

# Factors Affecting Awareness and Attitudes on the Green Purchase Intention of Eco-friendly Products in University Students

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**Abstract** - Pollution and earth-destructive behavior has obliged humans to look for ways to restore natural resources. As such, through the past few decades, the use of eco products has become a well-accepted approach and is now popularizing in the local context. This study derived from a quantitative approach securing data from university students of the Western Province in Sri Lanka. Data were collected from 380 students using stratified random sampling methodology and a self-administered questionnaire, across four universities in order to understand the factors that affect awareness and attitudes on the purchase intention of eco-friendly products. Statistical analysis was applied to describe sample and understand sample composition. Multivariate analysis was conducted employing a factor analysis coupled with a multiple linear regression analysis to identify the latent and underlying factors affecting and the relationship towards the purchase intention. The findings provided a comprehensive generalized profile stating any significant statistical differences on demographics and socio-economic variables. Multivariate analysis suggested that the underlying factors that affect purchase intention are overall awareness, environmental concern and product perception. Further, of the three, environmental concern proved to be the factor that impacts young consumers the most indicating that attention should be focused on this factor when dealing with purchase intention of eco products. The study concluded by suggesting that the use of eco labels on eco products with a price range suitable to attract young consumers would influence the intention for purchasing these products thereby participating in the improvement of the environment.

**Keywords** - Ecofriendly products, awareness, attitudes, purchase intention, factor analysis

## I. INTRODUCTION

The world has been depleting as a result of many man-related activities and for the past few decades it has risen to a considerable state causing humans to look back for restoration. This is now one of the most pressing problems known to mankind due to the adverse effects caused by it. As a result, new industries and avenues have been opened in dedication to remedy this cause. One such industry that opened up is the production of green products which grew from the recently introduced 'green concept'. [3] mentioned 'exponential growth' is visible covering the past few years on the mentioned concept as well as in green marketing, while affirming that the market and global environment are impacted significantly due to this introduction. In simple

terms, it captures the idea of no harm or minimized harm to the environment by hosting sustainable waste management systems, efficient use of resources, thereby reducing the use of harmful elements and the introduction of substitute products that are eco-friendly.

Even though eco-friendly products widely range the form of goods, the ideas of this concept have been disseminated to the services sector, and services such as construction, banking, consultation etc. have been developed based on these principles. Moreover, as used in this study, tangible goods/products have been dominant among them. Accordingly, [12], implied from an overall sense that these green goods can be equaled to 'environmentally friendly' or 'ecological' goods. From a Sri Lankan perspective on green products, [7] highlighted that this 'green' does not focus only on lessening ecological destruction when consumer goods and services are utilized; rather, within the scope of this utilization, sustainability and development too also ensured.

Eco-friendly products have been brought into the markets mainly due to the increasing levels of pollution causing discomfort to the environment. Globally, developed countries have recognized this challenge and commenced working towards it while Sri Lanka too, has identified the need for using products harmless to the environment and has started working towards being environmentally conscious. [8] emphasized on the issues of "increasing levels of toxic waste, exposure to severe road traffic noise, high levels of garbage disposal and rapidly lessening landfill space in most of the urban areas", and that businesses have to take measures to address such causes. Further, [13] concluded, in comparison - this concept has been rising in the West and Sri Lanka is now in the stage of green awakening. There is, however, room for much development which shows high necessity in comprehending the requisites and resources of the industry especially as it was recently introduced and is growing at infancy stages.

The main goal of the study under consideration is to investigate and examine what factors affect the awareness and attitudes on the purchase intention of eco-friendly products among university students. The study focuses on eco-friendly products and these products constitute of natural ingredients and are reusable/ recyclable and/ or biodegradable. They are

non-toxic, have low maintenance requirements (in general) and do not cause harm to the environment. Scanning Sri Lanka for these products, it should be noted that the country currently uses many recycled paper products, large variety of reusable bags, range of coir products, cutlery, eco bricks and reusable straws which are a few products through professional businesses that are currently in circulation, with more exposure within the Western Province.

This study concentrates on two aspects: firstly, what do they know of eco products, are they conscious of the impacts generated, are they mindful of these products and what they do. Secondly, what are the students' perceptions of these products, their usage, the environment which they are in and the way they think of the surroundings. As there are limited products and the industry is still growing an overall idea of their awareness and attitudes towards these products and the environment was obtained which acts as a base for further advancement within the green industry. As a known fact, the industry is still in its infancy stages and the customer base of such products is relatively small comparative to conventional products. Therefore, understanding customer perception and their intention to purchase such products would certainly provide insights to manufacturers in positioning their products and knowing what could be expected from consumers in the future. As it has been advised by experts of the industry, the usage of such products would promote the wellbeing of themselves and the environment. Thus, this study seeks to understand the factors that are associated with the purchase intention of such products.

An extensive range of studies have been conducted in this field studying the various aspects of consumer behavior, awareness, intention and purchase intention. A closer look on awareness of eco products suggest that demographic features affect the level of awareness on eco products –[1], [4], and [9]. Furthermore, [4] concluded that youth need to be brought to this knowledge of eco products and its use. He also insisted on the importance of education on environmental issues. Further, [14] through a regression analysis identified that 'awareness of green products is a critical factor and significantly affects the buying decision of such products'. This was confirmed by [11] from Indonesia through Structural Equation Modeling technique mentioned ecological knowledge had a significant effect on green purchase intention. A recent study by [15] from Nepal identified that the purchase behavior can be modified by educating consumers on benefits of such products.

A subset of previous studies in line with purchasing intention and attitudes on green products, show the attitude or manner in which people perceive eco-friendly products, have a direct influence over the purchase intention of such products. [5] used a structural equation modeling (SEM) technique on 351 participants and found that attitudes on eco products, concern for the environment and perception of consumer effectiveness directly and significantly drives green purchase intentions. [6] applied a stepwise regression model which revealed that out

of four factors that were assessed, attitude on green products directly influenced the purchasing behavior of consumers. [10] conducted a study in Malaysia and concluded that environmental concern was the main forecaster for green purchase intention. Such studies have also been conducted within the Sri Lankan context where [8] identified that Sri Lanka is aggregating pollution against the environment and this has impacted both the customers and traders alike, with concerns for the surroundings. Further, with regards to the perception seen on green products, [13] concluded that environmental attitudes directly influence the green consumer behavior.

Thus, knowing the current complexities of the world due to the declining natural resources and its importance in protecting such, through the purchasing and consumption of eco products, this study highlights the factors that affect awareness and attitudes of eco-friendly products on the green purchase intention of university student community in Sri Lanka.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to enrich the understanding of characteristics of the attitudes of university students towards the green purchase intention of eco-friendly products, the study followed the approach recommended by the principles of statistics and a number of statistical techniques were applied.

The study was fashioned to identify the affecting factors on purchase intention of eco-friendly products and along with this objective the researcher also aimed at uncovering any demographic and socio-economic factors of university students that may affect purchase intention. This was further contracted to identifying if there were any differences between students who have been living and brought up within the Western Province, as opposed to the those whose home towns were out of the Western Province. The Western Province was selected as an ideal area to draw data as it contains the highest population and is the commercial hub of the country. It implied that the area would have the highest awareness of eco-friendly products and was hence selected for comparison [2]. Thus, through these outcomes, the market has an enhanced insight on university students' perceptions and their intent to purchase the same.

The role of the dependent and independent variables of this study were green purchase intention, and the university students' awareness and attitudes on purchase intention of eco-friendly products respectively. Primary data were collected from the population of university students within the Western Province of the country. Accordingly, the four main state universities of the said geographical area were selected and a combined sample of 380 was chosen for the study. The sample size was determined by the Krejcie and Morgan Table (1970) which determined this number out of the total number of students that amounted to approximately 40 000 from all universities.

This sample was selected via the stratified random sampling method as there were different number of students from each university and as the total number of students per university was known. The total number of students from all the four universities amounted to 38 500 from which a sample of 118, 89, 74 and 99 were taken from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, University of Colombo, University of Kelaniya and University of Moratuwa respectively. Within this sample framework, a quota was laid on selecting 25% of students from the first two years of academic engagement whereas the remaining 75% were students belonging to the third and fourth years. This quota was adhered in order to receive results that were more in line with what the students' future intentions would be. Though primary data were collected to address the research objective, additionally secondary data too were needed to advocate data collected and apprehend the nature of such products and buyer behavior.

Further, statistical tests such as ANOVA and t tests were conducted under the scope of bivariate analysis to identify if there were any significant statistical differences between the categorical variables developed in the study. The variables used up in this analysis were the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the student sample. In order to test the validity, tests such as the Leven's test and Shapiro-Wilk test were carried out. As the data collected were on the basis of a rating scale, in order to apply parametric statistical techniques, the data were first transformed into an index before the statistical analysis was carried out.

Finally, under the scope of multivariate analysis, a factor analysis was employed on the variables in order to distinguish the latent factors that have an effect on purchase intention. Reliability and validity were assured through the Cronbach's Alpha and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure ensuring further analysis. The Bartlett's test of sphericity was used to identify if there were any significant differences in the correlation matrix. The study used the Principal Components Analysis (PCA) as the dimension reduction technique, which is the most common method to identify the main components of the variables. A multiple regression analysis was conducted to recognize relationships between predictor variables on the response variable. The study concluded with the identification of these hidden factors and analyzing the strength of the relationship against the green purchase intention.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected were formatted using various statistical tools which brought out the results of the study. Descriptive analysis showed a fair breakdown with the number of students in each university and the highest number of students (31%) were from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura whereas the lowest (19%) from the University of Moratuwa. The University of Colombo and University of Kelaniya had 23% and 26% respectively. The ages of the students ranged between 21 and 27 years of age with the highest number of

students being 24 years of age at the time of conducting the research from December 2019 to January 2020. Gender differences were clearly seen with only 32% of the sample being males whereas the remaining 68% of the sample were females. Considering the academic year of the students – the highest number were students belonging to the final year (4th year) of university and his was skewed due to the quota of selecting 75% of the sample from the final two years. However out of the third- and fourth-year students, more students were from the fourth year amounting to 38% of the total sample.

The students were from a range from faculties following the different courses offered by each university where faculty of Arts/ Humanities/ Social Sciences and Management/ Commerce had similar percentage (23%) of respondents. The remaining 54% percentage consisted of students from Applied Sciences, Medicine, Engineering, IT/ Computing/ Technology, Law and Architecture. Province wise, the data showed that 48% of the sample were permanently living in the Western Province and the remaining 52% were from the rest of the country. Out of which highest number of the latter are from living at boarding places (27%), hostels (19%), or other homes by relatives or friends (5%). The family income level distribution had a majority of 33% within the range of Rs. 50 000 – Rs. 100 000 and 20% of the sample having over Rs. 150 000. 52% of the sample claimed they were receiving an income as a university student or through work or any other means such "Bursary" or "Mahapola".

When referring to the preferences of purchasing points for eco-friendly products, majority of 84% preferred to purchase such products from a supermarket shelf. Other options were limited to buying online (29%) and from specialized stores (22%), where as 4% indicated other modes or were not interested at all. However, when questioned on whether you are currently using any eco-friendly products 55% mentioned that they were either not using any eco-friendly product or were unsure of using any. The remaining 45% of the sample was confirm of using eco-friendly products during the time of study. Most responses centered around bags made of cloth or paper bags, paper related products and cutlery.

The study tried to understand the reasons why these products are still unpopular within the target group and the following was revealed. The sample felt that the products were more expensive than conventional products (57%), not always readily available (54%), no wide range or variety (53%), do not have proper labels indicating if it is a green product (46%) and are not promoted enough (42%). Other reasons such as lack of confidence in such products, lack of awareness and not having the current need to use such products were also mentioned with lesser number of responses.

Further, a few statements were asked to obtain a general understanding of the sample and the following responses were obtained. More than 90% of the sample believed that recycling is important in Sri Lanka (97%), agreed that they

separate waste in the university premises (95%), and they foresee that eco products will become popular in the future (90%). 86% of the total sample think that the current level of marketing on these products is insufficient and only 70% were aware of waste management companies available in Sri Lanka. It was important to understand if there were any specific differences caused by the demographic features of the sample and the following results were drawn out:

There was fair distribution of both genders in all faculties except the Engineering (70%) and Architecture (64%) faculties having more males than females. All the students across the four years had highest number of students staying at the boarding (26%) comparative to staying at the hostel (18%) as opposed to those traveling from their own home (48%). Based on the purchasing point preference and the gender, both genders had preference for purchasing online, at a supermarket and at a specialized store – however more females preferred purchasing at supermarkets (70% of those who preferred supermarkets) and more males preferred specialized stores (41% of those who preferred specialized stores).

Data collected from respondents were formatted and indexed in order to further derive conclusions about the sample providing space to apply statistical techniques of ANOVA and the t test. The table below (Table 1) shows in summarized form, which variables proved to have or did not show a significant statistical significance on the dependent variable - purchase intention, constructed on 95% confidence level.

TABLE I. DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

Variable	P value
Gender	0.541
University background	0.855
Different provinces	0.985
Academic years	0.649
Faculties	0.063
Current living location	0.011*
Family income level	0.027*
Receiving income	0.556

The test between the gender and purchase intention proved to have no significant statistical difference (P value = 0.541) between males and females and against the green purchase intention at a 5% significance level. The test between universities against the purchase intention proved to have no significant statistical differences indicating that there were no differences between the universities influencing the students.

As students were from different parts of the country, analysis was done on identifying if there were any significant differences from the nine provinces and green purchase intention but that too proved to have no significant statistical differences (P Value = 0.985) at a 5% significance level. There proved to be no significant statistical differences at a

5% significance level in among the academic years of students, the different faculties and between the purchase intention of eco products.

A significant statistical difference (P Value = 0.011) was identified between the current living locations such as own home, boarding, hostels, other and purchase intention at 5% level of significance. A significant statistical difference was also seen with the differences (P Value = 0.027) between the given four family income levels and green purchase intention. However, when analyzing if there was a difference between students receiving and not receiving an income against the purchase intention it proved to have no significant statistical difference at a 5% level of significance.

On completion of this, further for the factor analysis, reliability analysis (Cronbach Apla values awareness = 0.966, perception = 0.946, purchase\_intention = 0.945), Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO values MOawareness = 0.938, MOperception = 0.937, MOpurchase\_intention = 0.935), and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ( $\chi^2$ awareness = 0.938/ P = 0.000,  $\chi^2$ perception = 0.937/ P = 0.000,  $\chi^2$ purchase\_intention = 0.935/ P = 0.000), were conducted for validity prior to conducting the principal components analysis. All tests proved to be significant and of suitable format in order to conduct factor analysis.

Under the multivariate analysis process for reducing the dimensions of factors under the principal components the covariance approach was adapted to produce the initial Eigen values which reduced to 3 dimensions with values 106.783, 19.729 and 12.196. The adjoining scree plot using the elbow rule also confirmed of 3 factors. The rotated factor loadings analyzed by the rating statements are shown in the TABLE II

TABLE II. ROTATED FACTOR LOADINGS OF PCA

	Component		
	1	2	3
A_1	2.417	1.049	0.380
A_2	2.558	0.682	0.681
A_3	2.436	0.194	1.162
A_4	2.202	-0.10	1.390
A_5	2.338	0.904	0.688
A_6	2.291	0.595	0.860
A_7	2.294	1.326	0.273
A_8	2.378	1.239	0.273
A_9	2.364	1.300	0.332
A_10	2.231	1.206	0.431
P_1	0.814	1.263	1.521
P_2	0.932	1.361	1.504
P_3	0.466	0.870	2.065
P_4	0.500	0.846	1.909
P_5	0.507	0.303	2.173
P_6	0.554	1.107	1.795
P_7	0.755	2.196	0.921
P_8	0.825	2.396	0.797
P_9	0.890	2.302	0.641
P_10	0.760	2.256	0.750
P_11	0.844	2.327	0.807
P_12	0.857	2.278	0.793

The analysis resulted in revealing three main factors namely overall awareness, environmental concern and product perception that affect the purchase intention of ecofriendly products. Along with this conclusion from the factor analysis, a multiple regression analysis was further conducted in identifying the relationship of the factors. The following data were revealed through a correlation analysis.

TABLE III. BETA COEFFICIENTS OF VARIABLES AGAINST PURCHASE INTENTION

Factors	Standardized beta coefficients
Overall awareness	0.160
Environmental concern	0.547
Product perception	0.158

According to Table 4 the highest beta value of 0.547 belongs to the factor environmental concern indicating the strongest effect on purchase intention. This concluded the statistical analysis conducted on the study under consideration.

#### IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The study concluded by providing useful insights on the purchase intention of eco-friendly products of university students, their awareness and attitudes towards them. After the results of the analyzed data had been presented, further inference gathered is provided as the outcome of the study.

The main division among the selected sample was that the students deferred from the universities in which they were academically engaged in. Even though each institution had varied number of students there were no extreme differences in the number of students from each university.

The range of ages within the sample belongs to individuals who can be labeled as a young consumer and would be actively dealing in the market in the near future. They also have high exposure to the recently introduced green concept as opposed to individuals of older generations who would be less prone to switching to new products. Hence the sample provided a generalized response of individuals within the age group. The age group also provided an indicator as to what the future market behavior patterns for eco-friendly products would look like. The sample also had responses from a diverse range of academic backgrounds owing to the different courses provided by the universities which show that the sample could be generalized to the wider population of young consumers in the country.

The location from which individuals were distributed around the country; however, even though the data consists of responses of those who have been living from around the whole country almost half the sample within the Western Province itself. As location is a barrier for daily travel students had to locate themselves closer to the university premises and data shows that the majority were living in boarding houses – apart from those who travel daily from homes. There may have been higher exposure for students in

boarding houses with buying groceries and other necessities from supermarkets and other shops as opposed to those within the university hostel system. A difference was seen in those staying in boarding places against those who travel from home on the purchase intention of eco-friendly products. This may be because they could have gained awareness during their stay in the Western Province even if there was not much exposure prior to living in this province.

Family income provides a rough idea on the spread of income within the sample and even though the country is declared as upper middle-income generating country majority of students are of a family income of less than Rs. 100 000 (over 50%) showing that it may be a reason for the low level of usage of such products within the sample. Nearly half the sample does not receive a cash inflow and are dependent showing that they may not be able to spend on premium priced products considering a university student's basic needs. Overall, the demographic features of the sample justified the cause of generalization and was symbolic to the wider population in the society.

Given the option of purchasing such products, even though online purchasing and special store purchases were not rejected by the sample, higher preference was given to purchasing from a supermarket which is readily available with other shopping products. As current supermarkets have limited shelves with eco-products, it is useful to understand that customers would be more open to buying these products off a shelf from the supermarket.

Among the sample there was low awareness on the knowledge that waste management companies are currently running in the country. Also, majority perceive that the level of marketing for eco-friendly products are insufficient and think that these products will become popular in the future, showing a positive indication for the growth of the industry in the upcoming years. There was very high agreement on the necessity of recycling in the country as opposed to using eco-friendly products, indicating the latter is not widely accepted as recycling as yet. Lower knowledge on waste management companies shows that even though students are engaging in waste separation in their own universities the waste management systems available in the country are not well known yet.

In understanding the gender differences and the preference points for purchasing eco-friendly products, it was seen that more females prefer to purchase from a supermarket whereas more males preferred purchasing online. This can be considered when positioning products to reach the target audience.

Despite some universities taking efforts in practicing the green concept within the university, it resulted in no specific differences among the level of purchase intention of the students. Hence the message has not quite translated to the students in terms of switching their products from conventional products to eco-friendly products. The location

of permanent residence too showed no differences indicating that there was no difference from the students who have been living in the Western Province against those who were not living the Western Province on the purchase intention.

Neither the academic years of a student nor the academic background showed any statistical differences on the purchase intention of eco-friendly products, indicating the educational background does not have a strong influence on this concept. Further, the possibility of students receiving a cash inflow too did not show any differences in the purchase intention. There was a significant difference in the different levels of family income and the current living location against the green purchase intention. Those who received a family income of less than Rs. 50 000 and more than Rs. 150 000 showed a difference on the purchase intention indicating the intention of students from higher income families is different to that of those who are from low income families. Further there was a significant difference based on the students who are currently living in their own homes as opposed to those who are living in boarding places.

Multivariate analysis conducted on the data revealed that three main factors affecting purchase intention – overall awareness, environmental concern and product perception where awareness includes the total awareness for green products and the environment, environmental concern is the perception the consumers hold on to, with regards to the environment and product perception is the way at how the consumers view green products. All factors have a significant positive impact on the purchase intention which highlights its importance. The analysis suggests that these factors need to be considered when engaging with the purchase intention of eco-friendly products in the future. Along with this finding, more focus should be given to environmental concern as it created the highest impact. This finding concluded the study.

### *Suggestions*

Prior to the suggestions, it must be noted that there were few limitations faced by the researcher. There was a time frame within which the study was conducted and hence it narrowed the scope of the study. As mentioned, the study deals with only tangible products that are more known towards the general public. Further studies can improve on the study by increasing the scope of products using this study as the base. Moreover, the data collection tool was provided only in English which eliminated the responses of those who were not comfortable with the language.

In conclusion, the researcher highlights a few suggestions based on the collected information and suggests that the use of eco labels be implemented on eco products and it would create a positive impact on the purchasing intention leading to the purchasing to such eco-friendly products. Product manufacturers providing information on the product ingredients can improve the confidence of the consumers and improve the usage by doing so. Further, as a developing country and targeting young consumers to start switching

from conventional products to eco-friendly products manufacturers need to consider the quality of the products as well as the pricing strategy that will attract the use of these products. Their perception can be influenced by conveying messages based on the environment and safeguarding it.

Thus, day by day the world is moving into a state of destruction, it is important to note that, as humans it is necessary to change certain behaviors that are harmful to the environment. Change needs to take place in a fast pace as if delayed it may cause much damage and humans may not be able to withstand it. As a developing country more concern should be shown on the product usage and disposal of products that have substitute eco-friendly options. Young consumers should begin to actively participate in a lifestyle that fits the ‘green’ concept by using and promoting eco-friendly products.

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