



## Original Research Article

# Does perceived social norms mediate the relationship between the attitude and buying intention towards Eco-friendly products?

Ashok Kumar Panigrahi<sup>1\*</sup>, Debasis Pani<sup>2</sup>, Sunil Kumar Pradhan<sup>3</sup>, Suman Kalyan Chaudhury<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>NMIMS University, Shirpur, Maharashtra, India.

<sup>2</sup>Gandhi Institute of Advanced Computer and Research, Rayagada, Odisha, India.

<sup>3</sup>Dept. of Business Administration, Berhampur University, Odisha, India.

<sup>4</sup>Dept. of Business Administration, Berhampur University, Odisha, India.

## Abstract

Attitude of the consumer is considered as one of the indispensable factor that not only shapes the personality but also influence significantly the buying intention of the consumer towards consumption of eco-friendly products. Earlier studies, has shown strong evidence of the influence of attitude on the consumer' buying intention. In contrary, some studies further holds that along with attitude of the consumer the buying experience influenced by the perceived social norms plays an important role in persuading the buying intention of the consumer. However the earlier studies have not clearly stated the importance of social norms is justifying the relationship between the attitude and buying intention. The thrust of the current research is based on a pertinent question, is the relationship between attitudes of the consumer and buying intention towards eco-friendly products is mediated by perceived social norms? To explore such relationship, the researcher has adopted multistage sampling method and data was collected from 428 respondents. Further, Smart-PLS approach was adopted to do the data analysis.

The outcome of the study revealed that both the attitude of the consumer and perceive social norms have positive influence on the buying intention of the consumer towards consumption of eco-friendly products. Moreover, the “perceived social norms” mediate the relationship between the “attitude” and “buying intention” of the consumer. The finding of the study strongly affirms the existence of partial mediation. The research findings not only gives a basis understanding about the complex buying behaviour of the consumer but also developing a new horizon of knowledge for the marketers to improve their marketing communication to entice the eco-friendly consumers.

**Keywords:** Attitude, Buying intention and perceived social norms

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## 1. Introduction

The consumer becomes more sensitive to the environment and ensures any of his consumption activity does not have any detrimental effects towards environment. The growth of eco-friendly consumers are attributed by information seeking, cautious about the environment and more sensitive towards negative effects towards environment. In contrast, the demands for eco-friendly products are increasing in the present scenario; where the entire world is challenged by the effect of climate change, global warming and environmental pollution. Eco-friendly products do not have any harmful effects towards the environment either in their consumption

of in their production. Therefore, there is an implied need for academics and marketers to investigate the factors contributing to the increasing demand for environmentally friendly products.<sup>1,2</sup>

The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) is one of the important theories that conceptualizes and explains the important factors that governs the buying intention of the consumer.<sup>3</sup> As per this theory the attitude of the consumer, social norms and consumer's capacity regarding that behaviour are the important indicators of buying intention.<sup>4</sup> Several past empirical and conceptual studies has shown enough evidence (Ajzen, 2015) that the attitude of the

\*Corresponding author: Ashok Kumar Panigrahi  
Email: [panigrahi.ak@gmail.com](mailto:panigrahi.ak@gmail.com)

consumer is one of the important indicators that not only determines but also shapes the buying intention of the consumer towards consumption of green products.<sup>6</sup> (Pani D., & Pradhan S.K.; 2022)<sup>7</sup> further a study conducted by Costa, CSR, et al., (2021)<sup>8</sup> to understand the nexus between buying behaviour and buying intention found that “the antecedents are presented by previous purchase experience, environmental consciousness and green attitudes.” As consumer’s attitude towards eco-friendly product is important antecedents of buying intention, subsequently consumer having more favourable attitude towards eco-friendly products are more likely buy. (Ajzen et al., 2018).<sup>9</sup> Several studies suggest that a social norm also plays an important role in influencing the buying intention of the consumer in relation to the consumption of eco-friendly products. Riethmuller and Buttriss, (2008)<sup>10</sup> in his study along with the attitude of the consumer the buying experience influenced by the “perceived social norms” plays an important role in the buying intention of the consumer.

Attitude of the consumer is a very much an internalized personal behaviour whereas the social norms are externally imposed behaviour, the consumer very often evaluates his self-behaviour after comparing his personal behaviour with the socially acquired behaviour. In such juncture the consumer develops a crisis and felt the pressure to perform or not to perform behaviour in accordance with the society. In contrast there is a nexus of social norms in relation between the “attitude of the consumer” and their “buying intention”. It is clearly evidenced from the above discussion; there is dearth of literature explaining the importance of social norms in justifying the relationship between attitudes of the consumer and buying intention. The discussion leads to arousal of a pertinent question as the relationship between “attitudes of the consumer” and “buying intention” towards eco-friendly products is mediated by “perceived social norms”? The current research study is an honest attempt of the researcher to find answer to this question, in this connection the current study has two important objectives

1. To explore the relationship of attitude of the consumer and perceived social norms on consumer’s buying intention towards eco-friendly products
2. To confirm the mediation role of perceived social norms in relation between the attitude of the consumer and buying intention.

To accomplish this research work; the subsequent section of the research work is organized in the following section, the section-2 of this paper deals with review of literature, section-3 deals with methodology section-4 deals with findings and discussion, section -5 deals with conclusion and implication. Finally, section-6 deals with limitation and scope for future research.

## 2. Review of literature

### 2.1. Attitude towards eco-friendly products (AEP)

The attitude of the consumer determines the overall appraisal and evaluation of the products and one of the inextricable factors of influencing the buying intention of the consumer. The attitude of the consumer further shaped by many social factors and behavioural belief. To Fishbein and Ajzen (1975),<sup>9</sup> “attitude as a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given object”. The attitude of the consumer is reflected in his likes and dislikes during buying of a product or service. According to Ajzen et al., (2011),<sup>5</sup> “Attitude toward the behaviour is a person’s overall evaluation of the behaviour, which may be expressed in positive or negatively.” The attitude of the consumer further especially towards eco-friendly products is completely different as the consumer is more concern towards use of the product and ensures the product should not have any detrimental effect towards the environment. Besides the use of the product the consumer is further concern about the disposal, recycle and waste reduction of the product. Bamberg (2003)<sup>14</sup> in his study found that the consumer behaviour towards the eco-friendly products is completely different from the other environmental related behaviour. Chen et al., (2016)<sup>15</sup> defined “Attitude towards green products is perceived as the degree to which performance of green purchase behaviour is negatively or positively valued by individuals”. Consumer having favourable attitude towards the eco-friendly products are have a stronger intention to buy (Pani D., & Pradhan S.K.; 2022).<sup>7</sup> The consumer is showing keen interest to acquire more and more information about the eco-friendly products, when it came to know the favourable outcome of the green product (Sharma and Dayal, 2016).<sup>30</sup> The outcome of the study of Kim and Chung (2011) strongly evident that the consumer showing favourable attitude towards green products are more likely to buy it. To Pani D., & Pradhan S.K. (2022),<sup>7</sup> “The intention to buy ecological product is significantly influenced by the attitude and the buying experience, further the buying experience is shaped by the consumer’s perceived social norms and its consumption effectiveness.” The above discussion connotes existence of profound relationship between the attitude of the consumer towards eco-friendly products and buying intention. Further such relationship is supported both theoretically and empirically. Therefore in-line with above discussion the following hypothesis has been proposed

Hypothesis 1: Consumer’s attitude towards Eco-friendly product positively influences their buying intention

Hypothesis 2: Consumer’s attitude towards Eco-product positively associated with their perceived social norms

### 2.2. Perceived social norm (PSN)

The social norms is otherwise known as subjective norms, that shows how the consumers behaviour is greatly shaped by the advice, recommendation and suggestive behaviour of

others in the society. According to Hwang “Subjective norm is the opinions of others that are influential on an individual's decision making.”<sup>23</sup> If he or she believes that people who are significant to him or her approve the behaviour, they are likely to perform the behaviour, and vice versa.” The social norm of the consumer is greatly shaped by the normative beliefs, further the normative beliefs are influenced by the prevailing beliefs in the society and social setup. The normative beliefs are the strong predictor of the social norms is influenced by the friends, family members and acquaintances (Davies et al., 2002).<sup>16</sup> In a similar study Arvola et al., (2008)<sup>12</sup> contributed that the acceptances of advice and recommendation of others and following the opinion of experts and suggestion of other influenced persons of the society is influencing not only the existing beliefs of the consumer towards society but also the cognitive behaviour of the consumer. Teng et al. (2015)<sup>32</sup> in his study propounded that among all the factors of TPB, the perceived social norms is the most important factors that influences the buying intention of the green consumer. In the context of buying eco-friendly products the social norms plays a highly significant role in patronizing their intention to buy a product (Shin, Y.H. et al., 2018).<sup>31</sup> Further confirmed the importance of social norms in the buying intention of the consumer towards green products.

The emergence of climate change, global warming and many environmental threats has resulted in the development of socially responsible behaviour of the consumer, the consumer is very sensitive about these issues and tries to develop a stronger sense of moral obligation (Jang, Y.-J.; Kim, E., 2023)<sup>24</sup> further consumer tries his best to show his concern by using eco-friendly product or green products, that do not have any harmful effect towards the environment. In contrast the consumer is very much involved in climate change mitigating behaviour. (Wynveen, C.J et al., 2015).<sup>33</sup> The consumer does have a strong intention to buy the products that are not only environment friendly but also product made of recyclable components (Hwang, C.G.; Lee, Y.A, 2015).<sup>23</sup>

The intention to perform pro-environment behaviour using eco-friendly products is driven by the socially responsible behaviour, personal norms and attitude of the consumer. Norm activation theory (Schwartz, S.H. 1977)<sup>29</sup> suggests that “personal norms stimulated by both awareness of consequences and ascription of responsibility are a core concept in explaining altruistic behaviour” Consumer showing higher moral obligation, stronger attitudinal beliefs and personal beliefs are more likely to engage in pro-environment behaviour and forms stronger intention to buy eco-friendly and green products. Based on the above discussion it is expected that perceived social norms influence the buying intention and it is playing a mediation role in between the attitude of the consumer and buying intention. Hence the below hypothesis are given to confirm

their association in the context of consumption of eco-friendly products.

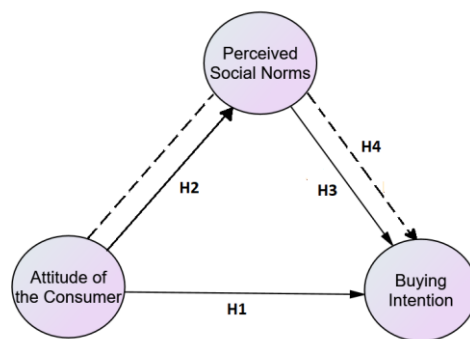
Hypothesis 3: Consumer's perceived social norms towards Eco-friendly product positively influences their buying intention

Hypothesis 4: Perceived social norms mediate the effect of attitude of the consumer on their buying intention.

### 2.3. Buying intention (BI)

The intention to buy eco-friendly product must be backed by a motive and a goal of the consumer, as an action cannot be performed without motive of the consumer (A. Al Mamun et al., 2018).<sup>11</sup> The intention to buy green product is very much influenced by the socially responsible behaviour, personal norms and attitude of the consumer. several studies has confirmed the existence of stronger association between intention and behaviour of the consumer, in contrast the consumer showing favourable intention is most likely to buy the product in present or near future. According to Ajzen (1991),<sup>4</sup> “when participants have higher intention to behave in a specific manner, they are likely to perform that manner”. Most of the consumer buy organic eco-friendly products, backed by positive intention to have it (Nguyen et al., 2016 and Kumar et al., 2017).<sup>28</sup> Kanchanapibul et al. (2014)<sup>25</sup> in his study found that consumer showing keen interest on seeking information about the environmental challenges and man-made natural disaster, subsequently exhibit affirm behaviour and intention towards eco-friendly products.

Based on the empirical findings, discussion of earlier studies and assumption of relevant theories, the above conceptual framework is proposed. The exogenous construct in the proposed conceptual framework is “attitude towards eco-friendly product” and “perceived social norms” whereas the endogenous construct is “buying intention”. The current study is an honest effort by the researcher to know the mediating effect of perceived social norms in relation between the “attitude of the consumer” and their “buying intention”.



**Figure 1:** Conceptual Framework Development

### 3. Materials and Methods

The objective of the study is to explore the effect of perceived social norms in relation between the “attitude of the consumer” and their “buying intention”. In this connection a conceptual framework is proposed in purview with relevant theories and findings of earlier studies. The independent factors undertaken in the model are attitude towards eco-friendly product and perceived social norms; the dependent factor is buying intention. The mediating factor is perceived social norms. The pilot study was undertaken in the city of Berhampur, where 30 respondents were considered for in-depth interview. Enough care was taken by the researcher to understand the motives of the consumer in the process of discourse. After considering important ideas and suggestions from the respondents, a questionnaire was developed to investigate consumers' attitudes towards eco-friendly products. A self-administered questionnaire with 5-point Likert scale with 1 denoting strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree, was used to validate the proposed conceptual model. Multistage random sampling method was adopted to get the response from 428 valid respondents.

The respondents were located across five important cities of Odisha. The researcher has used both online and offline mode to collect data from the respondents. The scales used to measure the constructs AEP and PSN were taken from past investigations. (Maichum et al.,2016 & Al Mamun, et al., 2018)<sup>27,11</sup> similarly to measure the buying intention of

the consumer the scale suggested in the earlier study (Chen, C. C., et.al.,2018 & Al Mamun, et al., 2018)<sup>15,11</sup> The item used to measure the constructs are of adopted scale. The researcher has used smart –PLS to understand the hypothesized relation among the constructs. The structural analysis has been performed in two stages as stage one is the analysis of measurement model and stage two is the analysis of structured model.

#### 3.1. Analysis of measurement model

“Structural equation modelling” (SEM) based on “partial least square” (Smart-PLS) algorithm is very popular and widely used in most of the social science research. This method is very popular over covariance based SEM on the ground that it is sample independent and providing most robust result. This method is not only useful in establishing vivid relationship among both dependent and independent constructs but also useful in predicting the dependent factor with the independent factor (Abdi, 2007).<sup>3</sup> The researcher need to ensure the constructs are free from the problem of biasness in the measurement model, According to Bagozzi, Yi & Phillips, (1991)<sup>13</sup> there may exist the problem of 'common method bias' if the constructs shows high correlation ( $r > 0.90$ ). In the current study such high correlation among the constructs were not found, hence the constructs are free from the problem of biasness and appropriate for further analysis.

**Table 1:** Reliability and validity

Constructs	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Attitude towards Eco-friendly Product (AEP)	B1	0.804	0.915	0.917	0.934	0.701
	B3	0.884				
	B4	0.852				
	B5	0.802				
	B7	0.841				
	B8	0.839				
Perceived Subjective Norms (PSN)	C1	0.871	0.882	0.911	0.914	0.681
	C2	0.653				
	C4	0.833				
	C6	0.907				
	C9	0.840				
Buying Intention (BI)	E2	0.802	0.905	0.909	0.926	0.677
	E3	0.843				
	E4	0.782				
	E5	0.864				
	E7	0.817				
	E8	0.828				

The output of the SEM results can be analysed in the preliminary stage as measurement model. The measurement models is the initial stage of model evaluation that examines the robustness of the items representing a construct. Subsequently 17 items were considered in the study after

evaluating their effectiveness in the construct purification process. The items shows weak associations with the construct are eliminated for further analysis. Reliability and validity are the most essential condition in the evaluation of measurement model. The reliability of the constructs is

measured with Cronbach’s Alpha and rho\_A estimates. It is evident from the above table that all the stated reliability indicators shows result greater than 0.80. Therefore the condition of reliability of constructs in the measurement model is satisfied.

The next important condition is the validity; that can be assessed with convergent validity and discriminant validity. To ensure convergent validity Fornell and Larcker (1981)<sup>18</sup> have suggested three criteria “they are as follows (1) All measurement factor loadings must be significant and exceed 0.70, (2) Construct reliabilities must exceed 0.80, and (3) Average Variance Extracted (AVE) by each construct must exceed the variance due to measurement error for that construct (that is, AVE should exceed 0.50).” The above table depict that the factor loading of all the items are greater than 0.70 except C2. This item is not eliminated because of its theoretical importance. The AVE estimates of all the constructs are greater than 0.5 and the CR estimates of the all the constructs are greater than 0.80 therefore the convergent validity condition of the measurement model is satisfied.

Table 2: Fornell-Larcker Estimates

Constructs	AEP	BI	PSN
AEP	0.837		
BI	0.777	0.823	
PSN	0.770	0.792	0.825

Discriminant validity shows how the items used to measure a constructs are not showing that kind of strong correlation with other constructs that are conceptually different. To Gefen and Straub (2005),<sup>20</sup> “discriminant validity is shown when each measurement item correlates weakly with another construct accepts for the ones to which it is theoretically associated”. The diagonal values shown in the table are the square root of AVE are greater than the column value and row value. Hence discriminant validity condition of the measurement model is satisfied.

3.2 Analysis of structured model

After satisfying all the relevant condition for measurement model, the next phase of evaluation is structured model.

Table 3: Structural relationship testing

Hypothesis Path			Path coefficients	T-value	P-value	Result
AEP	→	PSN	0.770	22.871	0.000***	Significant
PSN	→	BI	0.473	6.030	0.000***	Significant
Direct Effect						
AEP	→	BI	0.414	5.302	0.000***	Significant
Specific Indirect Effect						
AEP → PSN → BI			0.364	6.099	0.000***	Significant

\*\*\* is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed)

The relationship among the latent constructs considered in the measurement model can be evaluated with the help of structured model. The existence of high correlation among the constructs would develop the problem of multi collinearity. Such problems can be identified with higher VIF estimates. The VIF estimates of all the formative constructs undertaken in the study are less than 3.33 show nonexistence of problem of multi collinearity (Diamantopoulos et al., 2008).<sup>17</sup> The robustness of the measurement model can be accessed through the model summary obtained through bootstrapping process. In the model fit indices, the SRMR value considered to be good when it is less than 0.08 (Hair et al., 2019)<sup>22</sup> the estimates show the obtained SRMR value is 0.073 that is less than 0.08. The fitness of the model is acceptable when its NFI estimates are above than 0.80 (Forza & Filippini, 1998; Greenspoon & Saklofske 1998).<sup>19,21</sup> The NFI estimates of the current study is 0.840, is above than the standard 0.80.

The above figure shows the combined result of inner as well as the outer model. The arrows show the relationship among the constructs in the inner model. Further the inner model shows the path coefficient and p-value. Whereas; the factor loading and p-value is shown with outer model. It can be noticed from the above figure that all the hypothesized relationship among the constructs shows a significant relationship and the magnitude of their relationship can be accessed through their standardized beta score.

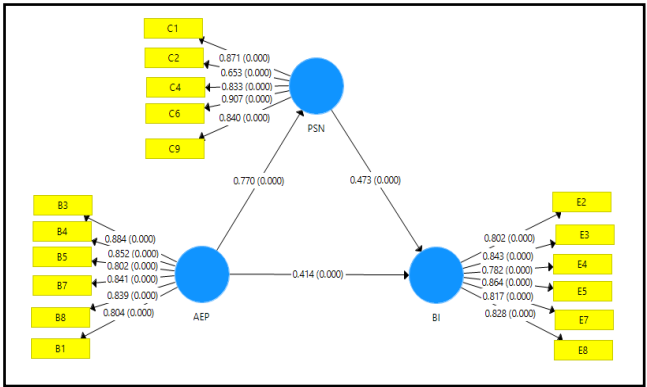


Figure 2: PLS-SEM output of conceptual model

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

The thrust of the current research is to unveil the relationship between attitudes of the consumer and buying intention towards eco-friendly products and to know whether such relation is mediated by “perceived social norms”. The relationship among the factors is explored and evaluated with the help of a conceptual framework and structured model.

It is evidenced from the above table that “attitude towards eco-friendly products” positively influences the “buying intention” of the consumer ( $\beta = 0.414$ ,  $t\text{-Value}=5.302$ ,  $p<0.000$ ). Similar to other behavioural studies the attitude of the consumer has a positive influence on the intention to buy the eco-friendly products. In contrast consumer shows favourable attitude towards environment friendly products have greater intention to buy. The consumer shows a paramount concern on the attributes of the product and its impact on environment. Such finding is similar to earlier studies (Pani D., & Pradhan S.K., 2022)<sup>7</sup> and (Kim and Chung, 2011).<sup>26</sup>

The above table clearly indicates that “attitude towards eco-friendly products” positively influences the “perceived social norms” of the consumer ( $\beta = 0.770$ ,  $t\text{-Value}=22.871$ ,  $p<0.000$ ). The attitudinal beliefs of the consumer significantly shape his social beliefs. The findings of the current study are supported by earlier studies (Pani D., & Pradhan S.K., 2022).<sup>7</sup> In addition to above the impact of attitude of the consumer upon the perceived social norms is high that can be noticed from the higher standardizing beta value.

It can be noticed from the above table that the “perceived social norms” of the consumer positively influences the “buying intention” of the consumer towards eco-friendly products ( $\beta = 0.473$ ,  $t\text{-Value}=6.030$ ,  $p<0.000$ ). The social norms of the consumer is shaped by the beliefs and suggestion shared by the family, friends and opinion of experts and reference group. Such enriched social norms beliefs positively influence the intention to buy eco-friendly products. in the context of purchasing eco-friendly products, societal norms have a significant influence on consumer’s decisions to buy (Shin, Y.H. et al., 2018).<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, Moon (2021) reaffirmed the significance of societal norms in influencing consumers’ intentions to purchase environmentally friendly products.

The thrust of the current study was to examine the possibility of mediating effect of perceived social norms in relation to “attitude towards eco-friendly” products and “buying intention”. The specific indirect effect output obtained through bootstrapping method has unveiled the nexus between these constructs. The result suggested existence of mediating effect ( $\beta = 0.364$ ,  $t\text{-Value}=6.099$ ,  $p<0.000$ ). The existence of both direct relation and indirect relation among the constructs has resulted in partial mediation among the constructs. The existence of partial

mediation indicates that there exists not only significant relationship between the mediator i.e. “perceived social norms” and with the “buying intention” but also direct relation between “attitudes towards eco-friendly product” and “buying intention”. The standardize beta of direct effect is (0.414) is relatively higher than the standardize beta of indirect effect (0.364). The total effect of the mediation is 0.778, in which the percentage of mediation of direct effect is 53.21% and percentage of mediation of indirect effect is 46.79%.

#### 5. Conclusion and Implication

The study has proposed the relation among the constructs in the form of a conceptual framework. The study further highlighted the importance of “attitude towards eco-friendly products” and “perceived social norms” on the buying intention of the consumer. Consumer having favourable behavioural beliefs towards eco-friendly products and positive social beliefs have shown a positive intention for buying. The study concludes that consumers’ attitudes towards environmentally friendly products are critical factors that not only favourably affect their desire to purchase but also have a favourable impact on their social and control views. in contrast, the attitude of the consumer is considered to be most important predecessor of the buying intention of the consumer. Further, such relation is mediated by “perceived social norms”. The outcome of the study is a panacea for the marketers and professionals associated with the business of environment friendly products. The markets should have to redesign their marketing approach and marketing communication that not only positively influence the behavioural and social beliefs of the consumer but also would result in their buying intention.

#### 6. Limitation and Scope for Future Research

Inspite of its contribution the present study is not free from limitation. The study has proved the existence of mediation effect of “perceived social norms” in relation between the “attitude of the consumer” and their “buying intention”. Hence more research is required in future to understand such relationship and to know factors influence such relationship.

The respondents of the current study were limited to five important districts of Odisha; hence the respondents were from urban areas. So future researcher should carry forward their research in a larger demography including rural areas to understand the buying behaviour in more precise manner.

#### 7. Conflict of Interest

None.

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