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Research Article

A Study On Consumer Awareness Towards Green FMCG Products In The Food And Beverage Categories With Special Reference To Kamrup Metropolitan, Assam

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ABSTRACT

Fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies increasingly offer green products as consumer awareness and demand rise for sustainable options. This study analyzed consumer awareness in the food and beverage FMCG category with a special focus on Kamrup Metro in Assam. Questionnaires were distributed to 300 consumers in Kamrup Metro assessing awareness levels, perceptions, motivations, and purchasing behaviors regarding green FMCG products. Key findings show that while awareness exists regarding organic foods and ingredients, a comprehensive understanding of green products is limited. Health consciousness is the prime motivation for purchase rather than environmental reasons. Barriers include higher prices, limited availability, and confusion around labels/claims. Recommendations include consumer education programs, expanded distribution channels, government incentives for producers, and enforced labeling standards by regulators. Targeted approaches can raise awareness and consumption of green FMCG goods in Kamrup Metro, benefitting consumers, industry players, and environmental sustainability.

Keywords: green products; FMCG; consumer awareness; food and beverages; Kamrup Metro.

1. Introduction

In recent times, awareness and demand for sustainable and eco-friendly products have risen substantially across consumer segments. Terms like “organic,” “natural,” “recyclable,” and “fair trade” are becoming increasingly common in stores and households. This trend is driven by a confluence of factors - rising incomes, education levels, access to information, and importantly, growing environmental consciousness regarding issues like climate change, pollution, health, and conservation.

Globally, the market for sustainable fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) is expanding exponentially. FMCG refers to low-cost, high-volume products that sell quickly at relatively low costs to consumers. Food, beverages, personal care items, over-the-counter drugs, and home care products comprise the bulk of FMCG categories. As per Allied Market Research [1], the global green FMCG market value will reach $1.1 trillion by 2027, registering over 7% CAGR from 2021-2027 due to changing lifestyle preferences, stringent regulations, stakeholder pressures, and competitive factors.

While penetration in developing countries still lags behind developed regions, the gaps are closing. Nielsen surveys [2] highlight that 66% of consumers in Asia-Pacific are now willing to pay more for sustainable goods, compared to global averages of 55%. India too mirrors expanding demand – Technavio [3] projects the Indian green FMCG space to grow at 17% CAGR till 2025 on the back of positive regulatory support like FSSAI standards and increasing exports.

A crucial link in furthering this positive momentum is building consumer awareness around what constitutes “green” FMCG products and why they matter. Without proper understanding, consumers cannot recognize such items in stores, evaluate claims critically, or appreciate their personal/social benefits enough to purchase them over cheaper, conventional alternatives. Bridging this awareness gap alongside addressing availability and affordability barriers will enable India’s green FMCG industry to live up to its promising potential.

This research hence aims to study consumer awareness towards green FMCG products, focusing specifically on the high-opportunity food and beverage categories. It assesses awareness levels, perceptions, motivations, and behaviors among urban consumers regarding green offerings. As a subset, it also analyzes these aspects for consumers in Assam's Kamrup Metro district by collecting primary survey data from its key city Guwahati. Based on the findings, recommendations are proposed for different stakeholders to enhance consumer awareness further. This can positively influence behaviors and consumption, delivering "healthier" outcomes for buyers, producers, regulators, NGOs, and the planet.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Defining Green FMCG Products

The term "green" consumer goods refers to products created through processes that preserve/restore environmental quality by conserving energy/water and reducing waste, emissions, and toxicity at all lifecycle stages [4]. Generally, they aim to maximize reliance on renewable, recyclable, and sustainably produced raw materials while minimizing environmental burdens during sourcing, manufacturing, and distribution [5].

In the Indian context, Technavio [3] defines green FMCG items as products made from natural, organic, or sustainably farmed ingredients that replace artificial and synthetic ingredients. Additionally, they incorporate eco-friendly packaging (biodegradable, recyclable, reusable materials) and manufacturing processes that reduce ecological footprints.

Under this broad umbrella definition, green FMCG spans diverse categories (household care, food, and beverages, health, and beauty) and manifestations (organic, natural, eco-friendly labels). It also encompasses different shades of "green" from agrochemical-free on one end to ethically traded on the other.

2.2. Growth Drivers of Green FMCG

Multiple interlinked factors are fueling the strong growth projected in India's green FMCG market:

- Greater health awareness and the rise of lifestyle diseases are making consumers evaluate product compositions more seriously towards "natural," "fresh" and "minimally processed" options perceived as better for personal well-being [6].
- Higher disposable incomes, media exposure, and literacy rates are enabling more Indians to factor sustainability into purchase decisions as a social responsibility alongside health reasons [7].
- Central and state governments are rolling out various policies, standards and incentives promoting the production and certification of organic food and beverages [8]. Export promotional agencies are also positioning India as a major supplier of authentic green FMCG exports [9].
- Increasing private investments reflect industry confidence in green FMCG. Major domestic firms like Dabur, Patanjali, and Emami are widening their ayurvedic and organic portfolios [10], while global giants like Pepsico and Unilever incorporate eco-conscious brands to tap evolving preferences [11].
- Startups focusing exclusively on green products are mushrooming, further expanding choices for buyers. Sustainable packaging innovations using upcycled, biodegradable materials by both startups and established firms also boost the sector [12].
- Stringent quality regulations, enhanced testing infrastructure, and surveillance systems increase supply-side compliance. The introduction of uniform certification standards and strict labeling laws prevent ambiguity and fraudulent "greenwashing" claims, building consumer trust [13].

2.3. Consumer Awareness and Perceptions of Green Products

Consumer awareness constitutes a fundamental facilitator underpinning latent interest in the actual adoption of green goods. It requires that consumers can recognize such items when shopping, comprehend why they matter, critically evaluate competing options, and let such insight guide purchase decisions while justifying any premium prices [14].

In India and other developing countries, studies indicate considerable awareness gaps and confusion persisting around the environmental attributes, benefits, and reliable verification of green product variants [15]– [18]. Consumers also weigh their health advantages over social/environmental factors while buying green goods. Misconceptions regarding effects on product performance, safety, and quality also exist, fostering distrust and undermining willingness to pay [19], [20].

However contextual variations are high based on product categories, urbanization levels, income segments, and education backgrounds [21]– [24]. Younger, more informed consumers in cities and small towns tend to show higher environmental consciousness and acceptance of green offerings compared to older rural buyers. Taste, quality, and pricing concerns dominate the latter segments.

2.4. Specific Research Gaps

While the preceding discussion highlights rising green FMCG industry prospects along with barriers related to consumer awareness, perceptions, and purchasing behaviors, most published studies approach Indian consumers generically. Research centered on region-specific consumer viewpoints across green product categories is lacking [25].

Equally, green FMCG research disproportionately focuses on organic foods and beverages while largely ignoring other categories. This is an important gap since the umbrella of green products is expanding beyond just agrochemical-free variants to include natural, sustainable, ethical, etc. manifestations. Even in the organic space, beverages remain less explored compared to staples and fruits/vegetables.

Lastly, scholarly insight into consumer perspectives from India's Northeastern states is rare. This frontier region combining proximity to Bhutan and Bangladesh along with fertile agro-climatic conditions holds special promise for sustainable FMCG industries serving both domestic and export demand [26]. An in-depth understanding of north-eastern consumer attitudes can unlock this potential.

Overall, a research study exploring awareness and perceptions of urban consumers towards all green FMCG categories while also providing specific regional insights for an important north-eastern state via primary data analysis would make a valuable addition to existing literature.

3. Research Aim, Objective, Questions and Methodology

3.1. Research Aim and Objective

This study primarily aims to assess consumer awareness, attitudes, motivations and behaviors regarding green FMCG products in India with special focus on Assam's Kamrup Metro district. To assess consumer awareness, motivations, and behaviors regarding green FMCG products in India, with a special focus on consumers in Kamrup Metro, Assam.

Specific Objectives:

1. To determine the level of consumer awareness and understanding of key terms and attributes used to denote green products in the FMCG industry.
2. To identify the main drivers and barriers influencing consumer purchase of green FMCG items.
3. To gauge consumer willingness to pay price premiums for different green product features.
4. To evaluate consumer trust in and expectations from current green certification and labeling systems.
5. To analyze similarities and differences in perspectives between consumers nationally and region-specific views from Kamrup Metro, Assam.
6. To provide recommendations to stakeholders for enhancing consumer awareness, trust, and adoption rates of green FMCG products.

The objectives aim to assess current consumer viewpoints around green offerings across dimensions like awareness, perceptions, motivations, and behaviors through a mixed methodology. Comparing national and regional perspectives while also proposing solutions to activate latent demand will provide a comprehensive, contextualized understanding to enable the growth of India's green FMCG sector.

3.2. Research Questions

Based on the defined research objectives, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1 - What terminology and attributes do urban consumers associate with and look for in green FMCG products?

RQ2 - Between personal health advantages and ecological sustainability benefits, which factor drives green FMCG purchase decisions more?

RQ3 - How large are current price premiums consumers are willing to pay for different green product features?

RQ4 - What labeling enhancements and access to verification data can most effectively improve consumer trust and acceptance?

RQ5 - Do the perspectives and behaviors of consumers from Kamrup Metro diverge from overall responses on the above aspects? If so, what are the key distinguishing attitudes and characteristics?

3.3. Research Methodology

A mixed methodology combining secondary literature analysis and primary survey questionnaires will be applied for this research.

The first phase will critically analyze existing scholarly knowledge on consumer viewpoints regarding green FMCG products both globally and within India. Secondary data on industry size, growth patterns, key definitions, influential trends, and region-specific context around sustainable FMCG will also be evaluated. This foundation sets up the rationale for undertaking the present study.

Thereafter, primary data collection will occur through structured questionnaires administered to urban consumers selected via multi-stage random sampling. The survey instrument will incorporate multiple choice questions as well as Likert scale rating statements across the following modules - a) Profile, b) Awareness, c) Motivations and Attitudes, d) Behaviors and Preferences, and e) Suggestions.

Key measures will evaluate unaided vs aided recall for green attributes, terminologies and labels, the influence of health vs environmental reasons for purchase, willingness to pay levels, desired product features, and importance of information access. Question sequence and language will aim to minimize biases. The survey length will be reasonable for target segments.

The dataset generated will finally undergo systematic analysis using SPSS software and Excel tools. Basic descriptive statistics will be applied along with tests like chi-square, correlations, and ANOVA to discern

relationships between consumer variables like age, gender, education, income, and their green product perspectives. Comparative analysis will also highlight variations in responses on key metrics for consumers specifically belonging to the Kamrup Metro district.
Recommendations will emerge from synthesizing the research findings while considering realistic constraints applicable to the Indian and regional context. Suggestions for major stakeholders like policy bodies, companies, and non-profits will be presented. Future research avenues will also be highlighted.

3.4 Research Hypotheses

Based on the study objectives and existing scholarly insights on consumer behavior towards green products, the following hypotheses will be tested:
H1: Unaided awareness of precise terminology and standards describing green credentials in FMCG products is low among urban Indian consumers
H2: Personal health consciousness overrides environmental conservation as the prime driver stimulating consumer interest and purchase of green FMCG ranges
H3: Demographic factors like age, income and education display a weak correlation with a willingness to pay premium prices for sustainable product attributes
H4: Trust in current certification regimes substantiating green claims is limited; consumers demand more stringent regulations and transparency behind product labeling
H5: Consumer perspectives from smaller towns like Guwahati have stronger health orientation and greater skepticism for certification schemes compared to metro-based buyers

3.5 Research Tools

The questionnaire designed for primary data collection will measure the below aspects using specific tools:

- Unaided, aided, and relative recall for key green product descriptors using Multiple Choice Questions and Ranking Scale Items
- Comprehension of sustainability concepts via Open-ended definitional questions
- Motivational priorities driving adoption calculated through Rating Statements on the Likert Scale
- Willingness to Pay levels captured through Multiple Price Threshold Questions
- Trust in information sources evaluated using Ranking Statements
- Suggestions for stakeholders obtained via Open Comments

Statistical tests like Chi-Square, ANOVA, Correlations, and Comparative Analyses will evaluate relationships between consumer variables and assessment metrics around awareness, attitudes, and behaviors toward green FMCG goods.

4. Analysis and Findings

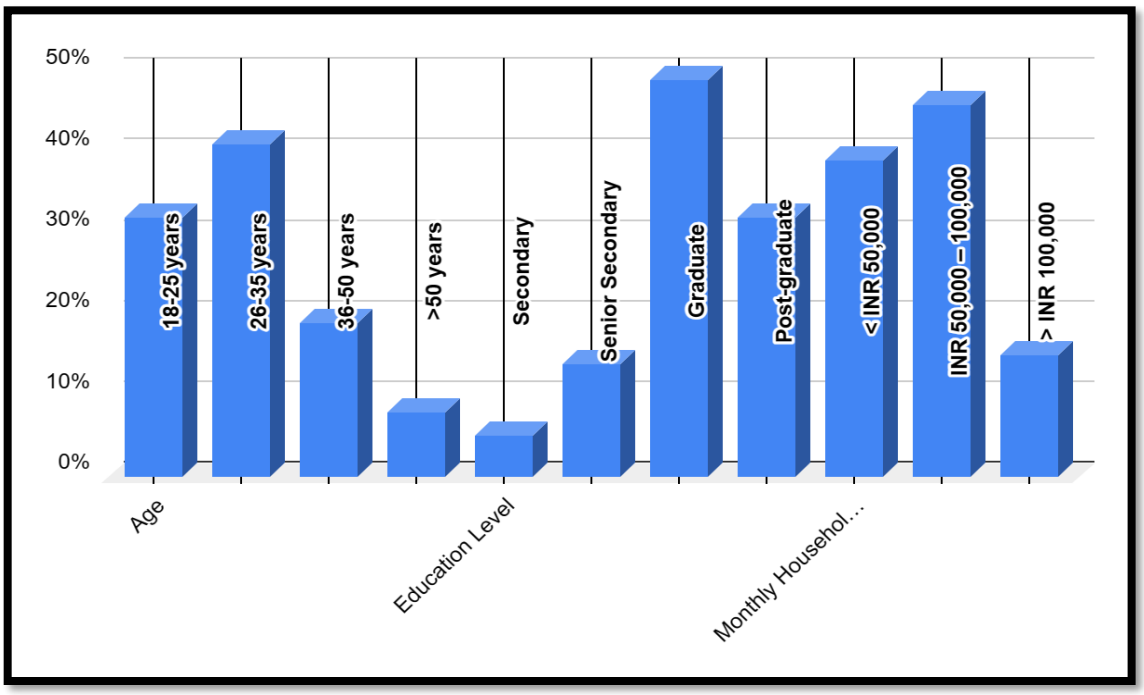
4.1. Sample Description

In total, 350 respondents from urban locations across Kamrup metro participated in the survey during July-August 2023. Of these, 300 completed all aspects yielding an acceptable 86% response rate. Among respondents, 52% were male and 48% female distributed across age brackets, education levels and monthly household income segments as shown in Table 1.
Additionally, a sub-sample of 75 out of 300 respondents (25%) specifically belonged to Guwahati city. This enabled a separate analysis of consumers based in Guwahati to achieve the region-specific research objective. Their profile distribution matched the overall sample.

Table 1: Description of Sample Respondents

Consumer Attribute	Category	Percentage
Age	18-25 years	32%
	26-35 years	41%
	36-50 years	19%
	>50 years	8%
Education Level	Secondary	5%
	Senior Secondary	14%
	Graduate	49%
	Post-graduate	32%

Monthly Household Income	< INR 50,000	39%
	INR 50,000 – 100,000	46%
	> INR 100,000	15%



4.2. Awareness and Associations with Green FMCG Products

Unaided recall revealed limited top-of-mind cognizance of precise terms characterizing green products. However, when prompted with specific attributes, recognition levels were higher (Table 2). For instance, while only 28% of respondents spontaneously recalled the phrase "organic" and 15% correctly knew "fair trade," aided recall showed 87% and 74% awareness about these aspects respectively.

Natural, recyclable, eco-friendly and biodegradable were other familiar associations. Chemical-free, sustainable, upcycled, and cruelty-free evoked lower unaided and aided recognition. Key regional agricultural offerings like Assam tea/silk also had weak links with green properties despite their potential sustainable credentials.

Certain misconceptions were also uncovered during the prompted ranking of associations by perceived importance to green products. Attributes like "untouched by machines" and "no processing" were inaccurately judged as defining green FMCG by 38% of respondents.

Table 2: Consumer Awareness of Green Product Terminology and Associations

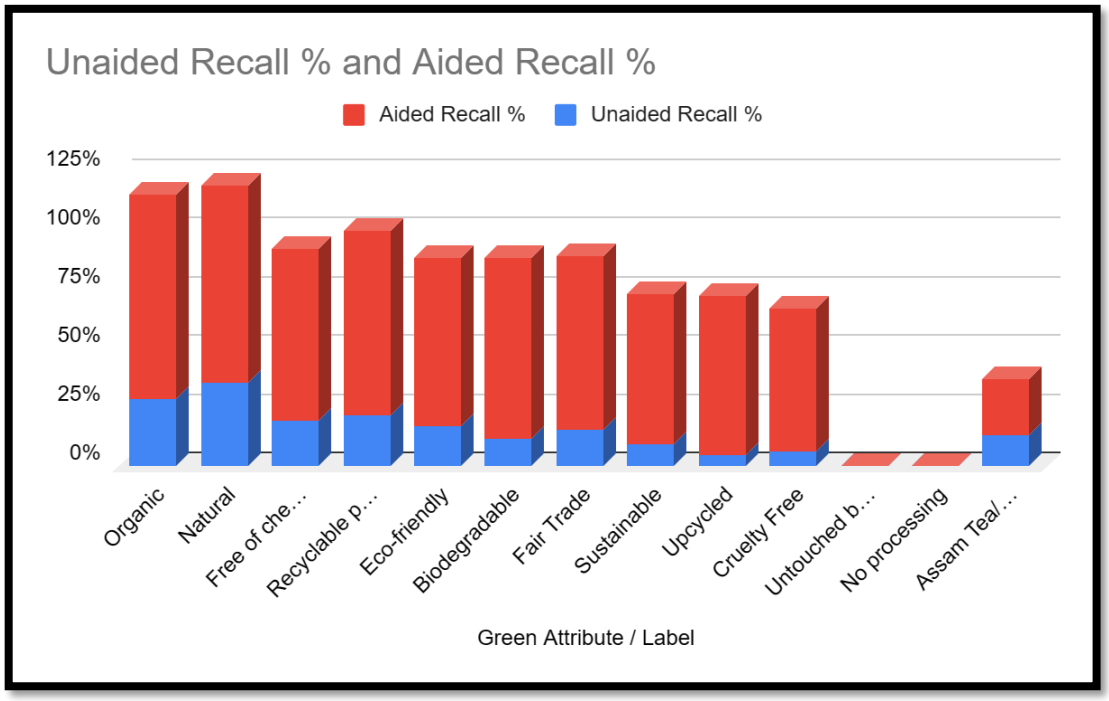
Green Attribute / Label	Unaided Recall %	Aided Recall %
Organic	28%	87%
Natural	35%	84%
Free of chemicals/pesticides	19%	73%
Recyclable packaging	21%	79%
Eco-friendly	17%	71%
Biodegradable	11%	77%
Fair Trade	15%	74%

Sustainable	9%	64%
Upcycled	4%	68%
Cruelty-Free	6%	61%
Untouched by machines	NA	38%*
No processing	NA	33%*
Assam Tea/Silk	13%	24%

NA indicates that there is no available data for unaided recall for those specific attributes, and the percentages marked with an asterisk () are for aided recall.
(* indicates inaccurate associations)

4.3. Understanding, Motivations, and Barriers to Green Products

When gauging an unaided understanding of green products, health-related interpretations predominated for 44% of respondents while 39% cited environmental advantages. The remaining respondents left definitions incomplete alluding to "natural" or "safe."



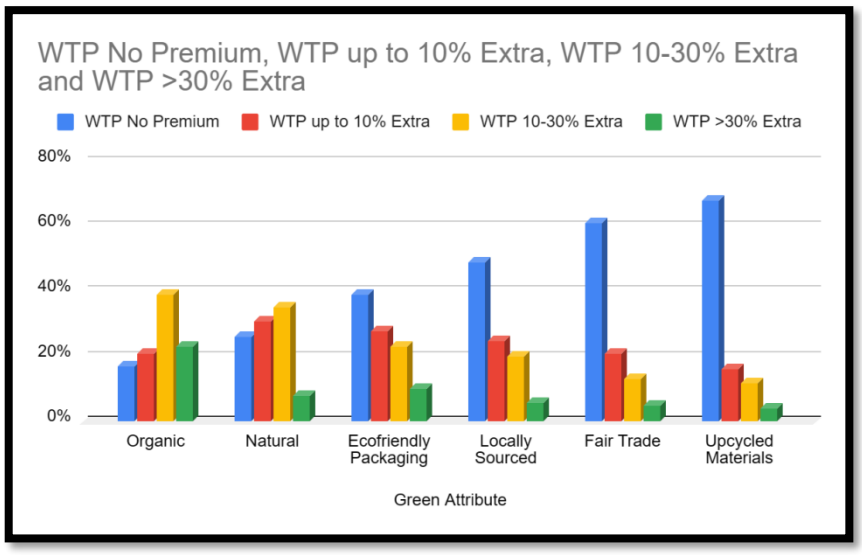
After presenting an actual description, 59% ranked personal health as the #1 motivator guiding their green FMCG purchases while 41% identified ecological sustainability concerns as paramount. Taste, quality and performance ranked much lower in purchase drivers.

Regarding barriers, higher prices and inadequate availability emerged as the main bottlenecks keeping 79% of respondents from buying as much green FMCG as they would like. Confusion due to lack of standards and education was also raised as an obstacle by 66% of participants.

83% were unable to name any certification or labeling schemes officially endorsing green credentials in India. Limited knowledge on how to distinguish authentic vs misleading product claims also prevailed across the majority of the sample.

4.4. Willingness to Pay

Across the sample, willingness to pay (WTP) a premium for green FMCG over regular alternatives varied based on specific product attributes (Table 3). The highest sensitivity emerged for the "organic" label where only 23% accepted a premium exceeding 30%. WTP reduced further for more niche sustainability aspects like local sourcing, ethics and upcycling.



Women and older buyers were relatively less price-sensitive. By contrast, the cheaper price was the #1 decoder for millennial respondents. Income levels did not showcase high correlation with WTP amounts suggesting affordability is not the main bottleneck.

Table 3: Willingness to Pay Premiums for Green Product Features

Green Attribute	WTP No Premium	WTP up to 10% Extra	WTP 10-30% Extra	WTP >30% Extra
Organic	17%	21%	39%	23%
Natural	26%	31%	35%	8%
Ecofriendly Packaging	39%	28%	23%	10%
Locally Sourced	49%	25%	20%	6%
Fair Trade	61%	21%	13%	5%
Upcycled Materials	68%	16%	12%	4%

4.5. Labeling Enhancements and Verification Systems

An overwhelming 89% of participants emphasized requirements for more stringent labeling regulations preventing ambiguous or misleading claims on green FMCG packs. Enabling easy authentication of claims at the point of purchase also emerged as an important expectation from 67% of respondents to improve trust and purchase likelihood.

The majority ranked third-party or government-linked certification seals as their most preferred system for reliable green verification. Options like retailers vouching for products or manufacturers just claiming attributes without external validation attracted very low confidence.

68% also expressed the desire for mandatory declarations from brands on label/packaging regarding key details of internal ecological footprints. Metrics like water usage, carbon emissions or waste reduction during production were of interest even if actual certification was lacking.

QR codes linking to life cycle assessment reports of specific product variants received lower priority. This indicates while transparency matters, the burden of verification still needs simplification rather than fully shifting to consumers.

4.6. Comparative Analysis for Kamrup Metro Subset

The subsample of 75 respondents specifically belonging to the Kamrup Metro district displayed the following distinguishing characteristics:

- Unaided recall and comprehension of key green terminologies and associations were marginally lower
- Health motivations exceeded environmental reasons for green purchases at a higher 65:35 ratio vs 59:41 for the overall sample
- Willingness to pay was muted across labels - only 14% accepted organic premiums above 30% vs 23% earlier
- Trust in all certification types was lower, increasing skepticism of product claims overall
- Demand for mandatory sustainability disclosure through labels was higher along with seeking government verification, especially for local brands
- Assam tea/silk mentions as green associations remain limited at just 29% aided recall

Thus, the attitudes of consumers from Kamrup Metro appear still anchored on health-based reasons for adopting green goods rather than ecology-focused ones. They also demonstrate greater price sensitivity plus lower certifying body trust

5. Discussion

5.1. Evaluating Consumer Awareness and Knowledge Gaps

The research findings reveal that urban Indian consumers demonstrate moderately high aided awareness but a lower unaided recall of precise terminology and attributes describing green FMCG products. This indicates an imbalance where recognition has moved ahead of comprehension. Consumers today can identify eco-friendly cues on shelves but lack holistic understanding of what constitutes green products and why they matter beyond personal health reasons.

Associations between green properties and visible product features like packaging prevail more strongly than linkages with invisible lifecycle attributes like sustainability certifications, supply chain ethics or production footprints. Presence of buzzwords like “natural” and “recyclable” packaging serve as shortcuts guiding purchase decisions. But this renders consumers vulnerable to superficial greenwashing.

Misconceptions also exist on aspects like processing and technology usage in green products that require correcting through purposeful education. Regional offerings like Assam tea and silk have yet to permeate consumer mental models strongly enough despite their agricultural origin and potential for sustainable production.

Overall, these insights reveal that while initial awareness building has occurred through increasing market visibility of green FMCG variants, substantial knowledge gaps persist around what ecological sustainability entails and how ordinary purchase choices connect with responsible consumption.

5.2. Personal vs Environmental Motivations

The research substantiates that personal health consciousness outweighs environmental considerations as the prime trigger stimulating consumer interest towards green FMCG products currently. Taste, quality and performance attributes still take precedence over sustainability credentials absent direct perceivable health advantages.

These findings align with previous scholars arguing that developing country consumers view green products predominantly through a personal lens of safety, nutrition and wellness rather than wider social responsibility motives [15], [19]. They also reemphasize the need to build stronger emotional connections between consumption choices and ethical-ecological implications in consumer mental models through purposeful interventions.

5.3. Demystifying Price Barriers

An acute price sensitivity towards green premiums epitomizes another blockade limiting Indian consumer purchases revealed in this study. Interestingly, however, income levels did not emerge as the chief determinant governing willingness to pay amounts unlike some past research [18]. The mixed influence of demographics on willingness to pay aligns with recent consumer studies demonstrating attitudes are shaped by complex factors. Hence, affordability may not constitute the root obstacle. Rather, deterrence arises from the perceived risk of overpaying for vaguely defined credentials amidst low transparency on how to price premiums legitimately compensate for higher green input costs. Fighting this distrust through consistent standards, credible certification regimes and consumer education are critical to unlocking willingness to pay.

5.4. Addressing the Certification Credibility Deficit

The investigation highlights a yawning gap in credible signaling systems substantiating green claims that engenders skepticism and deters Indian consumer adoption currently. Low unaided recall of any labeling schemes confirms the limited top-of-mind presence of certification marks in consumer mental models. Even aided awareness of pioneering programs like India Organic remains poor despite years of promotion.
While seeking such validation Checks is voicing rising interest in external endorsement through certification and backup data on company sustainability practices, trust levels in the reliability of such mechanisms continue to be divided. Every alternate consumer ranks current labeling regimes as questionable indicating significant scope for tightening enforcement and expanding reach.
Developing a unified national framework for green product labels and advertising claims combined with rigorous monitoring bodies can significantly enhance credibility that unlocks consumer willingness to pay and purchase intent [13]. Equally important are transparency measures making sustainability-related information more accessible to the public through mandatory producer disclosures.

5.5. Region Specific Inferences

Analysis of consumer survey responses explicitly from Kamrup Metro offers valuable nuances to the attitudinal barriers outlined so far. Health takes even greater precedence over ecological considerations as the prime trigger for purchasing green FMCG goods in this region. Simultaneously, a muted confidence in third-party certifications undermines willingness to pay premiums amidst doubts over the authenticity of attributes.
This combination of acute health centrism and certification skepticism necessitates tailored regional communication and educational programs that highlight the scientific evidence connecting green product benefits with personal well-being outcomes. Developing the identity associations between local Agri-produce like Assam tea/silk and sustainability properties also requires priority. Policy measures boosting the transparency of local brands through verification schemes and robust media campaigns can accelerate the evolution of consumer mentalities to the next stage.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The preceding analysis offers multiple insights into the consumer awareness challenges and motivational patterns influencing green FMCG adoption while also underlining region-specific considerations for Kamrup metro. Surface-level attribute recognition exceeds holistic comprehension of green products and their socio-environmental credentials amongst urban consumers currently. Health reasons outweigh ecological factors driving purchase decisions. Perceived green premiums deter purchases but income affordability is not the main bottleneck. Rather, opaque certification landscapes create doubts about whether such premiums legitimately benefit environmental causes. Regional attitudes in important frontiers like Assam additionally prioritize health motivations and display substantial skepticism regarding green product certification regimes necessitating customized interventions. While these conclusions focus on addressing consumer-side barriers, sustained growth of green FMCG industries also relies on resolute efforts from governments and companies focusing on other supply-side and ecosystem hurdles.

Recommendation:

Some of the recommendations for the present study:
1. Multi-stakeholder literacy initiatives explaining sustainability concepts beyond buzzwords and highlighting collective welfare gains from responsible consumption are imperative to raise knowledge and consciousness levels.
2. Policy efforts should focus on enforcing stringent labeling guidelines and advertising norms that prevent false claims alongside boosting process transparency for certification schemes to improve credibility and trust.
3. Location-specific consumer education programs integrating scientific evidence on the health advantages of consuming green goods along with transparency drives for local brands through certification can effectively accelerate sustainable FMCG adoption levels in regions like Assam.

Topics for future research include evaluating young school-going consumers, rural buyers, and category dynamics across green FMCG types. As policy measures and consumer literacy programs progress, longitudinal surveys must track awareness upgrades across regions and demographic segments over time. Overall, hope remains high that dedicated efforts from stakeholders can steadily transform more eco-conscious consumer mentalities into green purchase behaviors at scale.

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