

# Role Of Socio-Economic And Psychological Factors In Sustainable Consumption Preferences Of Households In Thane City

Ms. RajashriPandit,  
Assistant Professor in Economics,  
Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL), University of Mumbai,  
Vidyanagari, Kalina, Santacruz, Mumbai-400 098, Maharashtra, India

Dr. Sujata Khadilkar,  
Associate Professor and Head,  
Department of Economics,  
S.K. Somaiya College of Arts, science and Commerce, Vidyavihar,  
Mumbai- 400 077, Maharashtra, India

## Abstract

This research focuses on the role of select economic, social and psychological factors on their socially responsible consumption behavior. Urban consumers are selected for this study since developing country like India is facing the problem of urbanization challenging environment sustainability. 52 households living in Thane City were covered. The results showed that to overcome impediments, not only socio-economic and psychological factors are important but active participation by all the stakeholders such as consumers, retailers, producers, NGOs and government is also important for socially responsible consumer behavior.

**Keywords:** Awareness, Environment sustainability, Sustainable consumption, Thane City, Willingness

## Introduction

Development process has started in many countries of the world. During this process rapid urbanization is inevitable. Urbanization has drastically changed the landscape as well as the lifestyle of the people. Such changes, throw challenges for maintaining environmental quality in the urban areas. Factors such as growing population, poverty, increased consumerism, urbanization and industrialization cause stress on the physical and natural environment.

Urbanization process has started in India at a faster rate, since India is a developing country. This process leads to challenges such as solid waste management, traffic congestion, water shortages, proliferation of slums etc. In such a situation, sustainable consumption is vital in supporting sustainable urban development. Indian society had always supported and followed the practices which protect the environment. In ancient times, Indians believed in resources preservation and need based consumption. The

change in economic scenario, improvement in income level and demonstration effect of western countries has resulted into a shift in the consumption pattern and preferences of Indian society.

Sustainable consumption is a foundation for sustainable urban development. In Oslo Symposium, 1994 on Sustainable Consumption defined it as “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 emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations”.

This research study focuses on the sustainable consumption practices in urban areas. The factors determining sustainable consumption are multi faceted. This study is about the pro environment patterns and preferences, factors influencing them and to identify obstacles / impediments for sustainable consumption practices in the urban areas.

### Research Problem

Since 1992, with the United Nations (UN) conference on environment and development, sustainable development (SD) has gained importance. Sustainable development is about interconnectivity between economic activity and sustainable environment. Sustainable consumption is important to promote both.

In India with growing number of cities and towns, solid waste management has been the important issue of urbanization. This research study focuses on pro-environment or sustainable consumption patterns and factors determining the same in the context of Thane City, one of the important regions in Mumbai Metropolitan City. It includes economic factors like family income, family size and fiscal incentives. Socio-psychological factors like environmental concern, attitudes and social awareness plays a crucial role. This research paper also focuses on the willingness to contribute for pro environment practices by the households in the study region.

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals are the goals that all UN member states have agreed to achieve from the year 2015. One of the important goals is to ensure environmental sustainability and to develop global partnership for development. In India, the aim of the government is to develop ‘smart cities’, so sustainable consumption would be imperative for their future survival. In the same manner, sustainable consumption practices would be crucial for the survival and maintenance of the quality of life in the existing towns and cities. To mention a few policies at national level for environmental sustainability are:

1. National Environment Policy (NEP), 2006
2. National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency
3. National Urban Sanitation Policy, 2008
4. Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission
5. National Mission on Sustainable Habitat
6. National Mission for a Green India
7. National Mission on Strategic Knowledge for Climate Change

The success of these policies and goals requires participatory approach. Households constitute an important facilitator.

Objectives:

Following are some of the objectives of this research study.

1. To study awareness towards pro environmental consumer behavior in Thane City.
2. The study also intends to find the willingness to pay of households in Thane city for initiatives towards sustainable consumption in future.
3. To review and make suggestions regarding macro and regional policies and fiscal instruments directed towards sustainable consumption.

Methodology and scope

Primary source of data is used. In the context, an exhaustive structured questionnaire broadly is applied to collect information about sustainable consumption patterns at household level in Thane city. It covers aspects like basic consumer profile, amounts spent and preferences, environmental attitude, awareness and willingness to pay or contribute. Major facets of sustainable consumption such as food, energy use, waste management and travel were included. About 52 households from Thane city were covered in the sample survey. Data collection was done using convenience and stratified random sampling technique.

Data analysis

The questionnaire is divided into 3 parts. Part I is about Preliminary profile which includes monthly income of the households. In Part II questions on awareness have been asked to know about the general awareness about sustainable environment among households. In Part III questions related to the willingness to pay/spend by the households for sustainable environment have been asked.

Part I: General questions like name, contact details, education, gender, family / household size and monthly income of the households have been asked. Nearly 64.2% were women respondents. The respondents covered had a diversified educational profile. Family size matters a lot while taking decision about

spending on consumption. In our study, it is found that nearly 75 % of the households earned income above Rs. 50000/- per month.

## Part II: General Awareness

Questions on general awareness have been asked to households to understand how much they know about environmental sustainability, their city and about the measures taken by Thane Municipal Corporation (TMC). A mean awareness was calculated on the basis of the responses given by the households.

**TABLE 1: MEAN AWARENESS OF RESPONDENTS ABOUT ENVIRONMENT & MEASURES FOR SUSTAINABILITY IN THANE CITY**

Sr. No.	General awareness	Awareness of the Respondents
1.	The Primary cause of Global warming in the consumer driven society is increased level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere	0.85
2.	World Environment Day is celebrated on June 5th	0.71
3.	Presently TMC has a water treatment plant at Temghar	0.58
4.	No. of lakes in Thane City 30-40	0.17
5.	Present population of Thane City is about 15-20 lakhs	0.25
6.	There is a dumping ground in Thane City to dump garbage	0.54
7.	Proposed reduction in Property tax for reduction of 50% solid waste in any residential complex is 5%	0.58
8.	Every year TMC organizes an exhibition 'Vrukshvalli' for awareness of conservation of trees	0.71
9.	In order to reduce carbon footprints, TMC initiated Thane Public Bicycle Sharing facility in August 2017	0.60
10.	Conventional residential building can be converted into a green building	0.71
11.	Awareness about a Organic food products retail shop in Thane City	0.62
12.	Purchase of organic food products	0.33

**Source: Based on primary data collected from households through questionnaire**

It can be seen from the above table that, about 85% households are aware about the concept of global warming and its causes and harmful effects. As many as 71% households know that World Environment Day is celebrated on June 5<sup>th</sup> of every year across the world. Only about 58% households are aware that there is a water treatment plant at Temghar which supplies drinkable water to Thane city. Hardly 17% households are aware about the number of lakes in Thane city though the city is known for its lakes. Only 25% households know the present population of Thane city. Though tones of solid waste is generated by the city, only 54% households are aware that there is a dumping ground for Thane city. Nearly 58% households estimated correctly that there is provision to reduce their property taxes by 5% if they are able to manage / treat solid waste in their respective residential complexes. Almost 71% of the households know that every year TMC organizes an Exhibition called 'Vrukshavalli' to initiate tree plantation drive and conservation of trees. Nearly 60% of the households are aware about the Bicycle sharing facility campaign

initiated by TMC to reduce carbon footprints. About 71% households know that they can adopt 'Go Green' concept by converting their conventional residential buildings into green or energy saving building without much efforts. About 62% consumers know the location of retail shops selling organic food products. But only 33% of them actually purchase from these shops.

### Part III: Willingness to contribute for sustainable environment

To ascertain willingness of the households to contribute to sustainable development several questions have been asked to the consumers. About 42 respondents showed their willingness to spend / contribute towards purchase of organic food, eco-friendly products and renewable energy gadgets. Rest of the consumers gave the answer in 'maybe' form.

Nearly 44 respondents showed their willingness to spend up to Rs. 5,000/- per month towards purchase of organic food, eco-friendly food. The Pearson's correlation coefficient for household income & willingness to contribute is 0.439 indicating moderate positive correlation. About 30 households positively responded for the question of plantation of trees or having a kitchen garden. Majority of the respondents gave answer in negative to the question of signing a Public Interest Litigation / petition with reference to an infrastructure / development project such as sea link / metro that could harm the environment.

### Findings / observations

The researchers have tried to correlate the income, awareness and willingness factors of the households. In our data three fourth of the respondents income is above Rs. 50,000/- per month. It is also found that many households are aware about the problems related to environment sustainability and open to accept solutions to overcome these problems. Positive correlation suggests that households with higher income group are willing to spend/contribute more for sustainable development. It was found that the amount they are willing to contribute (up to Rs. 5,000/- per month) towards purchases of organic food or eco-friendly items is small / nominal. Along with socio-economic and psychological factors, external factors such as societal support, government incentives and role of NGOs are also important in determining the consumption pattern and preferences of the households in favor of sustainable environment.

### Suggestions and conclusion

Presently, pro-environment or eco friendly products / goods are not available easily like any other goods in the market. So the participation of other stakeholders like retailers and producers in contributing towards the availability and marketability of the products is equally important. Government plays an important role in promoting / encouraging eco-friendly products by providing fiscal incentives to both, the consumers and the producers in the form of tax concessions and tax benefits. Since the ultimate beneficiary is an individual, it is significant to promote the five R's of consumption, namely; Rethink (before consumption

about necessity / consumerism), Reduce (if possible to avoid / less consumption), Reuse (wherever possible avoiding use and throw policy), Recycle (using it for next best alternative use) and Repeat / Redo (earlier mentioned rules).

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