

Sustainability awareness and willingness to pay for organic food: Mediating role of self-esteem and self-reward

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the influences of sustainability awareness on consumers' willingness to pay for organic foods with self-esteem and self-reward as mediators. Employing Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as the theoretical framework, the study examines how self-esteem and self-reward impact on sustainable consumer behaviour. Data were obtained from 216 respondents through structural equation modelling (SEM) as this study adopted a quantitative approach. The findings suggest that sustainability awareness has a significant impact on self-esteem and self-reward, which act as a mediator between sustainability awareness and willingness to pay for organic food. By applying the tenets of self-determination theory, this study offers significant theoretical contributions relevant to a novel area of research, namely sustainable consumer behaviour and valuable practical recommendations to marketers and policymakers interested in encouraging the purchase of organic foods. There are significant implications for theory and practice based on the findings, which indicate that increasing the sustainability consciousness and appealing to psychological incentives may result in greater consumer acceptance of premium sustainable goods. The study's limitations, such as the cross-sectional research design and the focus on a single product category, are also presented, and recommendations for future investigations to consider other contexts and other psychological constructs are provided.

Introduction

Over the last few years, the concept of sustainability has gained prominence amongst consumers especially within the context of the purchasing of organic foods (Khan et al., 2023). Thus, consumers are becoming more and more aware of the emerging global environmental issues. According to Sgroi et al. (2023), consumers are innocent and unknowledgeable about sustainability. Consumers' willingness to pay (WTP) has attracted a lot of attention from scholars and traders alike, especially for sustainable products like organic foods. Eco-literacy, health consciousness and product quality have been identified in prior studies as the factors to influence WTP for organic foods (Kumar et al., 2023; Li & Kallas, 2021; Kokthi et al., 2021). According to research conducted by Alberto de Moraes Watanabe et al. (2023), consumers are willing to spend between 5 and 10 per cent of their income on organic products. Research also focuses on revealing the effects of different psychological variables on consumer trust and, for instance, emotional bonds with sustainability. Nevertheless, there is a scarcity of literature on how factors such as self-esteem and self-rewarding influence WTP alongside sustainability awareness (Grunert et al., 2024). For instance, self-esteem has cultural effects that influence consumers' choices, yet its influence on sustainable consumption is not well understood. Also, the concept of self-reward, which is the main idea that reflects the intrinsic benefits obtained from ethical decisions, serves as a significant mediator of the link between sustainability awareness and WTP.

The study is significant not only because it is pertinent to the global sustainability issue but also has the potential to address important issues in both developed and developing countries (Pacho & Batra, 2021). Agriculture continues to be a vital component of the sustainability of the environment and economic growth worldwide. However, unsustainable farming methods, land degradation, and climate change are putting a great deal of pressure on this industry (Chaudhuri et al., 2023). A path to more sustainable food systems is provided by organic food production, which places a strong emphasis on minimizing chemical inputs, preserving biodiversity, and fostering soil health (Chiriaco et al., 2022).

Promoting the consumption of organic food has several positive effects in developing countries, where agriculture serves as the foundation of the economy and a significant source of income. It boosts local food systems, reduces the dependence on expensive chemical fertilizers, and increases small-scale farmers' profits by reaching specialized markets (Amede et al., 2023). The adoption of organic products is still in its infancy in these areas as a result of low consumer knowledge, high prices, and inadequate organic certification regulations (Rokaya & Pandey, 2024). Overcoming these obstacles and promoting a shift towards sustainable consumption requires an understanding of the psychological and economic factors that influence willingness to pay (WTP) for organic products. Organic food is an essential tool for accomplishing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN, especially those relating to climate action (SDG 13), responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), and ending hunger (SDG 2). By investigating how psychological processes boost the impact of willingness to pay, this study advances these goals and opens the door for groundbreaking changes in consumer behaviour in developing countries.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the impact of sustainability awareness on WTP for organic food by considering the roles of self-esteem and self-reward as intermediary effects. This study aims at establishing the relationships between sustainability awareness, self-esteem and self-reward for influencing WTP for organic food and the findings of this study would help in understanding how these constructs could be used to increase awareness of sustainable consumption in Nepalese consumers. This research contributes to the ever-growing scholarship on

sustainable consumption. It proves to be useful for businesses, policymakers, and scholars concerned with the consumption of organic food in Nepal and other emerging markets. The paper is structured as follows: The methodology and results of the study are presented, and then the findings are discussed relative to the literature. Lastly, the paper offers a discussion of implications for theory and practice as well as the expansion of further research directions.

Literature review

Theoretical underpinning

Self-determination theory (SDT) is used to examine the various psychological aspects that influence people's consumption patterns in relation to sustainable and ethical practices (Khan et al., 2023). Self-determination theory (SDT), formulated by Deci and Ryan (1985), asserts that human behaviour is motivated by intrinsic and extrinsic factors, depending upon the satisfaction of three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Sustainability awareness is considered in this research as self-activation, which refers to a person's internal desire to act in an environmentally responsible and ethically appropriate manner. Cachero-Martínez et al. (2024) point out that customers are satisfied and happy when they make decisions that they think benefit a greater purpose, including effective and sustainable agriculture or environmental conservation. This accords with the SDT construct of autonomy whereby individuals feel that they are capable of acting in ways that they feel are right and reflect their beliefs.

Self-esteem is a person's evaluation of their worth and abilities, which align with competence per the SDT (Ryan et al., 2021). Consumers involved in sustainability practices like purchasing organic foods have a higher level of self-esteem as they are conforming to societal norms and their own values. These acts of positive reinforcement increase their willingness to pay (WTP) for organic products. Self-reward, in the same way, relates to the pleasure resulting from being a responsible consumer (Shah & Asghar, 2023). Since organic food purchases reflect a commitment to ecological objectives, customers who purchase organic food feel pride or emotional pleasure. Such an experience helps them to continue engaging in such behaviors, and, therefore, they are willing to pay for organic products. This research applies the Self-Determination Theory to examine the relationship between the awareness of sustainability and willingness to pay for organic food. It also focuses on the relationship between intrinsic incentives and psychological needs and the consumer, offering valuable practical lessons on how to encourage sustainable consumption.

Willingness to Pay

WTP refers to the amount of money consumers are prepared to spend on a product or service (Wertenbroch & Skiera, 2002) and is an important variable in consumer behavior studies, especially with regard to green and/or socially responsible consumption (Katt & Meixner, 2020). It specifies that a consumer is willing to spend on a product or a service due to value attribution and product characteristics. WTP is shaped by the quality opinion regarding the product offered or brand image and consumer attributes, including environmental consciousness or health awareness (Kokthi et al., 2021). Consumers relate these products to better quality, health benefits, and environmental conservation. Consumers willing to pay a premium for organic food explain their willingness through elements such as perceived health benefits of better food, concern with the environment, and the perceived safety of organic food. Several authors have highlighted that WTP is correlated with psychological and socio-demographic variables, among other factors, including age, income, education level, and environmental attitude (Tien et al., 2024). Furthermore, psychological factors such as personal beliefs and moral concerns are crucial in determining WTP for organic goods (Leonidou et al., 2022).

Sustainability awareness is an individual's knowledge of the environmental, social, and economic consequences of their actions, particularly in relation to consumption choices (Kurdiati & Fathurohman, 2024). It is one's purchasing behaviour on global challenges such as climate change, resource depletion, and social justice. Sustainability awareness in organic food involves recognizing the positive environmental benefits of organic farming, such as reduced pesticide use, soil health preservation, and carbon footprint compared to conventional farming practices (Gamage et al., 2023). Previous studies have articulated that sustainability awareness significantly influences consumer behaviour and willingness to pay (WTP) for products that are perceived to be more environmentally friendly or socially responsible (Sánchez-Bravo et al., 2021; Dangelico et al., 2022). When consumers are more aware of sustainability issues, they are more likely to make purchasing decisions that align with their values, including buying organic food. Sustainably conscious consumers tend to have a higher preference for organic products because they believe that these products contribute positively to environmental protection and sustainable agricultural practices (Leonidou et al., 2022). Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis has been proposed:

H1: Sustainability awareness positively influences the willingness to pay for organic food.

Self-esteem is an individual's overall sense of self-worth or personal value (AlHarbi, 2022), and it has been shown to influence consumer behaviour significantly (Razmus & Laguna, 2024). Individuals with high self-esteem tend to make purchasing decisions that align with their self-concept and personal values, often seeking products that reinforce their positive self-image. Self-esteem plays a pivotal role in shaping consumers' willingness to pay (WTP) for products, especially those that are perceived to be congruent with their values, lifestyle, or image (Krasa et al., 2023). Consumers with high self-esteem seek out products that enhance their identity and affirm their personal beliefs, which in turn influences their purchasing decisions. Organic food is associated with health consciousness, ethical consumption, and environmental sustainability values that resonate with individuals who have a strong sense of self-worth and wish to reinforce those values through their purchases (Parashar et al., 2023). Consumers with strong self-esteem buy things that match their ideals or improve their well-being. These consumers buy organic food to express their ethics, sustainability, or health (Sigurdsson et al., 2023).

H 2: Self-esteem positively influences the willingness to pay for organic food.

Self-reward is a psychological belief in consumer behaviour whereby consumers use a pleasant, credit or satisfactory product to reward themselves (Brown et al., 2018). Consumers buy products not just to satisfy utilitarian demands but also for psychological reasons. Self-reward is an emotional self-care where consumers get to find reasons for spending in the satisfaction of achievements, stress relief or, most importantly, pleasure (Park, 2018). Self-rewards are an important moderator of consumer behaviour, especially when the purchased good or service has functional as well as favourable attributes (Koch et al., 2014). As organic food is developed with customers' perceived health benefits, ethical sourcing and environmental management, it is perceived to be a product range that not only satisfies the physiological but also the emotional needs. Therefore, there is a willingness by consumers to pay a high price for organic foods due to psychographic attributes (Hamzaoui-Essoussi & Zahaf, 2012). Briggeman & Lusk (2011) have mentioned that every customer cannot afford to consume expensive organic food as a sort of reward to their body. From the above, the following hypothesis can be developed:

H 3: Self-reward positively influences the willingness to pay for organic food.

Self-awareness and self-esteem are interconnected concepts that play crucial roles in personal development and social interactions. Self-esteem is defined as an individual's overall affective

feeling of self-worth, which can be stable or responsive to stimuli (Westfall et al., 2020). It is associated with life outcomes such as satisfaction and success. Interestingly, modern social media practices like taking and posting selfies have been found to boost self-esteem among students potentially (Shin et al., 2017). The relationship between self-awareness, self-esteem, and empathy has also been explored in the context of nursing education (Lee & Nam, 2016), explaining the positive influence on interpersonal competency. Understanding these concepts and their interplay is essential for comprehending human behaviour and fostering personal growth in various settings. From the above discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Sustainability awareness positively influences the self-esteem.

Self-awareness and self-reward strategies have been explored in various contexts, showing potential benefits for behavior change and cognitive processing. Self-reward enhances learning motivation and achievement in high school students (Oktavia et al., 2024). However, a systematic review found only a small effect size for self-incentives in behaviour change interventions, highlighting the need for further research on their effectiveness (Brown et al., 2018). Self-awareness has been shown to barrier the impact of negative feedback, reducing neural sensitivity to losses and enhancing top-down evaluation of both positive and negative outcomes (Xu et al., 2021). This adaptive function of self-awareness suggests its potential to help individuals cope with negative experiences. In computing systems, self-awareness is considered a desirable feature, enabling systems to understand, manage, and report on their own behavior (Jantsch et al., 2017). These findings underscore the complex relationship between self-awareness and self-reward in different domains. From the above discussion, following hypothesis is formulated:

H5: Sustainability awareness positively influences the self-reward.

The mediating role of self-esteem and self-reward

Sustainability awareness, which entails understanding the environmental, social, and ethical implications of consumption choices, often aligns with a consumer's desire to act in ways that reflect personal and societal values. By making pro-environmental purchasing decisions, such as opting for organic food, consumers affirm their self-image as responsible, ethical individuals, thereby enhancing their self-esteem (Luomala et al., 2020). Self-esteem plays a crucial mediating role in various aspects of personal and financial behaviour. Parental financial teaching positively influences college students' financial attitudes and behaviors by enhancing their self-esteem (Noh, 2022). In the context of online behaviour, self-esteem is positively correlated with Internet altruistic behaviour, fully mediated by online social support, particularly among males (Zheng et al., 2021). Similarly, Usán Supervía et al. (2022) articulate that self-esteem mediates the relationship between resilience and satisfaction with life in adolescent students. Self-esteem as the mediator plays a vital role in the association of self-efficacy and life satisfaction in high school students (Usán Supervía et al., 2023). Based on above arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Self-esteem mediates the relationship between sustainability awareness and willingness to pay.

Self-reward is the intrinsic fulfilment individuals experience from their actions and serves as a critical mediator between sustainability awareness and willingness to pay for organic food. When consumers become aware of sustainability issues, they often feel motivated to make choices that contribute to environmental and societal well-being (Arcagni et al., 2021). These choices, such as purchasing organic food, serve as acts of self-reward, providing a sense of personal fulfillment and satisfaction. According to Öztrak & Güney (2022), individuals with self-reward exhibit proactive personality qualities. Self-reward involves encouraging individuals to reward themselves upon

effective changes in their behaviour and is a technique commonly involved in multiple behaviour changes (Brown et al., 2018). Self-rewards are essential for individuals to remain motivated (Siddiqi et al., 2016). Based on the above discussion, following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Self-reward mediates the relationship between sustainability awareness and willingness to pay.

Methodology

The study used an exploratory research methodology by employing a self-administered questionnaire to gather cross-sectional data from 216 individuals in Biratnagar, Nepal. Purposive sampling was used to gather data from the Biratnagar area of Nepal utilising the online data collecting platform Google Docs. Social media, especially Facebook, was used to distribute the questionnaire among the residents of the area effectively. The questionnaire was divided into two sections, each of which had closed-ended questions. The first segment consists of questions regarding demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education, and family income. The second component consisted of responses to the four latent variables: sustainability awareness, self-esteem, self-reward and willingness to pay. Amos 21 was applied to execute structural equation modelling in order to examine the data using the two-step method (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The first phase of the study employs the measuring model, which comprises confirmatory factor analysis, Cronbach's alpha, item-to-item correlation, and exploratory factor analysis (EFA). The next step is the structural model, which assesses the model's degree of fit. Table 1 below shows the scales used to measure the variables being studied.

Table 1: Measurement scale of constructs

Construct	Item Code	Items	Adapted from
Sustainability Awareness	SA1	I am aware that organic food is better for the environment.	Dangelico & Vocalelli (2017)
	SA2	I understand the importance of supporting sustainable farming practices.	
	SA3	I recognize the environmental benefits of purchasing organic food.	
	SA4	I believe that buying organic food helps address global environmental challenges.	
Self-esteem	SE1	Buying organic food makes me feel proud of my choices.	Rosenberg (1965)
	SE2	Purchasing organic food enhances my self-worth.	
	SE3	I feel good about myself when I make sustainable purchasing decisions.	
Self-reward	SR1	I treat myself by purchasing organic food.	Koch et al. (2014)
	SR2	Buying organic food feels like a reward for my commitment to sustainability.	
	SR3	I enjoy indulging in organic food as part of my self-care routine.	
Willingness to pay	WTP1	I am willing to pay a higher price for organic food because of its environmental benefits.	Lee et al. (2013)
	WTP2	I am prepared to spend more on organic food because it aligns with my values.	

	WTP3	I consider organic food worth its higher cost due to its perceived quality.	
	WTP4	I would choose organic food over conventional food even if it costs more.	

Data collection

The demographic data from 216 respondents reveals a well-distributed and diverse sample, ensuring representativeness for the study. 50.0% are male, 48.1% are female, and 1.9% identify as other or preferring not to disclose. Age-wise, the majority fall within the 26–35 years (38.0%) and 18–25 years (29.6%) groups, reflecting a younger demographic active in sustainability related behaviours. Educational attainment is notably high, with 85.1% holding undergraduate or graduate degrees, suggesting an informed and aware respondent base. Income levels are varied, with most respondents earning between \$500–\$2,000 monthly, indicating purchasing power. The sample is primarily urban (63.9%), aligning with the availability and accessibility of organic food in urban settings, though 36.1% of rural representation adds valuable diversity. Marital status indicates a near-equal split between single (51.9%) and married individuals (44.4%), further enriching the sample diversity for exploring organic food purchasing behaviours.

Table 2: Demographic sample of respondents

Demographic variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	120	55.55
	Female	92	42.5
	Other/Prefer not to say	4	1.9
Age Group	18–25 years	64	29.6
	26–35 years	82	38
	36–45 years	42	19.4
	46–55 years	20	9.3
	Above 55 years	8	3.7
Educational Level	High School or below	20	9.3
	Undergraduate degree	88	40.7
	Graduate degree	96	44.4
	Masters or higher	12	5.6
Monthly Income	Less than \$500	40	18.5
	\$500–\$1,000	68	31.5
	\$1,001–\$2,000	72	33.3
	Above \$2,000	36	16.7
Marital Status	Single	112	51.9
	Married	96	44.4
	Other	8	3.7
Residence	Urban	138	63.9
	Rural	78	36.1

Measurement model

The measurement and structural models are the two steps used to evaluate the data in the study. Cronbach's alpha was used to evaluate the data's reliability. Data reliability is indicated by Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.88, 0.81, 0.75, and 0.90 for sustainability awareness, self-esteem, self-reward and willingness to pay, respectively. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), three distinct criteria should be fulfilled for convergent validity: (a) factor loading must be greater than 0.50, (b) composite reliability must be greater than 0, and (c) the average variance extracted must be more than 0.50. All of the factor loadings in Table 3 are over 0.50, ranging from 0.555 to 0.937. All values above 0 fall within the range of 0.83 to 0.91 for composite reliability. Each construct's average extracted variance falls between 0.66 and 0.71, all of which are greater than 0.50, indicating the constructs' reliability. By comparing the correlation between variables to the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), discriminant validity is evaluated. According to Table 4, discriminant validity is demonstrated when the average variance extracted (AVE) for every multi-item construct is greater than the shared variance between the constructs.

Table 3: Reliability and Validity of constructs

Construct	Item Code	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	CR	AVE
Sustainability awareness	SA1	0.775	0.88	0.89	0.67
	SA2	0.701			
	SA3	0.61			
	SA4	0.896			
Self-esteem	SE1	0.586	0.81	0.86	0.66
	SE2	0.0744			
	SE3	0.755			
Self-reward	SR1	0.555	0.75	0.83	0.7
	SR2	0.882			
	SR3	0.937			
Willingness to pay	WTP1	0.867	0.90	0.91	0.71
	WTP2	0.574			
	WTP3	0.91			
	WTP4	0.894			

Table 4: Discriminant table

Construct	SA	SE	SR	WTP
SA	0.82			
SE	0.63	0.84		
SR	0.58	0.65	0.82	
WTP	0.61	0.69	0.67	0.84

Structural model

The structural model displayed an acceptable fit to the data, as indicated by many significant fit indices. The Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) was 0.94, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.90, indicating a favourable model fit. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was 0.91, surpassing the

acceptable threshold of 0.90, reinforcing the model's adequacy. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was 0.061, the accepted criterion of 0.06, indicating a strong match between the model and the observed data. The CMIN/df ratio was 2.98, falling within the advised range of 1 to 3, indicating a suitable balance between the model's complexity and the sample size. These fit indices combined provide convincing evidence that the structural model is suitable for examining the relationship between sustainability awareness, self-esteem, self-reward and willingness to pay.

Table 5: Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Path	β Value	P Value	Remarks
H1	SA $\rightarrow$ WTP	0.53	0.044	Supported
H2	SE $\rightarrow$ WTP	0.49	0.000	Supported
H3	SR $\rightarrow$ WTP	0.51	0.049	Supported
H4	SA $\rightarrow$ SE	0.56	0.034	Supported
H5	SA $\rightarrow$ SR	0.59	0.037	Supported

The study examines the relationships between sustainability awareness (SA), self-esteem (SE), self-reward (SR) and willingness to pay (WTP) in the context of organic products. The results show that sustainability awareness significantly influences willingness to pay ($\beta = 0.53$, $p = 0.044$), self-esteem ($\beta = 0.56$, $p = 0.034$), and self-reward ($\beta = 0.59$, $p = 0.037$), supporting H1, H4 and H5. Furthermore, self-esteem and self-reward significantly impact willingness to pay ($\beta = 0.49$, $p = 0.000$) and $\beta = 0.51$, $p = 0.049$), confirming that consumers are more likely to pay when they feel esteem and rewarded, supporting H2 and H3. These findings emphasise the critical role of sustainability awareness in shaping self-esteem and self-reward, which ultimately influence willingness to pay.

Table 6: Mediation analysis

Mediation Path	Direct Effect (β)	Indirect Effect (β)	Total Effect (β)	p-value	Remarks
SA $\rightarrow$ SE $\rightarrow$ WTP	0.42	0.21	0.63	< 0.001	Supported
SA $\rightarrow$ SR $\rightarrow$ WTP	0.42	0.17	0.59	< 0.001	Supported

The mediation analysis demonstrates that both self-esteem and self-reward play significant roles in partially mediating the relationship between sustainability awareness and willingness to pay for organic food. The direct effect of sustainability awareness on willingness to pay remains substantial and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$) for both mediation paths. The indirect effect through self-esteem ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$) and self-reward ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.001$) indicates that these mediators add a significant layer of influence. The total effects for self-esteem ($\beta = 0.63$) and self-reward ($\beta = 0.59$) show the combined strength of direct and mediated effects, underscoring the importance of these psychological factors in enhancing willingness to pay. Overall, the results confirm that sustainability awareness not only directly impacts willingness to pay but also exerts its influence indirectly through self-esteem and self-reward, emphasizing their critical roles in driving consumer behaviour.

Discussion

In conclusion, the results from this study are important in determining the correlation between sustainability awareness, self-esteem, self-reward, and consumers' willingness to pay for organic foods. As suggested by previous research, this study also finds that sustainability awareness affects willingness to pay positively, and the psychological factors of self-esteem and self-reward mediate the positive influence of sustainability awareness on willingness to pay. Our study aligns with García-Salirrosas et al. (2024), who also demonstrated that environmental awareness has a positive relation with willingness to pay for green products. The mediating variable of self-esteem implies that the increase in sustainability awareness leads to improvement of the individuals' self-worth and hence are willing to pay for organic food. This study supports the 'green-self-identity' theory whereby consumers have a positive image of themselves if they are able to buy a green product (Becerra et al., 2023). Also, the mediating role of self-reward suggests that consumers derive personal satisfaction from making sustainable choices. Zhang et al. (2023) pointed out that even positive facial expressions on products that are associated with the environment will lead to an increase in purchase intention. The current study builds on this by showing that self-reward also plays a role in willingness to pay, providing a more differentiated view of the emotional dynamics of sustainable consumption. In sum, this study contributes to this line of research by incorporating psychological mechanisms into the model of sustainability awareness and willingness to pay. It contributes to the understanding of the intrinsic incentives that drive sustainable consumption by underlining self-esteem and self-reward.

Theoretical implications

This paper supplements the theory of consumer behaviour by embracing the Self-Determination Theory in the given research, focusing on the awareness of sustainability and willingness to pay for organic foods. According to SDT, which highlights the role of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations as driving forces of key behaviours, the impact of sustainability awareness on the consumer's decision-making process is through self-esteem and self-reward mechanisms. Firstly, the study expands the theory of self-determination. SDT also postulates that autonomously motivated behaviours, those initiated by personal choice based on values and self-identity, are more enduring. From the results of this study presented above, it can be concluded that the compliance of sustainability awareness with intrinsically motivated self-esteem makes consumers more intrinsically motivated towards purchasing sustainable goods, thus making them willing to pay. Ethical consumerism gives the consumer a feeling of stability and value of their choice, fulfilling the intrinsic motivation in SDT that retains psychological importance like competency and independence. Secondly, the mediating role of self-reward, where self-reward is regarded as extrinsic motivation in addition to intrinsic motivation related to self-esteem. According to the Self-Determination Theory, intrinsic motivation is the primary motivator for sustained behaviour. However, extrinsic rewards can be motivating when individuals value them. In this regard, the positive reinforcement that is experienced whenever people engage in sustainable consumption, such as buying organic foods, can be regarded as an extrinsic motivation system that is in congruence with self-promotion. This aligns with the stand of the SDT that asserts that extrinsic motivations, when regulated to ensure that they are aligned with the person's psychological needs and are in harmony with one's core values, promote behaviours that are sustainable in the long run.

Practical implications

The practical implications of this study offer valuable insights for marketers, policymakers, and businesses aiming to promote sustainable consumption, particularly in the organic food sector. Marketers can enhance self-esteem by positioning organic products as a means for consumers to align their values with their purchasing behavior, emphasizing personal fulfillment and environmental responsibility. Additionally, strategies that tap into self-reward, such as offering loyalty programs or highlighting the health benefits of organic food, can increase consumers' emotional gratification and willingness to pay. Policymakers can promote sustainability awareness through educational campaigns and provide incentives to make sustainable products more accessible while creating a supportive environment that nurtures long-term behavioural change. By combining intrinsic motivations (self-esteem) and extrinsic rewards (self-reward), businesses can design targeted marketing campaigns that resonate with consumers' psychological needs, ultimately fostering loyalty and encouraging sustained eco-friendly purchasing habits. These insights not only support the goals of sustainability but also contribute to shaping more effective, consumer-oriented policies and marketing strategies.

Limitations and future directions

This study has several limitations that should be addressed in future research. Firstly, the sample was limited to a specific demographic, which may not fully represent the broader population. This suggests the need for a more diverse sample across different cultural, socio-economic, and geographic backgrounds for greater generalizability. Secondly, the focus on organic food limits the scope, and future studies could explore other sustainable products, such as eco-friendly clothing or renewable energy, to understand if the relationships between sustainability awareness, self-esteem, self-reward, and willingness to pay hold in different contexts. Additionally, the cross-sectional design of this study restricts causal inferences, and longitudinal or experimental approaches could help track changes over time and establish causality. Furthermore, while self-esteem and self-reward were identified as key mediators, other psychological factors such as moral obligation, empathy, or environmental identity could also influence sustainable consumption and warrant further exploration.

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