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## Pitching It Right - How to Place a Sustainable Product that Customers Want to Buy

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### Abstract

The ultimate test of man's conscience may be his willingness to sacrifice something today for future generations whose words of thanks will not be heard. '

- Gaylord Nelson

Climate change is the biggest threat to our existence. To address this menace, we require unprecedented changes in all aspects of society. It is extremely important to embed sustainability into our lifestyle. One such intervention is the uptake of sustainable products by consumers. Sustainable products are those products that are developed while keeping the environment at the forefront and also have zero to minimal impact during use and disposal. With time, there is a spate of sustainable products in the market. Also, the uptake of these products has increased over time. However, the crippling issue is the rate of growth. Through our survey, we realized that even the people who are capable of buying sustainable products are not opting for them for several reasons. There exist a torrent of concerns that are inhibiting consumers to be responsible towards the environment. To hold global warming to 1.5-degree celsius, we require imminent interventions and changes in habits and lifestyle. This research paper highlights the key concerns of customers and provides recommendations to manufacturers and sellers to 'Pitch It Right!'

### **Statement of Intended Contribution**

1. There exists an inclination amongst consumers to buy sustainable products. However, the intention to action gap is widely evident.
2. Our survey identifies that though people have the capacity and knowledge to buy sustainable products, the uptake is well below the noise level.
3. Using a logistic regression model, we identify the categorical response of the customer in buying a product based on several independent variables.
4. Finally, we provide key recommendations to the stakeholders on the supply side to invigorate the need for sustainable products in the demand side.

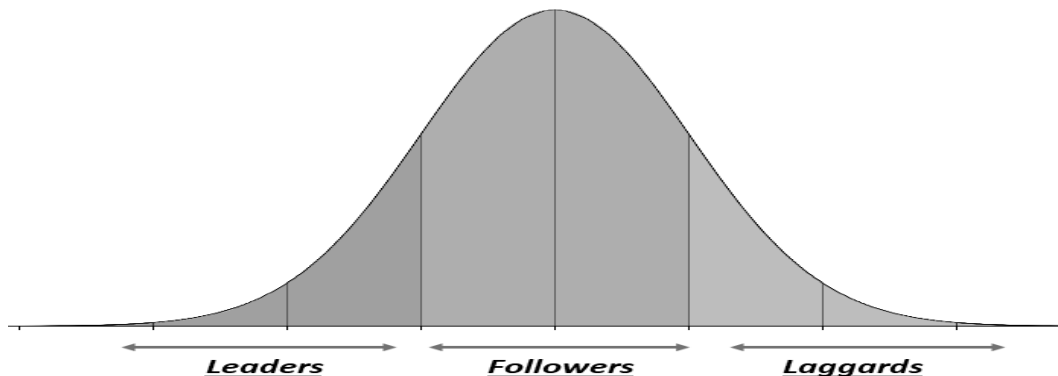
**Keywords:** Sustainable, Responsible, Product, Pitch, Communication.

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## **Introduction**

Climate change has become an existential threat to humankind. There is a clear increase in the intensity and frequency of life-threatening events in the last few years like hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, droughts, etc. This underscores the urgent requirement for the countries to move towards net-zero emission targets and ensure that the global temperature rise is less than 2 degrees Celsius by the end of the century, a prerequisite for our survival. (Sanjeevikumar et al., 2020) However, this crisis is preventable. It requires resolve from everyone in the social hierarchy. Needless to say, certain sections of the society will be better off at the initial stages than others. However, eventually, everyone must be onboarded.

Over the years, it has been well established that even a solitary action can have a positive impact on our environment. Recent studies have shown that the impact of an individual on the environment is majorly dependent on the choices made by them in day to day life. (Reints, 2019) (Whelan & Kronthal-Sacco, 2019) These choices can vary in scale from buying a needle to buying a vehicle for transportation. Hence, to assess the dynamics of consumer behavior, it is imperative to classify the



**Figure I: Normal Distribution Curve Depicting Various Consumer Stages**



populace into leaders, followers, and laggards. As expected, this will follow a normal distribution curve where followers will account for ~68.3% of the entire population with leaders and laggards on either side of the majority as seen in Figure I.

This research paper aims to identify reasons for the delayed response from the followers' group in opting for sustainable products. There is no denying the fact that there are sustainable products in the market, that have a minimal environmental impact, however, the uptake of these products even amongst the well-off section of the society hasn't taken place.

A few key barriers associated with these are - First, several organizations are pitching their products as sustainable or environmentally friendly. These pitches are based on criteria like an improved performance than counterparts based on Life Cycle Assessment (LCA), prudent material selection, responsible manufacturing processes, and others. However, the strange reality is that the claims match the product impacts only 20% of the time. (Brady, 2016) (ONYA, n.d.) Second, prevailing ambiguity amongst the terms like 'green', 'environment friendly', 'sustainable', etc. Third, there are several certification schemes in the market to certify sustainable products. However, there is minimum awareness amongst the consumers about these schemes. (Schmuck et al., 2018) Fourth, for some products, consumers are concerned about the trade-offs with the performance like laundry detergents, soaps, etc. (Whelan & Kronthal-Sacco, 2019) It should be well established beforehand that this is not an exhaustive list and lacks the size of each barrier that will be addressed through this paper.

## Literature Review

29<sup>th</sup> July was marked as the Earth Overshoot Day for 2019. (Mead, 2019) This was the earliest Earth Overshoot Day earmarked since 1970. This implies that humans had already consumed more natural resources by this date than the earth could produce in a year. This further indicates that, at present, we are consuming 1.75 times more than the earth can regenerate.

Our present rate of consumption of the earth's natural resources is a trend that will have far-reaching consequences on the Earth's ecological balance and consequentially, on humanity. Changing patterns of production and consumption to make goods more sustainable is a remedy to this problem. The idea of sustainability has picked up traction in the past years, owing at least in part to the discussion around the Sustainable Development Goals developed by the United Nations. Sustainability has been variously defined by experts and includes parameters such as efficient use of resources, minimizing emissions of waste and pollutants over the product life cycle, and simultaneously promoting a better quality of life. (UNEP, 2017) Thus, sustainability broadly covers three dimensions – economics, environment, and society. (Sheth et al., 2011) Further, sustainability also encompasses “eco-friendly” or “green products” and so sets the focus on the future.

Academic research reflects that people, in general, are more aware of climate change and appreciate the need for adopting sustainability practices. (Darnall et al., 2012) Products that claim sustainability show twice the growth than their conventional counterparts. (White et al., 2019) Fast-moving consumer goods brands that advertised sustainability as their offering saw greater retail shelf placement because of increasing demand; thus adding credence to the idea that consumers



who are invested in the idea of sustainable brands are open to buying products that claim sustainability in their operations and impact. (Nielsen - CPG, 2018)

However, research shows that concerns about sustainability do not translate to changes in the purchasing behaviour, especially in the developing countries where demand for sustainable products is not nuanced. Only about 26% of the consumers who show an inclination towards sustainable products buy them. (White et al., 2019) In India, sustainability is not seen as a necessity when it comes to India's retail industry and sustainability practices are still at a nascent stage. Since consumers do not feel the need to buy sustainable products, few companies feel motivated to focus on incorporating sustainability into their offerings. (Sivagnanasundaram, 2018) Therein lies the question that this research seeks to answer- why, if the idea of sustainability holds sway on the imaginations of customers, do sustainable products not see the uptake their proponents expect?

Pre-existing research seeks to answer this question from various angles. Consumer psychology is one of the lenses through which several researchers probe the puzzle of sustainability uptake. According to such research, the action-intention gap is pervasive in human buying behaviour, which means that while people often have good intentions, their choices may not always be rational. (Hollingworth & Barker, 2019) In other words, people often deviate from the 'rational choice' theory due to behavioural barriers. (Frederiks et al., 2015) Research shows that social protocols can dictate the uptake of sustainable products and habits (or their lack). (White et al., 2019) Public interventions that encourage sustainable behaviour are the central aspect of such research with core recommendations including using social influence, shape good habits, leveraging the domino effect, deciding whether to talk to the heart or the brain and favouring experiences over ownership.

The dual-process theory has been discussed in the literature to narrow down the intention-action gap and nudge customers towards sustainable products. (Ooms, 2016) The dual-process theory states that people do not act rationally all the time but have two systems that define their behaviour; one is automatic, fast, and based on heuristics whereas the second system is slow, controlled, and analytic. The first system of behaviour can be nudged using various techniques such as product positioning (influencing sales through vertical and horizontal placement), using social norms, providing informative labelling on products (using coloured labels for eco-friendly products), and routing (influencing pedestrian routes through floor markers).

It may be noted that persistent challenges, other than the behavioural barriers, also hamper the growth of sustainable consumption, such as a) high price – only about 13% showed an inclination to pay higher prices for green products; (Rakowski, 2010) b) greenwashing – companies that spend more resources in publicity than curbing their environmental impacts; c) performance trade-offs – consumers are usually sceptical about performance trade-offs of products such as sustainable sanitary napkins and as a result, they may continue to use non-biodegradable products (Whelan & Kronthal-Sacco, 2019).

Nudging consumers towards sustainable products also requires considering other factors. Companies focusing on sustainability initiatives need to proactively partner with consumers to accomplish sustainability goals efficiently and effectively. (Sheth et al., 2011) Companies also need to meet the consumer's expectations in terms of price, product quality, the convenience of use, etc.



to sell sustainable products. (LaBrecque, 2014) Another tool that can be deployed by the companies is changing the default conditions and/or options; primarily imposed in situations when consumers do not make a decision or request for an alternative. (Pichert & V.Katsikopoulos, 2008) A common example of this could be sending e-bills for electricity and telephone by default with a physical copy being sent only on the explicit request of the consumer.

This raises another dimension of sustainability – negative spillover or licensing as termed by various researchers and “sustainability liability”. Negative spillover implies that sustainable behaviour can lead to less sustainable choices. For example, investment in energy-efficient appliances may lead to an increasing number of hours of use. Also, whether a sustainable product will be preferred over its counterpart depends on the type of benefit the consumer desires from that product. (Luchs et al., 2010) The author demonstrates that ethical products are usually associated with softer values, hence if the consumer desires strength related features in a product, he may opt for a less sustainable alternative, resulting in sustainability liability.

Consumption is primarily driven by social and cultural norms and consumers often tend to buy products that fulfil their self-identity and social relationships. (Schaefer & Crane, 2005) Studies have shown that personal knowledge of a consumer is a critical driver of sustainable purchase habits. Various studies also show that even though value associated with the product, its utility, price, and ease of purchase remain critical factors in purchase decisions, environmentally conscious consumers take in to account the environmental costs and sustainability is becoming a bigger factor in purchase decisions. (Rosmarin, 2020) (Rakowski, 2010)

## Methodology

An extensive review of academic literature and grey literature was conducted. This was aimed to identify the baseline situation and the studies instituted to address the research gap underlined in this paper. Moreover, to get public opinion on the same a survey questionnaire was prepared. The survey questionnaire was aimed to identify several key tenets:

- 1) Monthly income of the individual to gauge the availability of financial resources to spend on sustainable products.
- 2) Awareness of the individual about sustainable products in the market.
- 3) Key factors that affect brand selection for an individual
- 4) Reasons inhibiting the individual from buying sustainable products.

Also, the questionnaire was designed in a way that provided the freedom to the respondent to express their opinions on the above-mentioned factors.

The sample size for the survey was calculated as follows:

Consider the top 10 metropolitan cities in India. Each of the cities will have a population size greater than 4 million. Assuming that at least a quarter of the population in these cities is capable of buying sustainable products, then



Total population under consideration (P)= 4 million \* 10 \* 0.25 = 10 million

For confidence level of 90% (z-score = 1.65) and margin of error (e) 5%, the sample size is,

$$\text{Sample Size} = \frac{\frac{z^2 P(1-P)}{e^2}}{1 + \frac{z^2 P(1-P)}{e^2 N}}$$

Sample Size = 273

Hence, through google forms, we surveyed more than 280 individuals. This survey methodology can be extended to a larger population size in the future when economic growth transitions them to the population class under consideration in this study. At present, this study was restricted to the demographic that has the financial means to consider buying sustainable products.

The demographics of respondents in the survey conducted are provided below in Table I.

Demographics	Classification	Percentage
Age	Below 20	1%
	20-30	40%
	30-40	50%
	40-50	6%
	Above 50	3%
Gender	Male	60%
	Female	39%
	Others	1%
Monthly Income	Under 50K	16%
	50K-100K	30%
	100K – 200K	23%
	200K-500K	10%
	500K	21%

**Table I: Demographics of the Respondents**

The data obtained from the survey went through the following steps:

- Data Cleaning
- Data Summarization
  - Centrality
  - Dispersion
  - Concentration
- Data Visualization
- Predictive Analysis



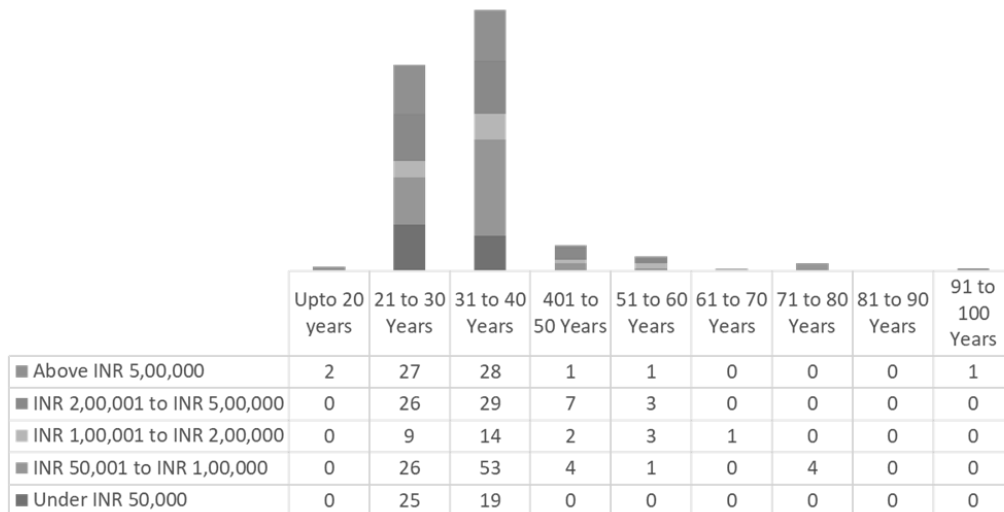
In the end, this paper will answer the reasons for lackadaisical growth in the uptake of sustainable products. It will help us in curating recommendations for the stakeholders to re-Pitch sustainable products.

## Survey Results and Analysis

The role of each stakeholder is crucial when it comes to increasing the uptake of sustainable products and practices. However, indisputably consumers are the fulcrum of the entire ecosystem that drives demand through their choices. Through this survey, we tried to assess the inclination of consumers towards sustainability. This gave us insights on the consumer's perspective and possible nudges that can help manufacturers in better product development, packaging, and placement. The key findings of the survey are discussed in this section.

### Participant's Profile

The consumer segment involves a multi-dimension mix of individuals. As shown in Figure II, most participants belonged to the age range of the 20s to early 50s whose family income ranged from under INR 50,000 to about INR 5,00,000 per month. Further, more than 95% of the respondents had completed graduation or post-graduation. Thus, we were able to capture the response of participants from across the ecosystem.

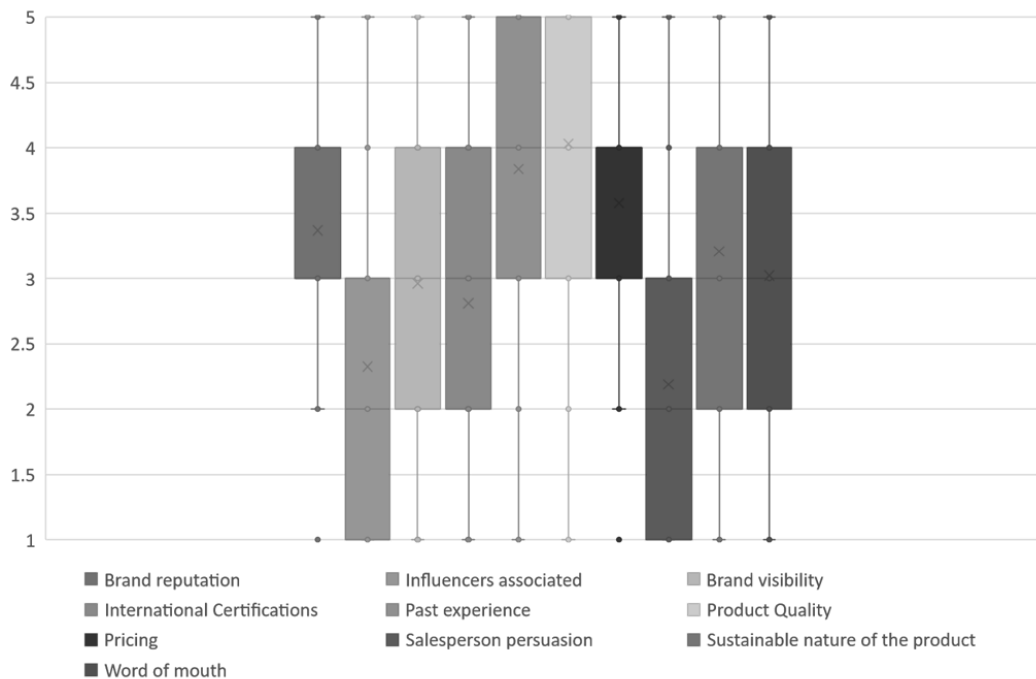


**Figure II: Snapshot of Age and Monthly Household Income Profile of Participants**

### Participant's Response

One of the key parameters that may affect consumption decisions could be how the peers or other actors of the ecosystem are affected. On enquiring about the factors that influence the choice of selection of a product, we found that quality and experience were the most critical parameters for more than 70% of the respondents. Even one bad experience can drive away customer interests for

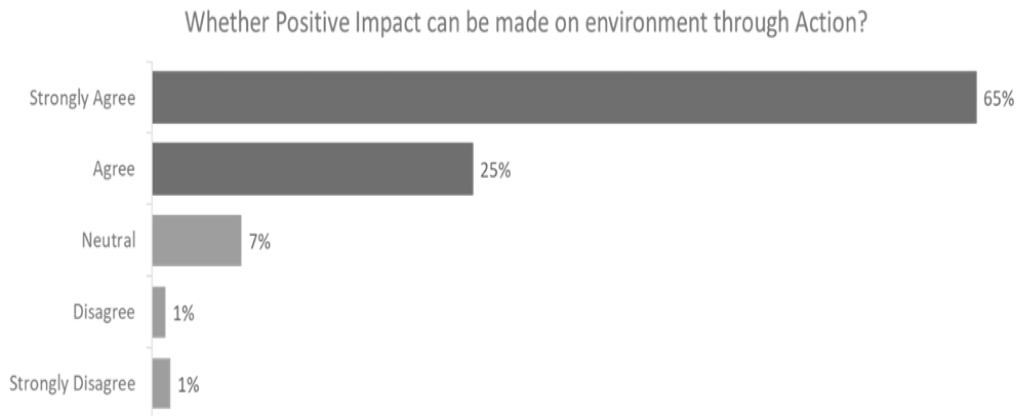
good. Thereafter, pricing of the product and brand reputation, brand visibility, sustainable nature of the product played a critical role in nudging the consumers towards a brand. It was endearing to see the mention of sustainability in this list by the consumers. Interestingly, we also found that word of mouth and international certifications are also a critical element in brand selection. This shows, with time, the awareness of people is increasing on products and their validation by accredited agencies. On the other hand, we found that inter-personal factors such as promotions by influencers and salespersons were not very effective in the final decision making of the consumers. This is in sharp contrast to the facts and on which insurmountable amount of money is invested. The chart in Figure III provides a summary of responses where participants were asked to assign points to various factors based on their criticality while selecting a brand (5 points to the most critical factor and likewise).



**Figure III: Criticality of Factors Considered Before selecting a Brand**

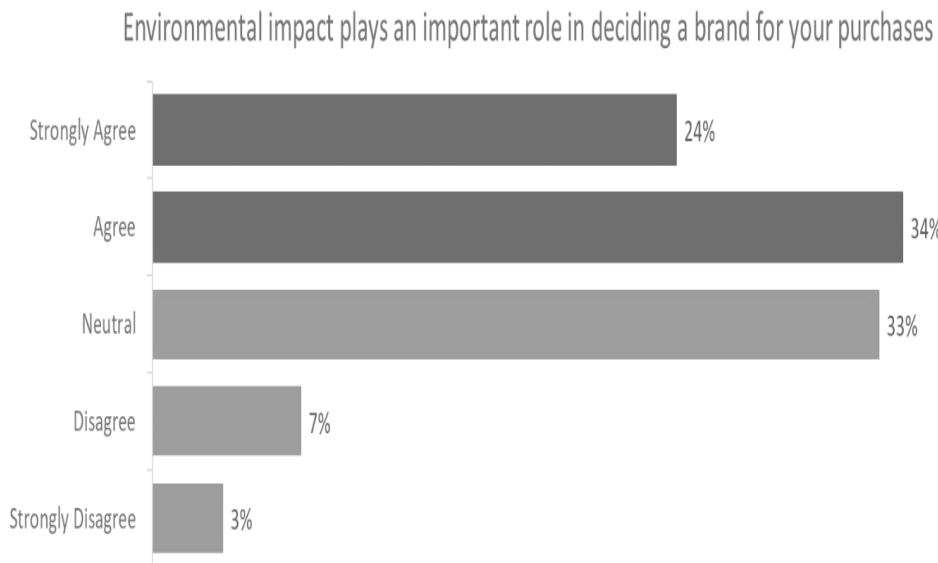
As a consumer, buying sustainable products sometimes comes with inherent challenges. It is difficult to put yourself through the inconvenience associated with buying such products unless there is a trust in the idea of sustainability. Hence, we sought to establish how empowered consumers felt to have a positive impact on the environment through their actions. As shown in Figure IV, approximately 90% of the respondents believed that they could make a positive contribution to the environment through their actions while 2% believed that their contributions did not make much difference to environmental protection efforts and the rest were ambivalent.





**Figure IV: Beliefs in the Impact of individual Actions on Environment**

As the transition towards sustainability is for the environmental benefits, the awareness of the environmental impact of the brands' becomes an important criterion for buying sustainable products. Around 58% of the respondents stated that the environmental impact of a brand or a product did play an important role in their purchase as seen in Figure V. Surprisingly, ~33% of the respondents were ambivalent regarding the importance of the environmental impact on their buying decisions while ~9% of the respondents indicated that environmental considerations did not impact their consumption choices greatly.



**Figure V: Environmental Considerations in Purchase Decisions**



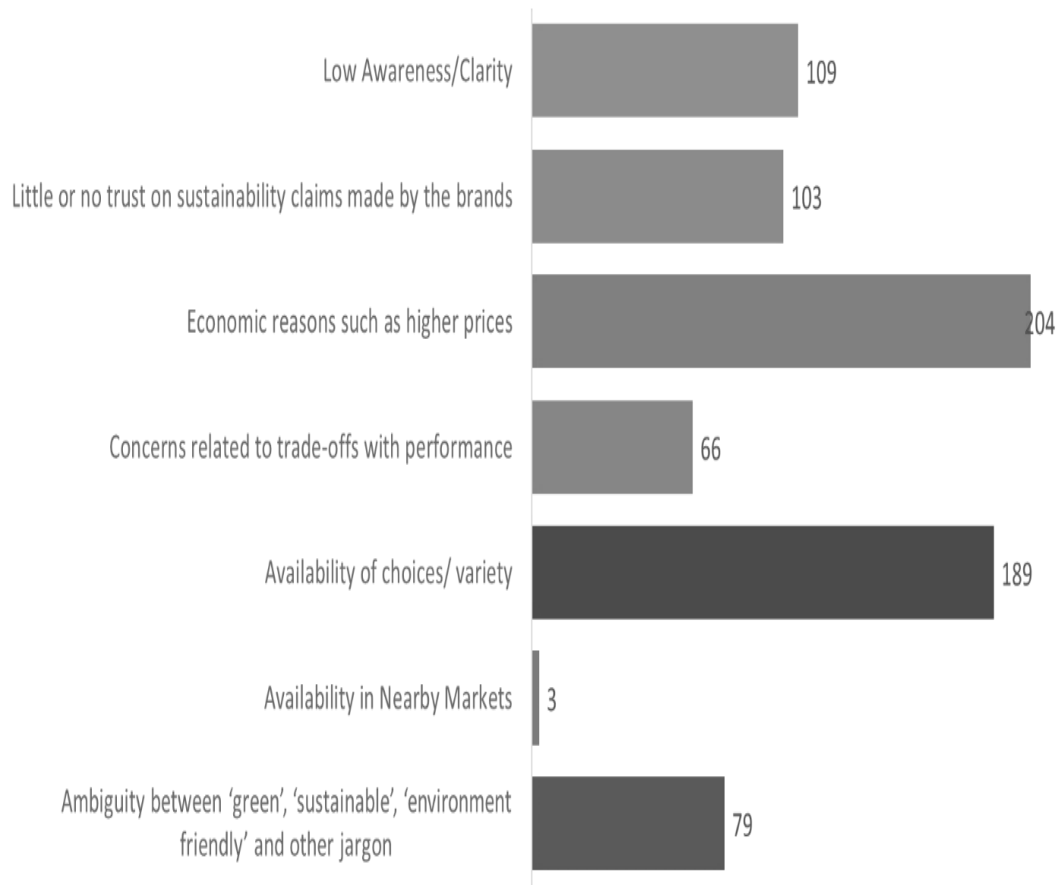
Sustainability is a profound issue and our respondents showcased a willingness to switch to organic or sustainable variants, wherever such an option was feasible. However, various other reasons impact the feasibility of buying sustainable products, and our research investigated these reasons in greater detail. We posed questions that helped us understand consumer psychology when it came to sustainable alternatives.



**Figure VI:** Word-cloud Representaion of **Sustainable Products Used by Respondents**

We sub-divided our questions into two categories- one-time investment products and products that constitute everyday items of consumption. Sustainability is a vast domain and such a division was made to narrow down upon the perceptions of consumers towards various types of sustainable product categories in the market. At the outset, we asked the respondents to list down the sustainable products used by them in day to day life. Interestingly, reusable cloth/paper bags were the most cited of them all as can be seen in Figure VI. This also poses another question as to whether it is a trend of recent past considering the extra cost imposed by most of the retailers on plastic bags. Nevertheless, the range of sustainable products included reusable goods, low-carbon technologies, and environmentally friendly goods. Alarmingly, some of the respondents stated that they perceived polypropylene bags as sustainable because of their reusability. Considering that commonly these bags are presumed to be made of fabric rather than plastic reflects the pervasive confusion among the consumer segment in the differentiation of sustainable products from unsustainable ones.

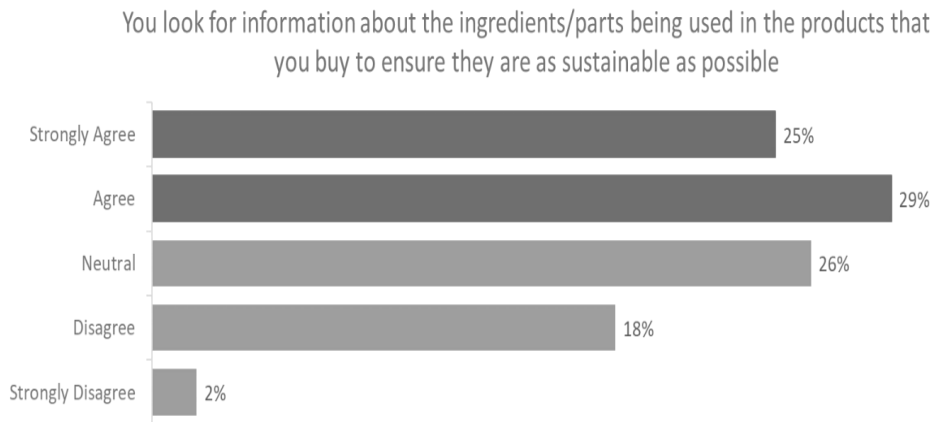
As established before, the general sentiment of the respondents towards the idea of sustainable products was positive. However, a very basic but important hurdle that comes in the way of buying sustainable products is their availability. From Figure VII, around 72% of the people who wished to buy sustainable products stated that higher prices of such products constituted a significant hurdle to buying them.



**Figure VII: Reasons for not Buying Sustainable Products**

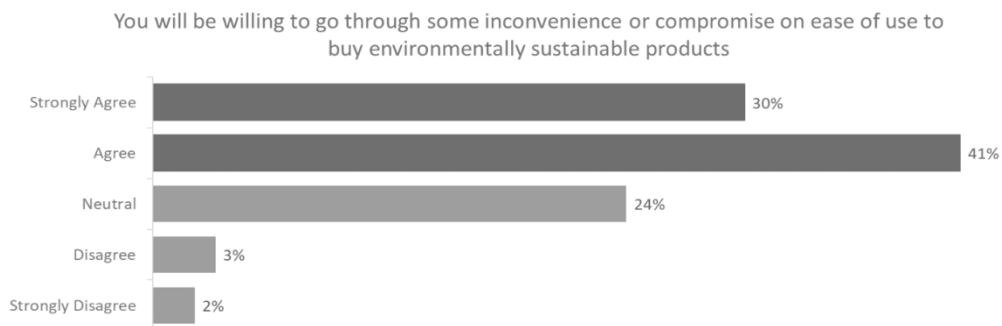
However, despite consumer sentiment being in favor of sustainable products, there continues to be an unwillingness to purchase them when they are available. As stated earlier, sustainable products are generally priced higher than their counterparts, which is a major deterrent for consumers. Lack of choices when it comes to sustainable products is another factor that comes in the way of greater uptake of sustainable products while respondents also cite a lack of trust in the sustainability claims of the products being advertised as sustainable. Despite the push for sustainability on a global scale, lack of awareness, and clarity around sustainability concepts generates apprehensions amongst the consumers.

The call for the sustainability of consumer products is a relatively new one and buying sustainable products often requires careful consideration of the products available. We set out to gauge whether people took actionable steps towards buying sustainable products. Checking for the parts that make up the whole of the product constitutes a critical step towards ensuring that one is acting sustainably. Interestingly, 54% of the people surveyed stated that they did buy products after careful consideration of the ingredients or parts being used in the products they were buying as seen in Figure VIII.



**Figure VIII: Careful Consideration of Product Information to Ensure Sustainability**

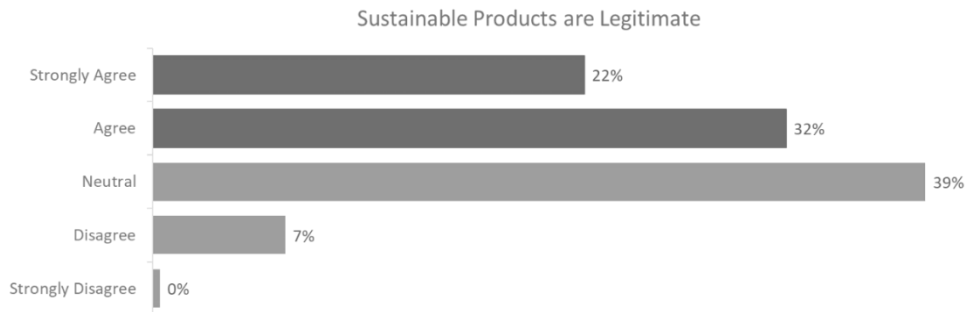
Buying sustainable products requires more effort from consumers. As sustainable products are relatively new arrivals on the market, inconveniences might include forgoing the ease of use that less sustainable counterparts offer, paying higher prices for a product whose less sustainable counterpart might cost less, putting in greater effort in scouting for sustainable alternatives among others. Many of the respondents of our survey were willing to put themselves through some inconvenience to buy sustainable alternatives. As seen in Figure IX, approximately 71% of the respondents expressed a positive attitude towards such inconvenience while ~24% were ambiguous and 9% were unwilling to put themselves through the inconvenience associated with buying sustainable products.



**Figure IX: Willingness to Compromise on Ease of Use for Sustainable Options**

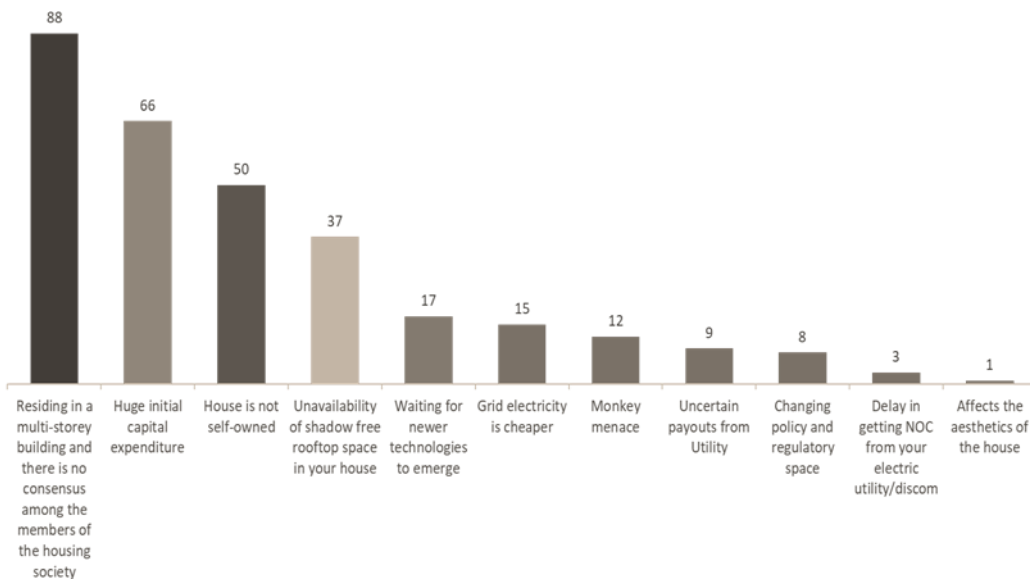
We further questioned them regarding the problem of convenience versus sustainability to gauge what stood out as being more important to them. For approximately 46% of the respondents, sustainability took precedence over convenience while approximately 54% of the respondents believed that convenience played an important role in their buying decisions. This provides important insight to the product manufacturers to arrive at a middle ground in terms of providing apt prices and experience for the commodity.

When questioned on the perception of the legitimacy of sustainable products, 39% of the respondents expressed an ambivalence of sentiment while 7% of the respondents expressed low levels of trust in the legitimacy of products and the claims associated with them as can be seen in Figure X. This underscores the need for the product manufacturers to device new strategies and models to gain the trust of the consumers in the near term.



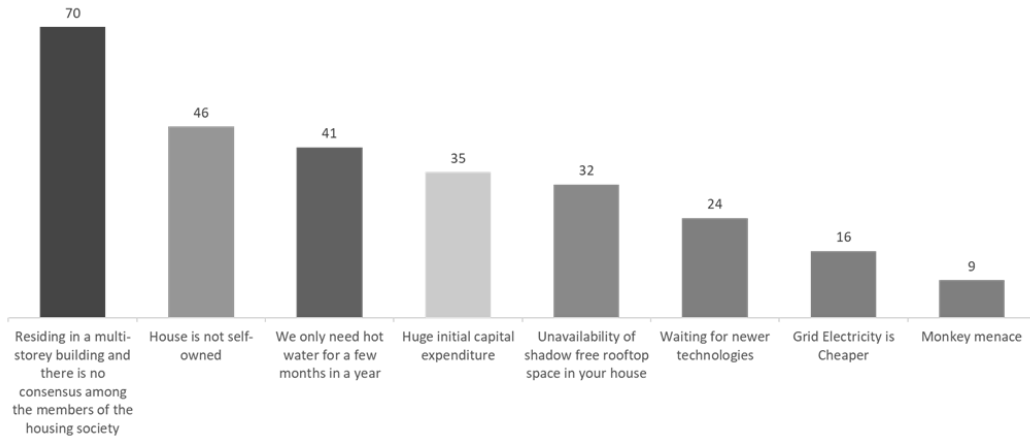
**Figure X: Legitimacy Claims of Sustainable Product**

One-time sustainable technology investments faced one significant hurdle that was different from the hurdles faced by sustainable alternatives to everyday products. More than half of the respondents could not install solar rooftops for generating electricity. We found that, in urban areas, the respondents staying in multi-story or rented apartments had no say in this decision. Whereas for about one-third of our respondents, huge initial capital expenditure was a major deterrent. Figure XI shows the opinion of the respondents concerning the installation of solar panels in their homes.



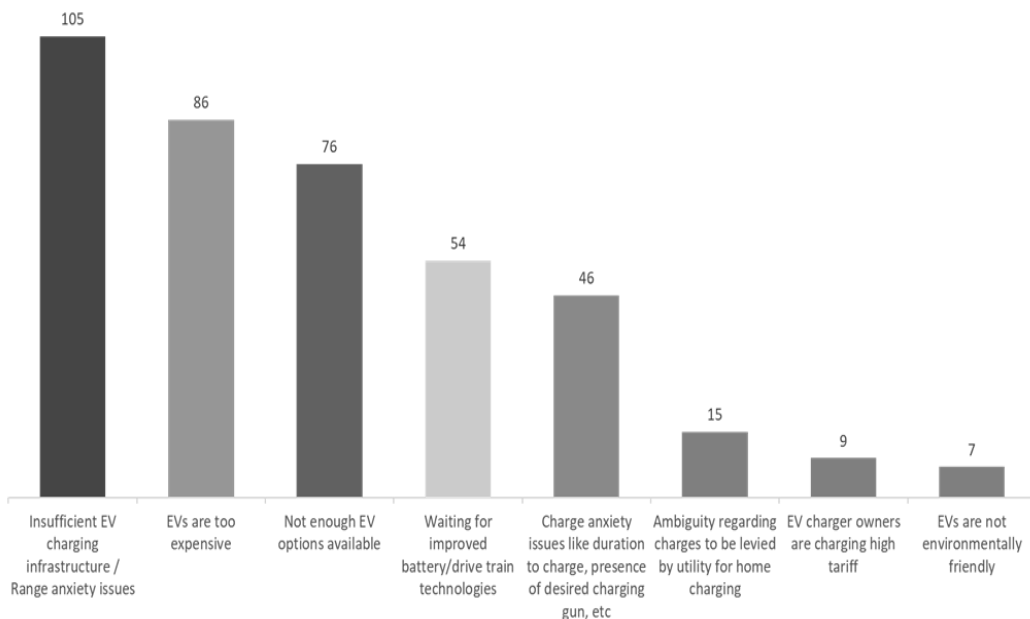
**Figure XI: Reasons for not Installing Solar Panels**

On similar grounds, we tried to assess the inclination of respondents towards solar water heaters and Electric Vehicles (EVs) as well. For solar water heaters, the deterrents were akin to solar panels. Additionally, respondents stated that their hot water requirement is restricted to a limited number of months in a year. Figure XII the opinion of respondents for not installing solar water heaters.



**Figure XII: Reasons for not Installing Solar Water Heaters**

As for the EVs, major disincentives against buying include range anxiety, a limited number of options, and high up-front cost as seen in Figure XIII.



**Figure XIII: Reasons for not Considering EVs**



## Predictive Analysis

Logistic regression is a type of non-linear statistical analysis aimed at determining the categorical response (Success or Failure) based on the several independent input variables. It helps in establishing the relationship between one dependent binary variable and the other independent ordinal, non-ordinal or continuous variables. (Hoffman, 2019) We used high-level programming language- Python, in an Integrated Development Environment (IDE)- Spyder.

The data collected from the survey acted as a lynchpin in the analysis. We used the same data to train and test the model to safely predict the possibility of the future customer to buy a product. Table II enlists the independent variables into consideration and their type whereas Table III shows the outcome of the regression.

Type	Variable
Continuous (1,100)	Age
Non-Ordinal (0- Female & 1- Male)	Gender
Ordinal (1 to 5)	Brand reputation; International Certifications; Experience; Pricing; Quality; Brand Visibility; Influencers Associated; Sustainability; Word of Mouth; Salesperson Persuasion;

**Table II: Independent-Variables**

$$\text{Generic Equation: } y = a_0 + a_1 * x_1 + a_2 * x_2 \quad (I)$$

Independent Variables	Coefficients
Age	-0.04
Gender	-0.27
Brand reputation	0.95
International Certifications	0.86
Experience	1.04
Pricing	1.00
Quality	1.88
Brand Visibility	0.45
Influencers Associated	0.22
Sustainability	0.74
Word of Mouth	0.76
Salesperson Persuasion	-0.13
Constant	-32.14

**Table III: Coefficient Value of the Independent Variables**

$$\text{Probability of occurrence: } P = 1/(1+e^{-y}) \quad (II)$$

In simple terms, input the values of the variables mentioned above (obtained from the prospective customers) in the equation I and calculate the value of y. Finally, substitute this value of y in equation II to get the probability of occurrence. (Zornoza, 2020) Based on the probability, one can satisfactorily predict the purchase decision of the customer. This will be critical in answering



specific queries like forecasting the sale of a sustainable product, vendor optimization, etc. In the next section, we provide recommendations for manufacturers, marketers, and sellers based on the literature review and survey results.

## **Recommendations**

Our research into consumer preferences throws up interesting insights into sustainable buying behaviors. While a majority of our respondents, at least in urban areas, held a positive attitude towards sustainable products, the research identified several pain points that marketers and product designers must address to boost sales of sustainable products. Defining a problem statement from the consumer perspective can help understand major gaps that cause a disjunct between the consumers' desires and their actual buying behavior. At the onset, manufacturers should avoid designing one-size-fits-all solutions. For instance, innovative business models to address pricing issues of solar PV will be of negligible importance in catering problems like monkey menace that need installation level innovation. Thus, product designers should explore ways to compartmentalize consumers to produce unique solutions addressing their requirements.

According to consumers, they hesitate before buying sustainable products primarily because of:

1. Lack of availability of product or choices between products
2. Unjustifiable costs
3. The inconvenience entailed while buying such products
4. Low trust and/or low awareness about the need for such products and their availability

Addressing these pain points can lead to breakthroughs in getting people to adopt sustainable products and finally solve the pervasive chicken and egg narrative. Most of the people in the market are looking to buy a product that gives them the best quality at the lowest cost. However, cost-competitiveness might be hard to achieve owing to operational or production challenges and as such, does not fall within the ambit of this paper. In the same vein, availability of products, ease of access, or infrastructural accessibility (as in the case of electric vehicles), may be hard to achieve owing to systemic challenges external to marketing and cannot be covered under this research.

Marketing professionals aiming to increase sales of sustainable products must understand the consumers' motivation behind buying such products and create an urgent need for their product in the mind of the consumer. Sustainable products are uniquely positioned, especially from a consumer's perspective. For one, the market for sustainable products is new, and not many businesses are producing such goods. Secondly, most sustainable products offer similar competencies as their counterparts, but at a higher financial cost. They also require consumers to compromise upon their ease or comfort of buying by demanding higher cognitive and physical effort in their procurement and usage. Overall, sustainable products offer only one thing that their not-marketed-as-sustainable products offer- i.e. their sustainability.

The knowledge that buying sustainable products can help mitigate the environmental crisis is a major selling point for many environmentally conscious consumers. These consumers are willing to





step out of their comfort zones and put in greater time, money, and effort into buying sustainable products. But there is a vast chunk of the population that may not feel the same pull towards these products or while aware of the need for environmental actions, might not feel convinced as to their role in the process.

The importance of building an emotional connection between the product and the consumer has long been held up as an important marketing principle (Zorfas & Leemon, 2016). In the case of sustainable products, this includes not just the product but also the cause being sold. By connecting consumers emotionally to the cause, sustainable products have a stronger chance of making an impact on the consumers' buying preferences.

For example, while an electric car company might promote its car for having zero tailpipe emissions, this aspect of the product will not click with the consumers unless an effort is also made to build awareness around the negative impact of tailpipe emissions on the consumers present and future health and wellbeing. Buying an electric vehicle, or any other sustainable product, might have a high upfront cost, but marketers need to establish that this high cost is moot in comparison to the negative health impacts that are a consequence of continuing with the status quo.

Similarly, marketers attempting to sell bamboo toothbrushes can focus upon the health benefits to be gained from using bamboo toothbrushes over plastic ones. These are just two examples showcasing the right pitch to adopt. Sustainable products have inherent co-benefits for human well-being apart from their environmental benefits. Emphasizing these co-benefits can present them as a holistic solution.

Our analysis also highlights the need for data and how manufacturers will be flooded with it once the demand picks up. It is essential that they also invest in technologies like big data management, machine learning, etc. to address some of the impending issues like their counterparts. These technologies can help them forecast future demand, perform sentiment analysis on the feedback received, and continuously improve their manufacturing and operational efficiency.

Products that create a desire in the consumers' minds have a stronger chance of being bought (Alton, 2017). Therefore, while emphasizing the sustainable nature of the product is a viable strategy, sustainable products can also stand to gain if pitched directly against their counterparts by highlighting the aesthetic and functional features of the product and not solely pitching its sustainability. Using the same media platforms as their counterparts, both new and traditional, such products can target the same eyeballs and pitch themselves with greater effectiveness.

Pitching items like solar panels or solar water heaters require a different approach. Though highly interested, most of our respondents could not consider installing solar-based technologies as they lived in residential apartments or community settings where the decision to invest in such technologies was not solely their own. Such products require different marketing tactics and business models. High costs and lack of reliability are major drawbacks to the traditional electricity supply in most parts of India. (PHD Research Bureau, 2013) Emphasizing the payback period and the improved reliability of solar products is an important aspect of marketing solar and other renewable products. Marketing such products would require deploying more door-to-door/ personal outreach campaigns over mass campaigns as the target audiences are groups of people in one



location as opposed to individual consumers. The nature of these products being such, collaborations between brands and government and industry stakeholders can also provide positive outcomes.

Our research also suggested that there are some levels of distrust involved in the reliability of the sustainability claims of the products being marketed as such. Tackling such a sentiment requires two levels of awareness building. First, brands need to work on building more higher-level awareness around sustainability as a whole through collaborations with other brands in the same space. Such a collaborative approach helps build trust in the idea of sustainability while adding value to brands individually too (Becker & Smith, 2018). Second, products need to use mass communication to build transparency around their brands. Our research supports the assumption that sustainable products are subjected to greater scrutiny on the part of the consumers before they are bought. Our research revealed that consumers have a hard time trusting the sustainability claims of products. Apprising consumers about the different certifications the product has achieved can be a good way of establishing transparency and trust with your consumers while at the same time allaying their fears about false claims of sustainability. Such communication can also serve to strengthen the brand's position as a thought leader in the sector. Integrity to a cause being a core component of sustainable products, improving communication around transparency can have a significant impact on their uptake (Dienel & Robinson, 2015).

But sustainability is not only a matter of selling a product to an individual or a group of individuals. The movement towards sustainability is primarily a social movement aimed at creating a better future for everyone (United Nations, 2015). Therefore, creating a demand for sustainable products can benefit from the creation of a social dimension around the product and by involving people directly with the brand. Not only will this create brand loyalty, but behavioral research has also shown that people tend to be influenced by social protocols (White et al., 2019). Therefore, if our neighbors are behaving in certain ways and buying certain products, being advocates for certain causes, we are likely to follow in their track too.

While our peers play a role in our social behaviors and actions, salespersons can often be a discounted source of influence. Our survey reveals that few consumers are attracted to a product because of the salesperson at the counter. But salespeople can be quite a powerful source of product uptake if they are passionate and thoroughly knowledgeable about the nuances of the product they are selling. Providing the necessary orientation and training to the salesperson on sustainable products is an overlooked but critical part of social influencing.

While marketing a sustainable product right is only one part of the puzzle of increasing the uptake of sustainable products, positioning a product in the right manner can have a massive influence on the way it is perceived. By pitching their sustainable product right, businesses can place the values they believe in before their consumers and gain recognition, increased sales, and loyalty. The need to adopt sustainability cannot be reinstated more, but our collective failure to imbibe it mainly stems from the complicated and contradictory response taken at all levels. This paper aimed to streamline some of those responses.



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