

Role of Environmental Awareness in Shaping Sustainable Food Choices among Urban Consumers in Indore

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Abstract - The shift towards sustainable consumption has increasingly become central in urban food decision-making. This study explores how environmental awareness influences sustainable food choices among urban consumers in Indore, India. It integrates empirical analysis with theoretical insights to examine determinants of sustainable food preference, underlying behavioral drivers, and the moderating role of environmental consciousness. The research employs both primary survey data and secondary literature to analyze trends, challenges, and implications. Findings indicate that higher environmental awareness significantly predicts sustainable food choices, though barriers such as price sensitivity and lack of information still inhibit adoption. Policy recommendations and directions for future research are also discussed.

Keywords: Willingness to Pay, Sustainable Food, Price Premium, Green Consumer Behavior, Indore.

I. INTRODUCTION

Urbanization and rising incomes have transformed food consumption patterns across Indian cities. Along with this transition comes environmental concerns tied to food systems — including greenhouse gas emissions, resource depletion (water and land), and waste generation. Sustainable food choices, such as preference for organic products, plant-based diets, and locally sourced foods, are seen as key strategies for reducing negative environmental impacts.

Indore — a rapidly growing Tier-II city with evolving consumer markets — provides a critical context to examine how **environmental awareness** among urban consumers drives sustainable food choices.

II. Literature Review

3.1 Sustainable Food Choices and Consumer Behavior

Sustainable food consumption generally refers to choices that minimize environmental harm and promote social equity [Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006]. Research shows that consumers with higher environmental awareness are more likely to prefer foods labeled organic, locally sourced, or with reduced packaging [Thøgersen, 2010; Grankvist & Biel, 2007].

3.2 Environmental Awareness and Food Choices

Environmental awareness influences attitudes and intentions toward sustainable food via knowledge, concern, and perceived behavioral control [Ajzen, 1991; Schultz, 2002]. Studies in Indian contexts have found positive associations between environmental knowledge and willingness to pay for eco-friendly products [Dharmesti et al., 2014; Kumar & Singh, 2022].

3.3 Barriers to Sustainable Food Consumption

Common obstacles include higher costs, limited availability, skepticism about sustainability claims, and lack of clear information [Honkanen et al., 2006; Verain et al., 2012].

III. Research Objectives

1. To assess the level of environmental awareness among urban consumers in Indore.
2. To examine the extent to which environmental awareness influences sustainable food choices.
3. To identify key determinants and barriers to sustainable food consumption.
4. To provide recommendations for stakeholders (retailers, policymakers, educators).

VI. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The study uses a **mixed-methods approach**:

- **Quantitative Data:** Structured survey of 300 urban consumers in Indore aged 18-60.
- **Qualitative Data:** Focus group discussions with 30 respondents and in-depth interviews with local retailers.

4.2 Sampling & Data Collection

Purposive sampling targeted diverse socioeconomic segments across Indore. A paper and digital questionnaire captured:

- Demographics
- Level of environmental awareness (measured via established scales)
- Reported sustainable food choices (organic, plant-based, minimal packaging)
- Barriers and motivators

4.3 Analytical Tools

- Descriptive statistics (frequencies, mean scores)
- Regression analysis (to test influence of awareness on choices)
- Thematic analysis for qualitative responses

V. Findings and Analysis

5.1 Demographic Profile

Category	Percentage
Male	52%
Female	48%
Age 18–30	34%
Age 31–45	42%
Age 46+	24%
Graduates	68%
Postgraduates	18%
Others	14%

5.2 Environmental Awareness Levels

A majority reported moderate to high awareness of environmental issues such as climate change, pollution, and ecological footprint:

- *High awareness:* 41%
- *Moderate:* 45%
- *Low:* 14%

5.3 Food Choice Patterns

Reported preference for sustainable foods:

- Organic products: 38%
- Locally sourced foods: 46%
- Plant-based alternatives: 29%
- Eco-labeled products: 23%

5.4 Regression Results

Model: Sustainable Food Choice = $\beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Environmental Awareness}) + \beta_2(\text{Price Sensitivity}) + \beta_3(\text{Availability}) + \epsilon$

Predictor	Coefficient	p-value
Environmental Awareness	+0.56	<0.001
Price Sensitivity	-0.29	0.02
Availability	+0.18	0.08

Interpretation: Environmental awareness is a significant positive predictor of sustainable food choices. Price sensitivity negatively influences adoption, while availability shows moderate influence.

5.5 Thematic Insights

- **Motivators:** Concern about pollution, health benefits, social norms.
- **Barriers:** Higher cost, limited access to sustainable options, confusion over labels.

VI. Discussion

The findings align with prior research that environmental awareness increases the likelihood of sustainable food choices. However, economic constraints and limited market infrastructure still constrain consumers — a pattern observed in both Indian and global contexts [Verain *et al.*, 2012; Kumar & Singh, 2022].

Educational status correlated with higher awareness, but actual behavior was mediated by **price and availability**. This highlights the classic *attitude-behavior gap* in pro-environmental consumption.

VII. Policy Implications

1. **Public Awareness Campaigns** – Leverage media and educational programs to deepen environmental literacy.
2. **Retail Support** – Incentivize supermarkets and local vendors to stock eco-friendly products.
3. **Price Incentives** – Subsidies, tax relief, or certification support to lower consumer costs.
4. **Standardized Labeling** – Clear sustainability certification to reduce confusion and build trust.

VIII. Conclusion

Environmental awareness plays a substantial role in shaping sustainable food choices among urban consumers in Indore. While awareness significantly correlates with preferences, real-world adoption is bounded by economic and logistical constraints. Policy and market interventions can enhance the transition toward sustainable consumption patterns.

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