is high. Social influence has been shown to



significantly shape individual consumption patterns. Consumers often align their behavior with prevailing societal norms to demonstrate what is considered acceptable and appropriate conduct (Figueroa-García, García-Machado, & Perez-Bustamante Yabar, 2018; Lazaric et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2015). While numerous studies have identified a positive relationship between social norms and the intention to purchase sustainably (Lazaric et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2015), other research has found no significant correlation between social influence and sustainable consumption behavior. These mixed findings highlight the need for further investigation into this relationship. Thus,

Hypothesis 3. Consumers' social values positively influence their sustainable consumption intention.

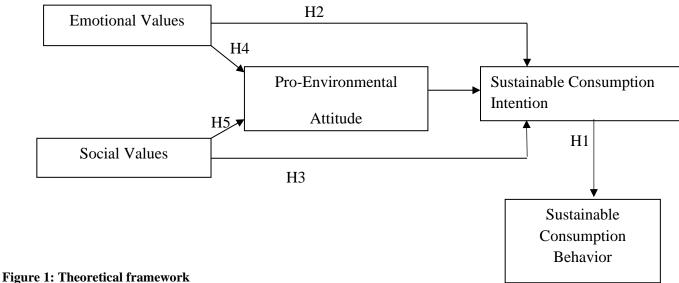
Pro-environmental attitude serves as a mediating mechanism through which emotional and social values are related to sustainable consumption intention and behavior. Pro-environmental attitude is the positive evaluation and disposition towards the protection of the environment (Lavuri, Roubaud, & Grebinevych, 2023; Runyan et al., 2012; Wang, 2017; Zeng, Zhong, & Naz, 2023). It is more of a psychological tendency that defines one's intent towards the actions that can help to mitigate negative environmental repercussions. Pro-environmental attitude is the feeling and thinking that is developed towards environmental preservation. It is about willingness to serve to environmental cause. Emotional values help to increase pro-environmental attitude because of following reasons. First, when a consumer feels emotions such as pleasure, satisfaction, prestige, and pride, he/she tends to develop positive evaluations, judgments, and feelings (Runyan et al., 2012; Wang, 2017; Zeng, Zhong, & Naz, 2023). The concern for the environment and the value associated with environmental preservation significantly enhances. This concern is translated into intentions that are tilted towards the environmental protection and preservation. Thus,

Hypothesis 4. Pro-environmental attitude mediates the positive relationship between emotional values and sustainable consumption intention.

Social values are another set of values that consumers derive while showing sustainable consumption intentions. When consumers think that society approves a product and they would be treated on the basis of social class, their intent to engage in pro-environmental behaviors in purchasing enhance. However, social values do influence attitudes towards the environment. Consumers think that their social class is also defined by how much positive they are about the environment. Social values create positive psychological dispositions that are translated into attitudes (Lavuri, Roubaud, & Grebinevych, 2023; Runyan et al., 2012). These attitudes are centered around the environment, future generations, society, and social responsibility. Hence,

social values create feelings of pro-environmental attitudes. The intent is one's way of deciding whether to engage in a behavior or not. The protection of environment is attributed to internal reasons by consumers who have positive psychological dispositions towards the environment. Such dispositions prefer to associate to attitudes that are on one's propensity to attribute the importance of environmental protection in all stakeholders' opinions. Social values therefore create an atmosphere where feelings of being pro-environmental provide positive energy, positive association, willingness, and concern (Lavuri, Roubaud, & Grebinevych, 2023). If society does not approve any particular product due to confusing social status differences and social pride, the negative attributions emerge and attitudes towards the environment also decrease considerably. Therefore,

Hypothesis 5. *Pro-environmental attitude mediates the positive relationship between social values and sustainable consumption intention.*



Participants and Procedures

The sample of this study is the consumers who are between the age of 30 and 50. The reason to select 30 years of age is that these consumers are better informed about the environment and their choices. They also have their own source of income that makes them to act as responsible consumers. Consumers below the age of 30 are usually not as knowledgeable and they consider price as the main driving principle while making purchase decisions. Both males and females were selected. The population for the current study was all potential consumers of food and beverage products in Mansehra, Abbottabad, and Haripur cities. The researchers went to various restaurants, shopping malls, bakeries, shops, departmental stores, and retail shops. Consumers were asked about their age and if the age was above 30 and below 50, they were

METHODOLOGY



told about the purpose of the research. In total, 520 consumers were conveniently chosen to fill the surveys. Out of 520 respondents, 37 just filled some questions and left the survey. We were able to gather 428 filled surveys which were complete and valid. 62% of the respondents were male, 31% had bachelor degree, and 21% had a Master degree.

Measurement

To measure emotional values, a six item scale was used which was developed by Lin and Huang (2012). All items in the survey were measured on a five point Likert scale. In this scale, 1 meant strongly disagree and 5 meant strongly agree. Social values were measured through 3 items developed by Shethman and Gross (1991). This scale is still in use and it is a well-validated instrument. Lee (2014) developed a scale comprising of 12 items to measure sustainable consumption behavior. This scale is also reliable as mentioned in previous literature. It has also been used and validated in food and beverage industry consumers. Proenvironmental attitudes were measured with the help of Félonneau and Becker's (2008) scale that consisted of 24 items. Chan (2001) validated a three-item scale to measure sustainable consumption intention. This study used Chan's three items. In total, the survey had 48 questions to measure five key constructs.

Data Analysis and Results

Table 1 displays the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables. Both emotional values and social values were positively related to consumers' sustainable consumption intentions (r = .41, p < .01; r = .49, p < .01, respectively) and pro-environmental attitudes (r = .32, p < .01; r = .39, p < .05), respectively. Consumers' sustainable consumption intention was significantly and positively related to consumers' sustainable consumption behaviors (r = .57, p < .01). Pro-environmental attitudes had positive effect on consumers' sustainable consumption intentions (r = .31, p < .001).

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variables	Mea	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	n										
1. Age	41.49	4.27	1								
2. Gender	0.62	0.21	-0.19	1							
3. Marital status	1.38	0.29	0.43	-0.11	1						
4. Monthly income	2.98	0.59	0.48	-0.24	0.86	1					
5. Emotional values	3.75	0.57	0.04	-0.13	0.22	0.06	1				
6. Social values	3.89	0.62	0.12	-0.09	0.27	0.19	0.17	1			
7. Pro-environmental attitudes	3.66	0.38	0.07	-0.11	0.18	0.17	0.32	0.39	1		
8. Sustainable consumption	4.13	0.52	0.11	-0.08	0.03	0.13	0.41	0.49	0.31	1	
intention											
9. Sustainable consumption	4.02	0.37	0.03	-0.02	0.11	0.01	0.16	0.21	0.25	0.57	1
behavior											

Hypothesis Testing

We used hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) to test the hypothesized relationships among emotional values, social values, pro-environmental attitudes, sustainable consumption intention and sustainable consumption behavior. To test Hypothesis 1, a regression of sustainable consumption behavior with control variables and independent variable i.e. sustainable consumption intention was conducted. Table 2 presents the hierarchical linear model results. The effect of sustainable consumption intention on consumers' sustainable consumption behavior was significant and positive (γ = .39, p < .01), supporting Hypothesis 1. We followed Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure in the hierarchical linear model analysis to test mediating effects. In step 1, we regressed pro-environmental attitudes on emotional values and social values. In step 2, we regressed sustainable consumption intention on emotional values and social values. In step 3, we regressed sustainable consumption intention on emotional values, social values and pro-environmental attitudes. For ease of presentation, Table 5 presents the results of the coefficients and t-values.

Table 2: Results of Hierarchical Linear Modeling for Sustainable consumption behavior

Variables	Sustainable consumption behavior					
	Estimate	s.e.	t	р		
Intercept	-0.47	0.47	-1.06	0.29		
Age	0.02	0.02	-1.32	0.26		
Gender	-0.07	0.09	-0.76	0.39		
Marital status	0.01	0.01	-1.11	0.48		
Monthly income	0.01	0.01	0.73	0.53		
Emotional values	-0.02	0.08	-0.35	0.82		
Social values	0.09	0.03	1.98	0.13		
Pro-environmental attitudes	-0.06	0.04	-1.21	0.11		
Sustainable consumption intention	0.39	0.08	8.35	0.01		

In step 1, emotional values and social values emerged as significant predictors of proenvironmental attitudes (γ =.31, p<.001; γ =.37, p<.05, respectively). In step 2, both emotional values and social values had a significant relationship with sustainable consumption intention (γ =.18, p<.001; γ =.24, p<.001, respectively). The study thus validated Hypothesis 2 and 3, that emotional and social values were positively related with sustainable consumption intention. When the indirect effect of pro-environmental attitudes was added to the equation in step 3, emotional values and social values were no longer significant, but pro-environmental attitudes remained significant (γ =.13, p<.05). Hence, Hypotheses 4 and 5 were supported. To further test mediating hypotheses, we performed the Sobel test, which provides a direct test of the indirect effect of an independent variable on the dependent variable through the mediator (Table 3). When indirect effect of pro-environmental attitudes was included in the equation,



the positive impact of emotional values on sustainable consumption intention $0.0374~(0.22\times0.17;~p<.001)$ reduced than the direct impact (0.0374<0.09;~p<.05;~95% CI), supporting Hypothesis 4. Similarly, the positive impact of social values on sustainable consumption intention $0.0567~(0.27\times0.21;~p<.001)$ reduced than the direct impact (0.0567<0.14;~p<.05;~95% CI), supporting Hypothesis 5.

Table 3: Mediation Analysis

Variables	Estimate	s.e.	t	p
Step 1: Pro-environmental attitudes				
Emotional values	0.22	0.05	2.59	0.03
Social values	0.27	0.08	5.37	0.04
Step 2: Sustainable consumption intention				
Emotional values	0.17	0.02	1.84	0.02
Social values	0.21	0.07	3.26	0.00
Step 3: Sustainable consumption intention				
Emotional values	0.09	0.04	1.25	0.07
Social values	0.14	0.07	1.54	0.06
Pro-environmental attitudes	0.11	0.03	2.84	0.03

DISCUSSION

The findings reported herein make several contributions to the literature on sustainable consumption intentions. First, the study empirically tests the relationship between sustainable consumption intentions and sustainable consumption behavior; second, it investigates the effects of social values and emotional values on sustainable consumption intentions; and third, the study assesses the mediating role of pro-environmental attitudes on the influence of social values and emotional values on sustainable consumption intentions. This study suggests three important conclusions. First, consumers' sustainable consumption intentions relate positively to sustainable consumption behavior. Despite considerable research on sustainability and sustainable consumption behavior, the effect of sustainable consumption intention on sustainable consumption behavior has not been adequately examined in the existing consumer buying behaviors and purchasing intentions.

Second, emotional values and social values predict sustainable consumption intentions. This finding is line with previous studies. Social and emotional values play a significant role in promoting sustainable consumption behavior. Social value, which is rooted in the desire for social approval and the enhancement of one's social identity, encourages individuals to conform to group norms and expectations. In collectivist societies like Pakistan, aligning with communal values is a common way to reinforce one's self-image. This study finds that social values intrinsically motivate individuals to adopt sustainable consumption practices, as they believe such behaviors will be socially endorsed and will enhance their reputation. Choosing

sustainable products and practices—such as using reusable bags, driving electric vehicles, or supporting environmentally responsible brands—can signal moral integrity and social consciousness, thereby improving one's perceived social standing.

In addition to social values, emotional values also increase the likelihood of engaging in sustainable consumption behavior. Emotional value arises when individuals derive affective benefits from their purchasing decisions. Actions that support sustainability can foster feelings of satisfaction, pride, fulfillment, and a sense of moral duty. These emotions appeal to an individual's internal state, and in turn, reinforce their commitment to sustainable behaviors. Consumers may choose to recycle, buy eco-friendly products, or support ethical brands not merely for functional or social reasons, but because such behaviors elicit positive emotions like self-respect, inner peace, or a sense of contributing to a larger cause. Conversely, neglecting sustainable consumption may evoke negative emotions such as guilt, regret, or moral discomfort. Third, emotional values and social values relate to sustainable consumption intentions through pro-environmental attitudes. This mediating effect explains that emotional and social values do not solely engage consumers to display sustainable consumption intentions and behaviors. Rather, pro-environmental attitudes mediate these effects. These attitudes are centered around the environment, future generations, society, and social responsibility. Hence, social values create feelings of pro-environmental attitudes. The intent is one's way of deciding whether to engage in a behavior or not. The protection of environment is attributed to internal reasons by consumers who have positive psychological dispositions towards the environment. Such dispositions prefer to associate to attitudes that are on one's propensity to attribute the importance of environmental protection in all stakeholders' opinions. Social values therefore create an atmosphere where feelings of being pro-environmental provide positive energy, positive association, willingness, and concern. If society does not approve any particular product due to confusing social status differences and social pride, the negative attributions emerge and attitudes towards the environment also decrease considerably.

Managerial implications and conclusion

This study provides several key implications for practitioners aiming to promote sustainable consumption. There should be a general understanding that products should be designed in such a way that they appeal to emotions of consumers and add social value to them. This can be done by providing more soothing, classical, and state of the art unique experience to people who should feel satisfied and pleasure in taking food and beverages. Marketing strategies should be crafted to highlight the importance of community welfare and collective well-being, aligning with consumers' altruistic values. Emphasizing the societal benefits of sustainable



products—such as their contribution to environmental justice or support for local communities—can effectively encourage eco-friendly purchasing decisions. Additionally, marketers should underscore the functional benefits of sustainable products by promoting attributes like durability, energy efficiency, and cost savings. Research consistently shows that consumers are more likely to choose sustainable options when they recognize clear utilitarian advantages. At the same time, organizations should develop campaigns that foster emotional engagement by emphasizing the psychological rewards of environmentally responsible choices. Highlighting positive emotional experiences—such as pride, moral fulfillment, or a sense of personal purpose—can significantly enhance the emotional appeal of sustainable consumption. Moreover, businesses should design marketing narratives that encourage consumers to internalize sustainability as a core element of their identity. Positioning individuals as "green consumers" who act in accordance with pro-environmental values can help reduce the attitude—behavior gap and promote greater alignment between consumers' beliefs and their actions.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. Data were collected from food and beverage industry only. There is a problem with generalizability of findings as data were collected from only a specific age group and in a single country. There can be other industries and future research should find out whether this theoretical framework holds for those industries or not. There are other potential mediators and moderators that could better explain the research model. Sustainable consumption behavior depends on moral identity and group norms. Factors such as social norms, personality characteristics, and consumers' preferences can play important role and future studies should explore them in detail.

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