



From Intent to Action: Steering Sustainable Consumption Choices

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Executive Summary

As India continues to be the fastest-growing major economy, its raw materials demand is projected to reach nearly 15 billion tonnes by 2030. This would make India the world's third-largest materials consumer, thereby putting immense pressure on natural resources¹. Hence, it is important to understand and encourage sustainable consumption.

¹ <https://www.outlookbusiness.com/opinions/india-embraces-circular-economy-for-sustainable-future-news-418241>

This white paper by SPIJMR WISE Tech presents a multi-perspective analysis of the various facets of sustainable consumption to arrive at implementable strategies. We followed a two-pronged method for credible and actionable insights: first, we surveyed 2,200 respondents in the 25–40 years age bracket from November 2024 to January 2025, spanning 10 major Indian cities. Second, we captured qualitative insights from nearly 40 industry leaders who gave their perspective on the survey findings, as part of a ‘Chatham House’-style² CXO roundtable held on February 22, 2025, in Mumbai. The key findings from the survey suggest that **84%** of respondents indicated a **preference for sustainable products** when given a choice. Further, consumers demonstrated a **willingness to pay premium prices for sustainable products**, particularly when linked with clear health and environmental benefits. **79%** of the respondents actively **assess potential employers' sustainability credentials** when evaluating career opportunities. To be noted here is that consumer preferences and recommended interventions for increased sustainable consumption were found to differ significantly by city.

Findings from both approaches enabled us to identify strategic recommendations for industry leaders and policymakers across the domains of **fiscal incentives and governance, awareness and communication, technological infrastructure, transparency and trust building, and education and behavioural change**. For the industry, key recommendations include treating sustainability as a core strategy rather than a peripheral corporate social responsibility (CSR) activity, building robust employee engagement programmes to embed

sustainability into daily operations, investing in visible sustainability signals like 'Blue Dot' labelling to build consumer trust and reduce friction, and leveraging technology for greater supply chain transparency and emissions tracking. For policymakers, it is suggested to offer Goods and Services Tax (GST) benefits and procurement incentives to responsible brands, launch localised behaviour-change campaigns driven by storytelling and community heroes, and encourage supply chain traceability through technology-backed regulatory frameworks. Furthermore, there's a call to integrate comprehensive sustainability education into curricula from an early stage to foster long-term behavioural change.

This white paper, therefore, serves as an urgent call to action for governments, businesses, educators, and innovators to collaboratively co-create an ecosystem where sustainable consumption becomes accessible, aspirational, and affordable for all. Such collective effort is essential to pave the way for a more sustainable and equitable future for India and to position it as a global leader in shaping sustainability standards.

² <https://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/chatham-house-rule>

Introduction

In an increasingly resource-constrained world, **what/how we consume** has become as critical as **what/how we produce**.

Consumption is no longer a passive outcome of economic growth—it is a deliberate choice with far-reaching implications for climate resilience, public health, social equity, and long-term business viability.

1.1 Mindful Choices: The Power of Sustainable Consumption

The UN definition of Sustainable Consumption refers to “the use of services and related products, which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations”.³

While the UN definition provides the cornerstone for global policy, its broad scope necessitates a more focused framework for application by individuals, communities, and businesses. This aligns with the principles of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12, which advocates for “doing more and better with less”.

1.2 Beyond Green: Decoding Sustainability

In this white paper, we view sustainability as the enduring state and capacity of ecological, social, and economic systems to remain diverse, productive, and in balance indefinitely⁴. It encompasses:

- **Environmental sustainability:**

Conserving natural resources, reducing pollution and waste, mitigating climate change, and protecting biodiversity.

- **Social sustainability:** Ensuring fair labour practices, promoting community well-being and inclusivity, and upholding human rights throughout value chains.

- **Economic sustainability:** Fostering long-term economic viability and resilience for businesses and societies through efficient resource use, innovation, and equitable wealth distribution.

³ <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/resource-efficiency/what-we-do/sustainable-consumption-and-production-policies>

⁴ <https://www.coolset.com/academy/three-pillars-of-sustainability>

<https://www.uwgb.edu/sustainability/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brundtland_Commission

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainability>

<https://www.epa.gov/sustainability/learn-about-sustainability>

<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n87/184/67/pdf/n8718467.pdf>

1.3 The Backdrop

The global urgency for this shift towards sustainable consumption and sustainability is escalating, driven by environmental crises, resource depletion, and heightened public awareness. Movements such as zero-waste, circular economy, and ethical sourcing are gaining traction as consumers worldwide become increasingly conscious of their purchasing choices. This transformation is not merely ethical; it is also profoundly economic. The World Economic Forum (WEF), for instance, reports that businesses adopting circular economy practices could unlock US\$4.5 trillion in global economic growth by 2030⁵. Furthermore, Gen Z and millennials, who represent the largest global consumer cohort⁶, increasingly emphasise purpose and align their personal and professional choices with sustainability values.

Against this global backdrop, India stands at a pivotal juncture. Expected to become the third-largest consumer economy by 2030⁷, the consumption decisions made within its borders, by over 1.4 billion people⁸ with rising aspirations and urbanisation trends, will significantly influence global sustainability outcomes. While Indian consumers, especially in urban centres, are showing early signs of awareness towards sustainability⁹ (**knowing**), this does not always translate into positive intent or action (**doing**) in terms of sustainable consumption behaviour.

This white paper seeks to **bridge the knowing-doing gap**. It identifies the

behavioural trends and barriers shaping consumer decisions and surfaces strategic levers for businesses, policymakers, and civil society to collaborate on creating a more sustainable consumption ecosystem in India.

1.4 Global Consumers Demand Sustainable Products

Globally, the discourse on sustainable consumption reveals a significant shift in attitudes and priorities, focusing on consumer behaviour, regulatory environments, and the pivotal role of businesses in advancing sustainability. A compelling 81% of consumers worldwide now actively demand corporate environmental responsibility, according to a 2023 Nielsen report. Interestingly, despite consumers seeking cheaper essential goods due to economic pressures, there's a reported willingness to pay up to a 9.7% premium for sustainable products¹⁰.

There is an emerging consensus that sustainability and profitability can go hand in hand (Porter & Kramer, 2011)¹¹. Businesses are critically re-evaluating their approach, moving away from viewing sustainability as mere corporate philanthropy towards recognising it as a strategic imperative. However, translating this strategic significance into widespread adoption of sustainable products remains challenging. While consumer support for sustainable lifestyles appears strong, consumer packaged goods companies often struggle to generate sufficient demand for these products¹², highlighting a persistent gap between intent and action.

⁵ <https://www.weforum.org/impact/helping-the-circular-economy-become-a-reality/>

⁶ <https://nielseniq.com/global/en/insights/commentary/2023/gen-z-and-millennial-consumers-what-defines-them-and-what-divides-them/>

⁷ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy>

⁸ <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/india-population/>

⁹ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/60-in-india-willing-to-pay-a-premium-for-sustainability-products-reveals-survey/articleshow/92030126.cms>

¹⁰ <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/news-room/press-releases/2024/pwc-2024-voice-of-consumer-survey.html>

¹¹ Kramer, M. R., & Porter, M. (2011). Creating shared value (Vol. 17). Boston, MA, USA: FSG.

¹² <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/consumer-packaged-goods/our-insights/consumers-care-about-sustainability-and-back-it-up-with-their-wallets>

1.5 India's Sustainability Journey: Opportunities and Gaps

India stands at a pivotal juncture where embracing sustainable consumption can profoundly influence its trajectory towards sustainable economic growth, enhanced social stability, and greater environmental resilience. While global trends underscore a move towards sustainability, India faces unique **structural challenges**, such as **limited recycling infrastructure**, **inconsistent regulatory enforcement**, **fragmented supply chains**, and **affordability concerns**. Addressing these necessitates a concerted effort to develop a robust ecosystem for sustainable consumption. The criticality of this endeavour for India's growth story is underscored by several interconnected factors:

1. The evolving Indian consumer:

While India's average 'lifestyle material footprint' (8,400 kgs of resource consumption per capita per year¹³), when compared to the sustainable material footprint of 8,000 kg per capita per year, is quite acceptable, urban consumption patterns present a growing concern. Urban India generates approximately 50 million metric tonnes (MT) of municipal solid waste annually, a figure projected to reach 125 million MT by 2031, with an increasing proportion of non-biodegradable waste¹⁴. This makes it imperative to enhance sustainable consumption, alongside responsible production through circular business models. Encouragingly, consumer awareness is rising. A 2025 Bain report highlighted that nearly 80% of Indian consumers express high concern for sustainability, with a similar number reporting more sustainable shopping habits over the last five years—evidence of a tangible behavioural shift¹⁵. Indian consumers, while perhaps not focused

on their carbon footprint per se, prioritise specific sustainability dimensions like 'natural' products, health benefits, quality, and the cost of sustainable options¹⁶. The environmental impact of climate change and plastic packaging is also a significant concern for Indian consumers. Often, cultural norms and lifestyle choices, more than explicit intent, shape their sustainability decisions. To effectively drive sustainable consumption, we must understand these nuanced value contributors, promote relevant sustainability dimensions¹⁷, identify barriers and motivators, and partner with consumers throughout their purchase-use-disposal journey.

2. Workplace sustainability as a competitive advantage: Embedding sustainability within business operations offers a significant competitive edge. Beyond ethical considerations, sustainable workplace practices can yield long-term savings via improved efficiencies in energy consumption and supply chain management. Critically, a commitment to environmental and social responsibility is becoming a powerful magnet for attracting and retaining talent, especially millennials and Gen Z, who increasingly seek value alignment in careers¹⁸.

3. Supply-side challenges in industry: The transition to sustainable consumption in India is significantly hampered by supply-side inefficiencies that affect the affordability and availability¹⁹ of sustainable products. Issues such as fragmented systems, poor coordination, and underutilised supply chain data contribute to wastage and increased costs. For instance, approximately 40% of India's food production is wasted due to such inefficiencies²⁰. The hurdles faced by

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)²¹, including financial constraints, a lack of dedicated Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) personnel, and difficulties in demonstrating immediate benefits of adopting ESG practices (as highlighted in a Southeast Asian study applicable to Indian MSMEs), further compound these challenges.

4. The role of policy and ecosystem development: Government policies and a supportive ecosystem are vital for accelerating sustainable consumption. Indian policy frameworks have started to incorporate aspects of sustainable consumption, largely driven by global commitments like the Paris Agreement (2015) and alignment with the UN SDG 12. However, the practical effectiveness of existing policies is uneven²². While progress is evident in renewable energy and certain sustainable practices, challenges persist in policy execution, regulatory enforcement, and infrastructure development. Current interventions include Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) in waste management, the Bureau of Energy Efficiency's (BEE) Star Rating for electronic products, and various state-led bans on single-use plastics. Government

campaigns like 'Swachh Bharat' have incrementally raised public awareness about waste reduction and responsible disposal. Despite these frameworks, substantial scope for improvement remains, particularly in policy clarity, enforcement consistency, and consumer education.

5. Regional variability: The drivers and challenges of sustainable consumption are not uniform across India. They vary significantly due to differences in awareness levels, income, cultural norms, and the availability of infrastructure in different regions. Disparities also exist between urban and rural sustainable consumption patterns and the accessibility of sustainable options²³. Identifying regional nuances is a crucial starting point in developing tailored strategies and effective, localised interventions.

¹³ <https://www.drishtiias.com/daily-news-analysis/responsible-consumption-and-production-sdg-12>

¹⁴ <https://www.bain.com/insights/sustainability-is-a-natural-part-of-indias-consumer-journey>

¹⁵ <https://www.bain.com/insights/sustainability-is-a-natural-part-of-indias-consumer-journey>

¹⁶ <https://www.bain.com/insights/sustainability-is-a-natural-part-of-indias-consumer-journey>

¹⁷ <https://www.bain.com/insights/sustainability-is-a-natural-part-of-indias-consumer-journey>

¹⁸ <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesbusinesscouncil/2025/05/09/why-sustainability-drives-profitability-in-business/>

¹⁹ <https://www.bain.com/insights/sustainability-is-a-natural-part-of-indias-consumer-journey-not-a-marketing-ploy/>

²⁰ <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/19/8162>

²¹ <https://www.macaubusiness.com/new-report-highlights-need-for-ecosystem-approach-to-help-msmes-in-southeast-asia-adopt-more-sustainable-practices/>

²² https://www.researchgate.net/publication/384112904_Federalism_For_Sustainability_Leveraging_Multi-Level_Governance_for_Environmental_Protection_in_India

²³ https://ficci.in/public/storage/SPDocument/23532/Sustainable_Consumption_and_Production.pdf

1.6 Barriers to Sustainable Consumption in India

Significant gaps that can hinder the wider adoption of sustainable consumption practices in India include the following:

1. Information and trust: A significant gap exists in the availability of clear, reliable information on sustainable products and practices. Consumers often lack the knowledge to make informed choices, and the prevalence of 'greenwashing' erodes trust in eco-labels and corporate claims. This is compounded by the diversity of regional languages and varying levels of education, making standardised communication challenging²⁴.

2. Supply chain transparency and standardisation: India's complex supply chains, particularly in sectors such as textiles and agriculture, often lack transparency. This makes it difficult for consumers to trace the environmental and social impact of products. The absence of robust standardisation and certification mechanisms further exacerbate the issue, leading to confusion and hindering the scaling up of sustainable production²⁵.

3. Regulatory incentives and support: While India has made strides in setting environmental policies, effective implementation and enforcement remain a challenge. A lack of consistent regulatory incentives, such as tax benefits or subsidies for sustainable

businesses, discourages widespread adoption of sustainable practices. Further, many businesses, especially SMEs, lack the resources and capacity to invest in sustainability, highlighting a need for greater engagement and support²⁶.

4. Embedding sustainability education: Sustainability education is not yet fully integrated into mainstream education in India. This results in a lack of awareness and understanding of sustainable consumption principles among a large section of the population.

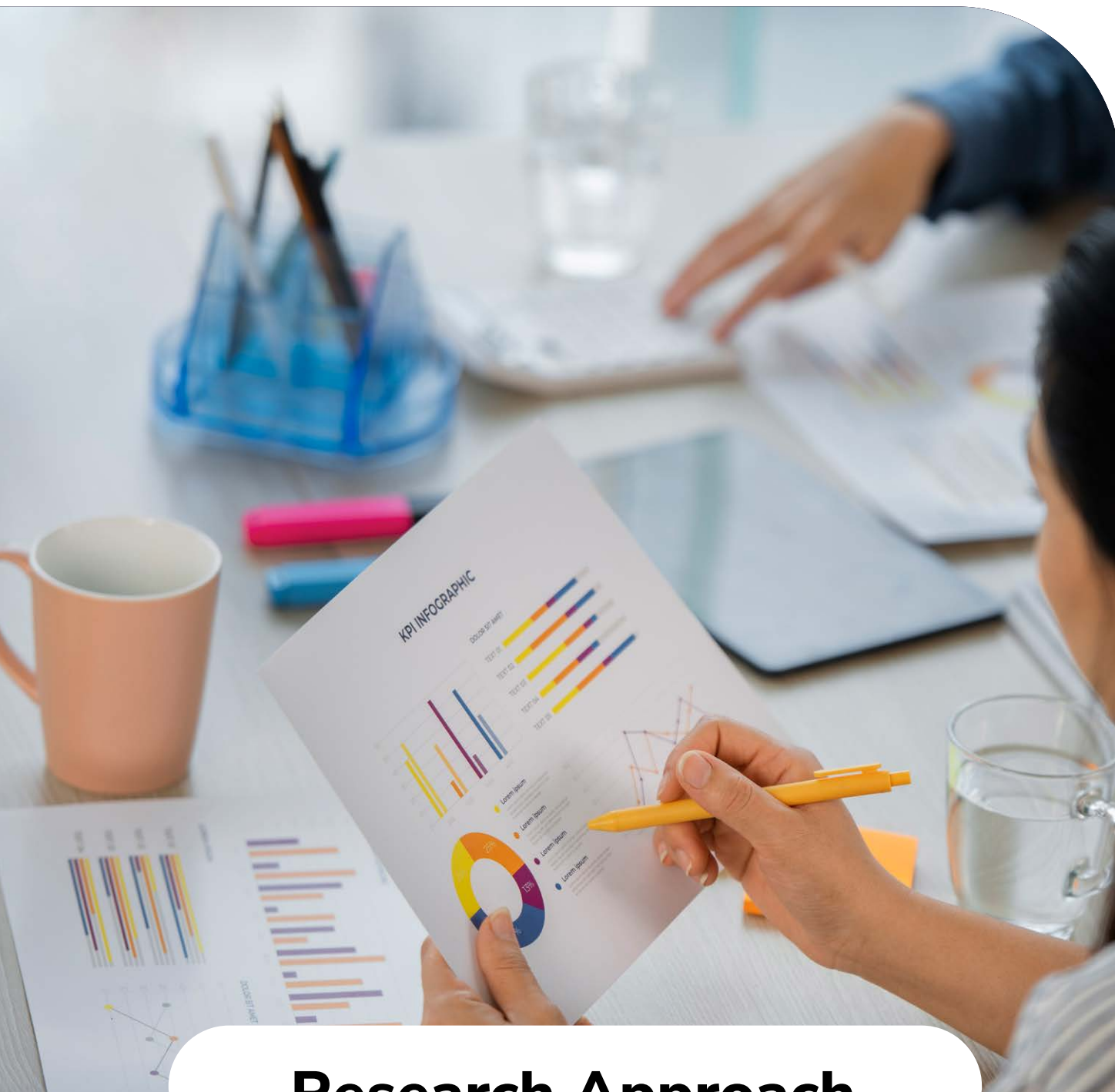
However, before recommending solutions to bridge existing gaps, we must first delve deeper into the psyche and preferences of the Indian consumer to understand their underlying motivations and concerns. By gaining the right insights, businesses and the government can design more effective strategies. With this objective in mind, we designed a survey to explore sustainability attitudes in personal consumption among Indian consumers, and then followed this up by sharing the survey findings with industry leaders at a CXO Roundtable, for their perspectives and recommendations.

²³ https://ficci.in/public/storage/SPDocument/23532/Sustainable_Consumption_and_Production.pdf

²⁴ <https://cuts-cart.org/pdf/detailed-report-sustainable-consumption-and-production-in-india-a-consumer-perspective.pdf>

²⁵ https://www.ey.com/en_in/insights/climate-change-sustainability-services/bridging-india-s-sustainable-finance-gap

²⁶ https://stafflive.iimcal.ac.in/sites/all/files/pdfs/wps_896.pdf



Research Approach

For a comprehensive understanding of sustainability practices and perceptions, SPIJMR Wise Tech first conducted a quantitative survey, and then gathered CXO insights responding to the survey findings.

In the quantitative phase, we administered the Sustainability Attitudes Survey to ~2,200 urban Indian consumers (Sec A, 25–40, graduates and above) across 10 major cities (Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi, Indore, Jaipur, Kolkata, Lucknow, Mumbai, Pune) during November 2024 to January 2025. The questionnaire was structured into five distinct sections: General Awareness, Daily Practices, Purchase Decision, Employment Choices, and Barriers to Adoption. We gathered insights into the awareness, attitudes, and behaviours of individuals regarding environmental and social responsibility, across various aspects of a person's life, from their daily habits and purchasing decisions to their employment choices (see Appendix II).

In the second stage, we organised a CXO Roundtable on February 22, 2025, in

Mumbai, under the Chatham House Rules, (wherein participants are free to use the information received, but their identity and affiliation cannot be revealed). Forty industry leaders from diverse sectors such as Media, E-commerce, Conglomerates, Consulting, FinTech, Retail, Education, Private Equity/ Venture Capital, Manufacturing, and Pharma shared their perspectives on the findings of the quantitative survey. Moderated discussions explored industry/supply chain challenges, consumer dynamics, and policy recommendations.

Insights from both methodologies were integrated and analysed to provide a comprehensive, data-driven understanding of sustainable consumption trends in India, enriched by industry perspectives.

Journey to sustainability insights



Survey conducted

The Sustainability Attitudes Survey was conducted with 2,200 respondents across 10 cities in India.



Data analysis

The findings were analysed to extract key insights.



Presentation to CXOs

The analysed data was then presented to 40 CXOs in a Chatham House-style discussion.



CXO discussions

The survey's key themes were discussed, and action points were identified.



White paper creation

Inputs from the survey and CXO discussions formed the basis for identifying key insights and recommending the way forward.



Key Findings from the Survey

SPJIMR WISE Tech's Sustainability Attitudes Survey presents detailed insights into urban Indian consumer behaviours, attitudes, and expectations concerning sustainable consumption. An analysis of the survey results revealed the emergence of **four core themes** highlighting consumers' perspectives on sustainable consumption behaviour.

3.1 Theme 1. “I want to, but it’s difficult to be sustainable”: Consumers’ Intent vs. Action

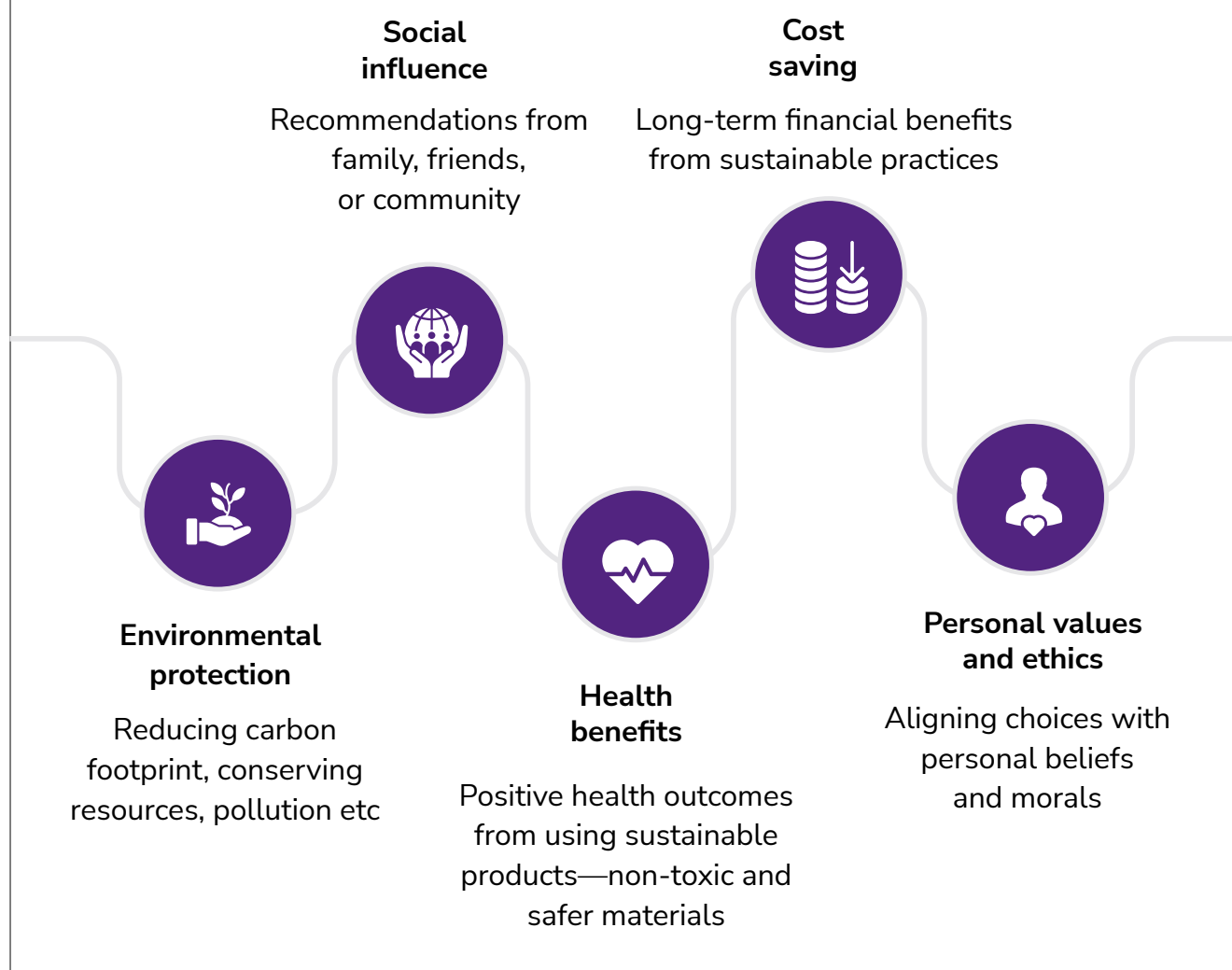
62% of the respondents were aware of sustainability concepts, which were defined in the questionnaire as reducing carbon emissions, choosing reusable alternatives, avoiding single-use or plastic products, conserving energy in daily activities, minimising unnecessary packaging, and being aware of global sustainability initiatives like the SDGs and the Paris Agreement.

- An overwhelming majority of respondents (84%) indicated a

preference for sustainable products when given a choice.

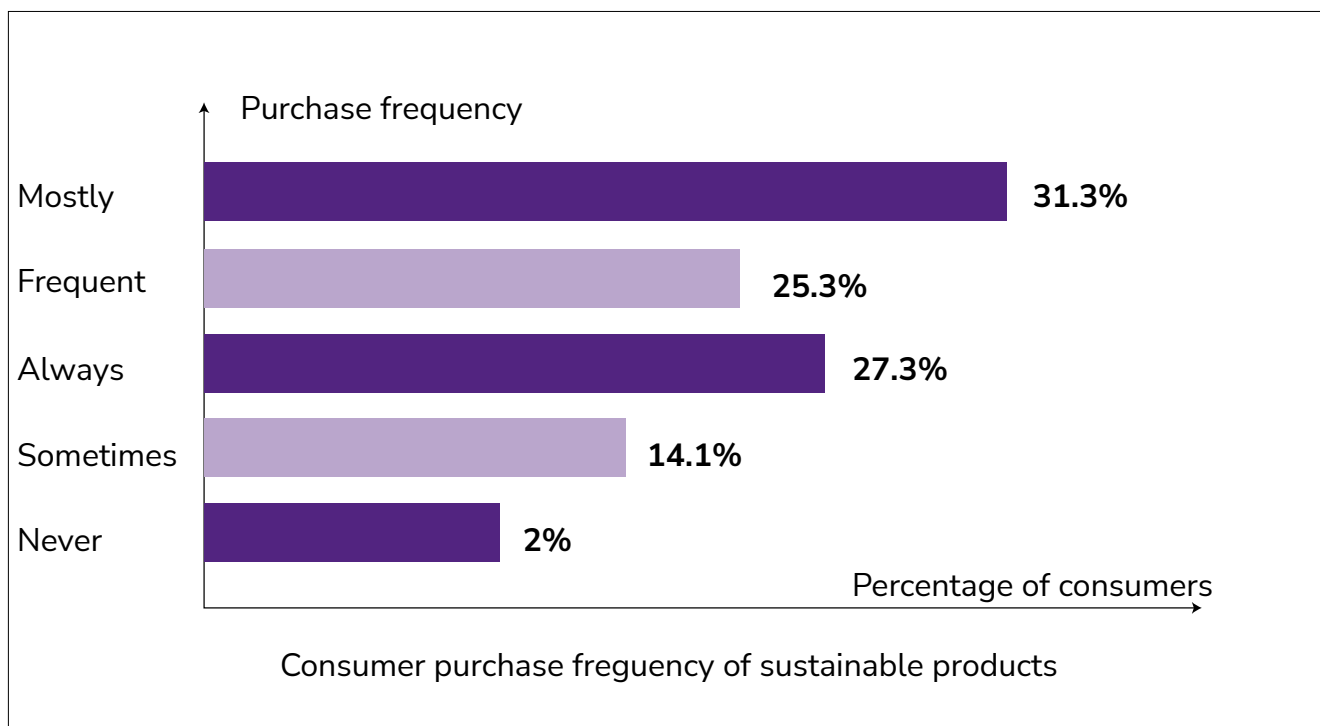
- For 35- to 40-year-olds, the most important reason driving sustainable purchases is environmental benefits, with over 20% of respondents claiming so, while in the 25- to 35-year-olds category, the major reason driving sustainable purchases is health benefits.

Top 5 reasons for choosing sustainable products



- While an overwhelming majority of respondents preferred sustainable products, the purchase frequency reveals a gap between intent and action. Only 27% of the respondents reported that they “always” buy responsibly, with others varying in their responses, stating

they purchase sustainable products most of the time (31%), or frequently (25.3%), or sometimes (14%). This suggests there is scope for closing the intent-action gap through improved availability and affordability.



3.2 Theme 2. “I’m happy to pay extra for certain products!”: Willingness to Pay a Premium

For certain product categories, the high prices of sustainable options did not deter consumers, and they exhibited a higher willingness to pay.

- Consumers demonstrated a willingness to pay premium prices for sustainable products, particularly when linked with clear health and environmental benefits:

- **Electronic devices:** Health benefits drive purchase, with consumers’ intent to pay a premium of **over 25%.**

- **Personal care products:**

Driven by health benefits, acceptable premium pricing is **up to 25%.**

- **Consumer goods:**

Predominantly driven by environmental benefits, consumers are willing to pay a premium of **as much as 25%.**

3.3 Theme 3. “I want my workplace to walk the talk”: Employment Choices and Sustainability

Respondents emphasised that they considered their employer's behaviours and workplace values towards sustainability.

Our findings suggest that while assessing job opportunities, sustainability credentials significantly influence job decisions:

- **79%** of the respondents assess potential employers' sustainability credentials when evaluating job opportunities.
- **42%** of the respondents in the age group 25 to 30 years, and over 60% of the respondents in the age group 30 to 40 years, have turned down job offers due to concerns over a company's sustainability credentials.

While in their job, respondents reported a positive impact on their job satisfaction due to the company's sustainability practices:

- **63%** state that a company's environmental and social consciousness substantially impacts their job satisfaction.
- Approximately **50%** of the respondents in manufacturing jobs linked sustainability measures to their job satisfaction, compared to around 67% in other sectors such as Consumer Goods, Tech, Financial Services, and Public Sector.

Impact of sustainability on employment choices

Employer sustainability assessment

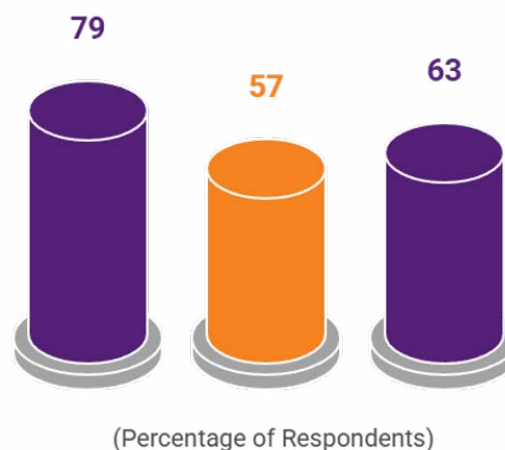
Actively evaluate employer's sustainability efforts.

Job offer rejection

Declined offers due to poor sustainability practices.

Job satisfaction impact

Environmental and social consciousness affects job satisfaction.



Employees identified six key areas in which they perceived their employers to be undertaking sustainability initiatives:

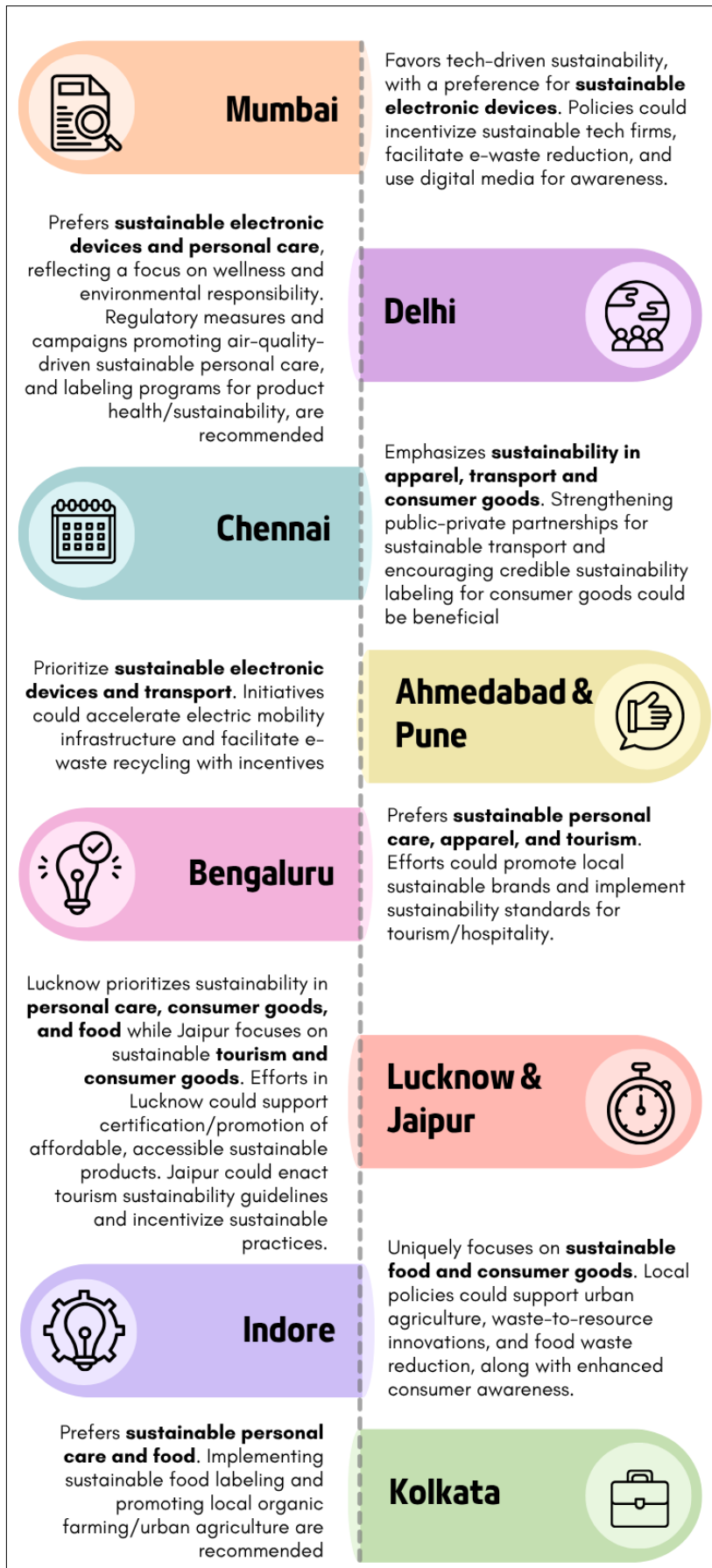


3.4 Theme 4. “Where I live shapes how I act”: Regional Insights on Sustainability

Consumer preferences for sustainable consumption were found to differ

significantly across the cities. The top-ranking categories of sustainable products also differed across the cities:

Regional insights



Respondents' perceptions of their sustainability efforts and their views on companies' sustainability efforts vary significantly across the country:

i. 'Sustainable citizens, sustainable companies' (example: Ahmedabad, Pune): In these cities, 100% of the respondents indicated that they practise sustainable behaviours through their purchases and transport choices. Also, 70% of the respondents indicated that they believe the majority of firms also demonstrate sustainability.

ii. 'Only citizens are sustainable' (example: Delhi, Lucknow): While 83% of the respondents in these cities indicated that they would adopt sustainable behaviours, less than 15% of them believed that the majority of companies demonstrate sustainability.

iii. 'No one is sustainable' (example: Jaipur): Neither the majority of the respondents nor the majority of the companies, in the respondents' view, demonstrate sustainability.



Recommendations for Industry

Insights from the consumer survey were discussed in the CXO Roundtable, which built on the emerging insights to bring forth nuanced perspectives, industry-specific challenges, and other stakeholder roles. From the analysis of consumer and industry inputs, SPIJMR WISE Tech recommends the following key focus areas for industry leaders, presented as a readily implementable guide:

5.1 Company Culture and Leadership

Businesses need to move beyond superficial commitments and must embed sustainability deeply and authentically within their organisational cultures, prioritising internal alignment before external messaging.

- **Higher purpose and internal alignment:** Focus on higher goals beyond the company's business objectives. An organisation's focus should be on building the right culture and priorities internally. It is crucial to imbibe authenticity or 'walking the talk' such that internal practices transparently align with external sustainability claims to build trust and credibility among consumers and employees.
- **Defined sustainability goals:** Set tangible objectives, ensuring that quantifiable key performance metrics and sustainability dimensions are well defined. A sustainable consumption-related agenda must be driven by the Boards so that companies are held accountable.
- **Employee engagement:** Ensure that employees clearly understand the personal and professional benefits of sustainability initiatives ("What's in it for me?"). Communicate such initiatives internally with clarity, set role-specific expectations, and actively incentivise sustainability-driven behaviours. Tap into a sense of 'employee pride' by designing meaningful and engaging sustainability programmes.

5.2 Supply Chain and Industry-level Initiatives

Businesses must tackle structural barriers in supply chains and lead cross-industry

efforts to embed credible, scalable, and transparent sustainability practices.

- **Supply chain certifications:** Develop industry-wide certifications for suppliers that would ensure transparency, accountability, and consistent sustainability practices throughout the supply chain. Prioritise sustainable sourcing across components, raw materials, and transportation. Top brands, with the power to shape trends and drive adoption, must shoulder the highest sustainability responsibility and lead by example.
- **Metrics and standardisation:** Push for the creation and adoption of industry-wide standardised sustainability metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs). Avoid fragmented standards that lead to inconsistent reporting, confuse consumers, and lead to increased scepticism — ensure standardised reporting for greater clarity and credibility.
- **Innovation and cost efficiency:** Invest in sustainability-led innovation, such as Design for Environment (DfE), to unlock efficiency gains, reduce costs, and tap into new market opportunities. Reframe the perception of sustainability as a value driver, and not a cost centre.

5.3 Consumer Expectations and Market Realities

Companies must ground their sustainability strategies in a pragmatic understanding of consumer sustainability preferences, aligning sustainability with core purchase drivers such as value, quality, and self-expression.

- **Value and quality first:** Design sustainable products that offer equivalent or superior value and quality

to conventional commercial alternatives. Recognise that while consumers express sustainability preferences, price and product quality remain primary drivers of purchase decisions. Therefore, position sustainability as a bonus or desirable secondary benefit, but not the trade-off.

- **Compelling narratives in sustainability**

messaging: Craft sustainability communication through clear, simple, and demonstrable messages, with a compelling story that can connect with consumers. Build emotional and self-expressive narratives, such as those channelling a sense of pride amongst consumers, to create a greater demand for sustainable products. Leverage behavioural insights such as FOMO-driven marketing to make sustainability 'cool' and aspirational. Create initiatives such as household sustainability ratings that provide positive recognition and make sustainable consumption at an individual or household level personally meaningful.

- **Visible sustainability markers:** Implement standardised visible indicators (like Blue Dot or Star Ratings) on products to enhance consumer trust, facilitate informed choices, and simplify sustainability communication at the point of sale. Develop and adopt a simplified sustainability index or scale that consolidates key socio-environmental factors in required weightages to ensure clarity amongst consumers.

- **Tangible consumer benefits:** Customise sustainability benefit communication according to various consumer segments' approach towards sustainability. Make the "What's in it for me?" clear, and

emphasise direct personal benefits to the consumers.

- **Regional and socioeconomic**

considerations: Incorporate regional and socioeconomic differences that could influence sustainability behaviours and attitudes when designing sustainability strategies. Avoid a one-size-fits-all approach through the following strategies:

- **Localised strategies:** Tailor product offerings, pricing, and marketing based on regional sustainability preferences and socioeconomic considerations.

- **Inclusive sustainability messaging:** Challenge the perception of sustainability as an elite concern by reframing it as a universal issue. Shape sustainability narratives that resonate across diverse demographic and income groups.

5.4 Leveraging Technology

Integrate technology as a core enabler of sustainability by using it to drive transparency, efficiency, and accountability across sectors.

- **Supply chain transparency and circular economy:** Adopt technological innovations such as blockchain and other digital tools to enhance supply chain traceability, enable circular economy models, and ensure greater accountability and systemic efficiency in sustainability practices.

- **Emissions tracking and management:** Deploy advanced technological tools like Internet of Things (IoT) and artificial intelligence (AI) to monitor emissions, track resource usage, and optimise

efficiency. Use such tools to ensure accurate sustainability reporting, meet regulatory standards, and inform strategic decisions.

In summary, the insights gathered from the CXO Roundtable provided valuable industry perspectives, with leaders emphasising several crucial themes. There was a strong consensus on the need for “authenticity over optics”, stressing that consumers and employees can detect “greenwashing”, and therefore, companies must genuinely embed sustainability into their culture and operations before making external claims. Discussions also highlighted “supply chain and innovation gaps”, noting that

fragmented and opaque supply chains limit traceability and that standardised supplier certifications and sustainability KPIs are much needed. From the perspective of “consumer perceptions”, leaders acknowledged that while sustainability is a growing concern, Indian consumers often continue to prioritise price and quality, viewing sustainability attributes as a “bonus” rather than a baseline requirement. This necessitates more effective “marketing and messaging”, using simpler, emotional, and aspirational narratives—such as visible sustainability markers and social proof—to help mainstream sustainable consumption.

REGULATION



POLICY

COMPLIANCE

Recommendations for Policymakers

WISE Tech Centre of SPIJMR recommends targeted policy interventions in five critical areas: **Fiscal Incentives and Governance, Awareness and Communication, Technological Infrastructure, Transparency and Trust Building, and Education and Long-term Behavioural Change.**

Driving sustainability through strategic policy recommendations

SPJIMR WISE Tech recommendations

- 1 Fiscal incentives**
Tax reductions and incentives to encourage sustainable practices
- 2 Public awareness**
Campaigns to educate and engage consumers on sustainability
- 3 Technological infrastructure**
Investment in tech for traceability and transparency
- 4 Transparency and signalling**
Standardized metrics and reporting for sustainability
- 5 Education**
Integrating sustainability into educational curricular

6.1 Fiscal Incentives and Governance

Well-structured fiscal incentives can nudge companies toward credible sustainability action while encouraging innovation and avoiding unintended exclusions.

- **Targeted tax reductions:** Introduce well-defined, targeted fiscal incentives, primarily through tax reductions, for enterprises that verifiably adopt and integrate sustainable production and

consumption practices. Many companies see sustainability as a potential cost burden, and incentives to mitigate initial expenses will help nudge desired corporate behaviour. Specific criteria should include measurable reductions in resource usage, clear evidence of sustainable sourcing, and demonstrated waste minimisation strategies.

- **Structured incentive schemes:** Put an incentive scheme in place to encourage substantial investment in sustainable innovation, stimulating a cycle of competitive sustainability improvements across industries. Ensure SMEs are not inadvertently disadvantaged due to the complex compliance requirements that may initially favour larger companies.

- **Regulatory mechanisms and compliance:** Prevent misuse and greenwashing through robust regulatory mechanisms.

6.2 Public Awareness Campaigns

Localised, relatable, and large-scale public campaigns can close consumer awareness gaps and shift consumption patterns over time.

- Develop and launch extensive, culturally resonant, and region-specific public campaigns that link daily consumption habits to tangible sustainability outcomes. Leverage relatable storytelling, highlight local champions, and utilise diverse media channels in campaigns to maximise reach and impact.
- Combine government scale and credibility with localised and insight-driven public campaigns to bridge awareness and intent-action gaps — since the survey findings suggest only

62% of urban consumers are familiar with basic sustainability concepts. Use successful models such as the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission) to anchor large-scale societal shifts towards sustainability.

- **Encourage companies to proactively communicate and substantiate sustainability efforts to meet higher consumer expectations and public scrutiny, which will increase with growing awareness and adoption of sustainable products and practices.**

6.3 Technological Infrastructure

Strategic investment in technology is essential to enable traceability, transparency, and consumer trust in sustainability claims.

- **Leveraging tech:** Promote platforms that integrate blockchain, IoT, and data analytics to track environmental footprints, verify sustainability claims, and effectively promote circular economy practices.
- **Accountability and adoption:** Increase accountability through enforcing tech-enabled transparency across the value chain, significantly reducing fraudulent sustainability claims. Ease adoption costs for MSMEs by introducing supportive policy mechanisms to ease the transition.

6.4 Transparency and Signalling

Unified standards and transparent communication are essential to build consumer trust and institutionalise sustainability as a market norm.

- **Standardised metrics and labels:** Mandate unified, industry-wide standards for sustainability metrics and labelling

systems (like the Blue Dot or ESG-lite standards).

- **Sustainability audits:** Require companies to publish regular sustainability reports, verified by credible third-party audits, and accessible via public databases maintained by regulatory authorities.
- **Credible systems:** Push for standardised labelling and transparent systems to significantly enhance consumer confidence, leading to higher adoption rates of sustainable products. Institutionalise sustainability as a market norm rather than a differentiator. The survey suggests that only 37% of consumers trust companies' sustainability information. Enhanced traceability and transparency are essential for bridging the trust deficit.

6.5 Education as an Enabler

Sustainability education from an early age can embed lifelong values and drive long-term societal and market-level transformation.

- **Sustainability education in school curriculum:** Integrate comprehensive sustainability education into school curricula across all educational institutions. Policies should focus on age-appropriate education modules that foster lifelong sustainability values and practices among India's youth.
- **Capability building:** Invest in teacher training, educational infrastructure, and curriculum development to deliver effective learning interventions and mould sustainable consumption preferences and behaviours over time.
- **Future focus:** Build a future consumer base that values sustainability and can

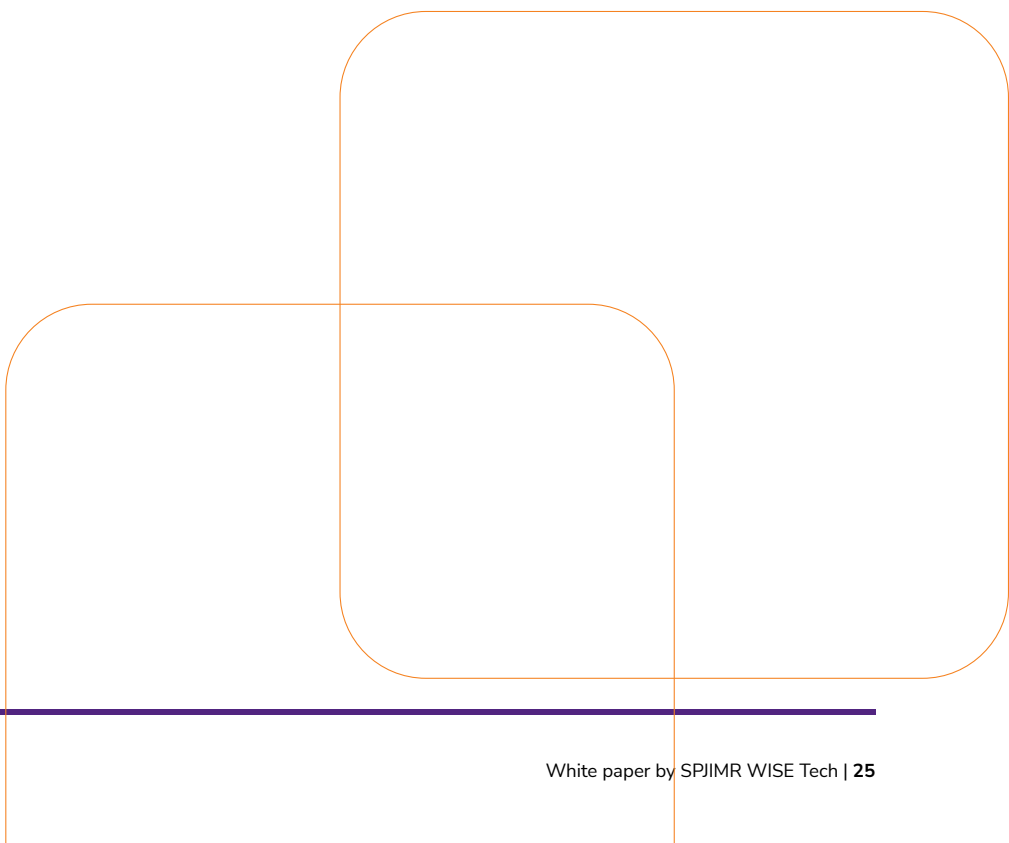
drive broader societal changes, such as reduced public health expenditures (from better environmental conditions), greater civic engagement in sustainability, and stronger consumer pressure for corporate accountability.

- **Long-term commitment:** Encourage cross-party political support and long-term planning, with adequate financial commitments for greater impact.

In summary, these detailed strategic policy recommendations are designed to drive realistic, impactful, and sustainable changes. While transformative, they are also pragmatically grounded in current data and industry insights, mindful of potential

unintended consequences, and designed to foster both immediate and enduring positive outcomes.

Creating policy-supported sustainability ecosystems at scale is the way forward. Government, community, education systems, and businesses would need to work together to drive social consciousness and enable the behavioural shift towards sustainable consumption.



The Way Forward

Sustainable consumption stands as one of the defining opportunities—and challenges—for India as it advances towards becoming one of the world's largest consumer markets. The insights presented in this white paper underscore the pressing need for a coherent, multi-stakeholder approach that integrates consumer awareness, business accountability, technological innovation, and robust governance frameworks.

Our findings reveal a profound gap between consumer intent and sustainable action. While a remarkable 84% of Indian urban consumers express a preference for sustainability-conscious products, pervasive barriers remain: inconsistent availability, premium pricing, information deficits, and persistent scepticism regarding corporate sustainability claims. These barriers collectively suppress active and consistent sustainable consumption behaviour. Furthermore, city-specific preferences—for electronics in Mumbai, wellness in Bengaluru, transport in Ahmedabad, or food systems in Indore—illustrate the importance of targeted interventions to sustainable consumption.

Industry perspectives further illuminate the way forward for businesses to adopt genuine sustainability practices. Transparent sustainability metrics, standardised certifications, clear communication, fiscal incentives, and robust regulatory support emerged as critical levers that can bridge the current gap between intention and impactful action.

This white paper ultimately calls upon industry leaders, policymakers, educators, and civil society to collaboratively foster

an ecosystem conducive to sustainable consumption. Fiscal incentives, standardised transparency measures, technologically driven supply chain transparency, and meaningful public education can collectively establish a solid foundation for India's sustainable economic growth.

The road ahead will undoubtedly present complexities and trade-offs. Yet, given the clear economic, social, and environmental dividends of embracing sustainable consumption practices, this is an investment India can scarcely afford to defer. Policymakers and industry leaders must act now, not merely in response to global trends, but in recognition of the pressing sustainability demands of India's future generations.

In taking these strategic steps today, India positions itself not only as a thriving, responsible consumer economy but also as a global leader shaping sustainability standards for decades to come.

Appendix I: Demographics of Respondents

Table [A] Age Group		
Age Group	Respondents	Percentage
25-30 years	576	27%
30-35 years	751	35%
35-40 years	799	38%
Total	2126	100%
Table [B] Education		
Education	Respondents	Percentage
Graduates	1410	66%
Less than Graduates	125	6%
Post Graduates	591	28%
Total	2126	100%
Table [C] Gender		
Gender	Respondents	Percentage
Male	1435	67%
Female	691	33%
Total	2126	100%
Table [D] Occupation		
Occupation	Respondents	Percentage
Pvt./Govt. Employees	1411	66%
Business Owners	536	25%
Professionals	179	8%
Total	2126	100%
Table [E] Industry		
Industry	Respondents	Percentage
Consumer Goods	592	28%
Manufacturing	531	25%
Public Sector	500	24%
Tech & F&Sr	503	24%
Total	2126	100%
Table [F] Location		
Location	Respondents	Percentage
Metro	1128	53%
Mini Metro	998	47%
Total	2126	100%

Appendix II: Abridged Questionnaire

Section A: General Awareness

1. How familiar are you with:

- Energy-efficient (EE) products
- Carbon footprint/emission reduction
- Global initiatives like SDG, Paris Agreement
(Scale: 1-Not at all familiar, 2-Not familiar, 3-Neutral, 4-Familiar, 5-Very familiar)

2. How do you usually learn about environmental and socially responsible/conscious products or practices? (multiple answer possible)

- Social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn)
- Friends, family, or peer recommendations
- Companies/Vendors selling products/services
- News outlets (e.g., newspapers, magazines, online news)
- Government campaigns or initiatives
- Others: _____

Section B: Daily Practices

3. Please answer the following statements on a 5-point scale:

- I adopt transportation methods that reduce carbon emissions (e.g., public transport, carpooling).
- I reduce waste by choosing reusable alternatives and avoiding single-use or plastic products.
- I actively conserve resources through energy-saving habits and minimising unnecessary packaging.
(Scale: 1-Never, 2-Sometimes, 3-Frequently, 4-Mostly, 5-Always)

Section C: Purchase Decisions

4. Please answer the following statements on a 5-point scale:

- While purchasing, I prefer buying products that are sustainable/energy-efficient/eco-friendly.
- While purchasing, I prefer buying from environmentally and socially responsible/conscious companies.
- I purchase sustainable/energy-efficient/eco-friendly products even if they are priced higher than regular products.

(Scale: 1-Never, 2-Sometimes, 3-Frequently, 4-Mostly, 5-Always)

5. What are the Top 3 reasons for buying sustainable/energy-efficient/eco-friendly products? (Answer Top 3 only)

- Cost savings (e.g., reduced utility bills, long-term financial benefits)
- Environmental protection (e.g., reducing carbon footprint, conserving resources, pollution etc.)
- Improved product quality or durability
- Personal values and ethics (e.g., commitment to sustainability)
- Health benefits (e.g., non-toxic, safer materials)
- Social influence (e.g., recommendations from family, friends, or community)
- Government incentives or subsidies
- Others: _____

6. In which of these categories is an environmentally and socially responsible/conscious product or service most important to you?

- Food
- Tourism
- Personal care
- Consumer goods
- Transport
- Apparel
- Electronic devices
- Others: _____

7. In the category that you have chosen, how much premium would you be willing to pay for an environmentally and socially responsible/conscious product?

- <10%
- 10 to < 25%
- 25% to < 50%
- 50% or above

8. In your view, what % of top Indian traditional companies (e.g. Tata, Reliance, Adani, etc.) demonstrate environmental and social responsibility/consciousness in their actions, products, services, etc.?

- Very few (<10%)
- Some (10% to <25%)
- Many (25% to <50%)
- Majority (50% to <75%)
- Almost all (75% or above)

9. In your view, what % of top Indian emerging companies (e.g. Uber, Zomato, Paytm) demonstrate environmental and social responsibility/consciousness in their actions, products, services, etc.?

- Very few (<10%)
- Some (10% to <25%)
- Many (25% to <50%)
- Majority (50% to <75%)
- Almost all (75% or above)

10. Which Indian company do you admire most? (open ended)

Section D: Employment Choices and Selection

11. Do you assess a potential employer's commitment to environment and social responsibility/consciousness in the hiring process?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

12. Have you ever rejected a job offer due to a company's lack of environmentally and socially responsible/conscious practices?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

13. Does a company's environmental and social consciousness have any influence on your job satisfaction?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

14. What type of environmentally and socially responsible/conscious initiatives do your current employer have? (Multiple choice; all can be selected)

- Adoption of renewable energy sources (e.g., solar, wind)
- Waste reduction programs (e.g., recycling, composting)
- Policies to reduce the company's carbon footprint
- Offering sustainable and eco-friendly office supplies
- Employee wellness programmes focused on sustainability (e.g., green commuting incentives, fitness initiatives)
- Partnerships with environmentally conscious suppliers or vendors
- Encouraging remote work or flexible schedules to reduce commuting
- Training programs to educate employees on sustainable practices
- Others: _____

15. What other sustainability initiatives do you expect your employer to have? (open ended)

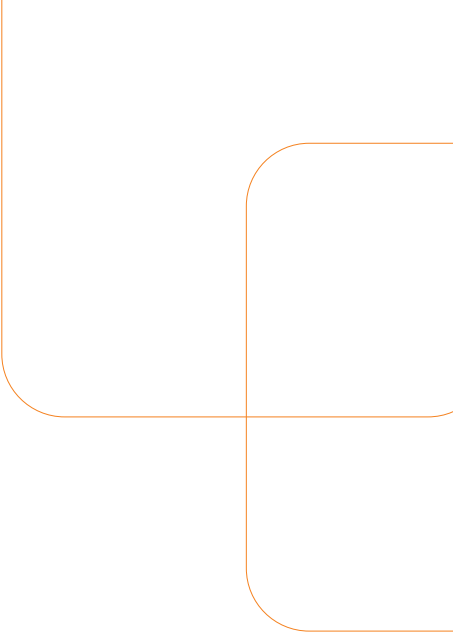
Section E: Barriers to Adoption of Environmental and Socially Responsible Activities

16. Please answer the following statements on a 5-point scale:

- I faced difficulties in finding sustainable/energy-efficient/eco-friendly products locally. (Scale: 1-Never, 2-Sometimes, 3-Frequently, 4-Mostly, 5-Always)

17. What prevents you from purchasing environmentally and socially responsible/conscious products? (Rank the top three: 1-Most important, 2- Important, 3-Least important)

- High price as compared to regular products
- Inconvenience in finding or purchasing such products
- Uncertainty about product performance or quality
- Insufficient information on how to use the products
- Lack of trust in environmentally and socially responsible claims of the brands
- Limited variety/choices available
- Preference for established brands which do not offer environmentally and socially responsible/conscious products.



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