

Responsible Consumption by Indian Women and Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

Responsible consumption, often used interchangeably with sustainable consumption, is a way of consumption that considers the economic, social, and environmental effects of the goods or services being consumed. Ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) published by the United Nations (2023)

The research aims to comprehend the awareness, practice, and scope of responsible consumption behaviour among women in India. It also serves as a means to highlight the necessity for further researches on Indian women's approach towards responsible consumption, attributing to India's abundance in resources as well as population, with women being an influential segment of the Indian society.

The research analyses primary data obtained from an online survey (n = 102) and online focus group interview (n = 4) with women consumers. The online survey checks the respondents' views through a series of Likert scale- based situational questions, while the focus group interview attempts to employ a more communicative and open-ended approach towards decoding Indian women's awareness and practice of responsible consumer behaviour. Diagnostic analysis of the obtained qualitative data has been performed.

Although application of convenience sampling method for the selection of the sample ensures exhaustiveness and authenticity in the responses, lack of diversity in the sample might diminish the generalizability of the inferences. Furthermore, the respondents' self-reported data might lack reliability, as it could be influenced by social desirability bias or inaccurate self-perceptions. Lack of statistical analysis tools for qualitative studies like this one makes the implementation of their results quite subjective and therefore, more complex. However, this report presents a thorough descriptive interpretation of the research and serves as a starting point for further researches in this domain, with emphasis on women consumers.

Keywords: Responsible consumption, Sustainability, SDGs, Women empowerment, Financial independence

INTRODUCTION

The topic of "Responsible consumption by women" is worth addressing because it highlights the important role that women play in influencing and shaping consumption patterns, both within their households and in broader society. Women often make a significant portion of household purchasing decisions, which can impact areas like sustainable products, ethical practices, and the overall environmental footprint. Women can contribute to more sustainable lifestyles, positive societal change and conscious promotion of consumer choices by adopting responsible consumption.

The factors that drive Indian women for responsible consumption include: increasing awareness of the environmental impact of consumption; growing influence of social media, which is helping to spread the message of sustainability; and the rising incomes of Indian women are giving them more disposable income, which they are increasingly using to buy sustainable products.

- In the past, Indian women practised responsible consumption due to deeply ingrained cultural values that emphasized frugality and minimalism. Their traditional roles as homemakers and resource managers guided their consumption decisions.
- Women managed household resources efficiently reusing items and minimising waste. This approach aligned with conservation and sustainability, even if not explicitly framed such as.

- Women placed the needs of family decisions over the personal desires, making consumption choices that catered to the well-being of the entire household
- While influential in managing the resources, women often had limited economic independence and broader consumption choices.
- The rise in media, advertising and evolving social norms introduced new ideas and products affecting consumption patterns.

Review of Literature

The responsibility of consumers for the social, economic, environmental and health related impacts is termed as responsible consumption (Olga Saginova, 2023). The conscious and deliberate act of making purchasing decisions that lessen the negative impacts on society and environment is known as responsible consumption. Albert (2015) says responsible consumption is a primary feature in promoting sustainable lifestyles and reducing the negative impacts of consumerism on the environment. He is also of the opinion that responsible consumption is very crucial for sustainable development, he opines that consumer should make informed choices in buying products keeping in mind its impacts on environment and sustainability.

Recent studies have highlighted the relationship between women and responsible consumption. With the impact of COVID-19, women may face unique challenges in practicing responsible consumption, this may also be because of their unique roles and responsibilities in the society (Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya 2020). Further, Barrea et al. (2019) and Mekary et al. (2013) highlighted the importance of dietary patterns and adherence to specific diets among women, signifying that responsible consumption goes beyond environmental concerns to include health-related considerations.

Moyer et al., (2020) say that intrapersonal barriers, such as lack of time, knowledge, and motivation, have been identified as noteworthy factors inducing responsible consumption among women. Concerns about physical appearance, health and money have played an important role in responsible consumption pattern (Joseph et al., 2015).

Demographic characteristics, such as age, education, and income level, have been shown to correlate with socially responsible consumption behaviors. Apart from them, value orientations, including collectivism, idealism, and locus of control, have been identified as predictors of responsible consumption. (Bedi, 2017)

Cobbina (2010), Fitzsimmons-Craft (2011), and Cabrera & Mauricio (2017), say that women's ability to engage in responsible consumption practices depends on societal and economic factors.

Though existing literature has provided valuable insights into responsible consumption among women, there are several gaps like awareness among women about responsible consumption, its implication on environment, willingness to pay premium for green products and to understand their level of decision making, that calls for further investigation

Objectives of this research

1. To assess Women's awareness of responsible consumption and its importance.
2. To understand how Women factor in the environmental and social impact of products and services when making purchases.
3. To gauge Women's willingness to pay more for products that are produced sustainably.
4. To identify the factors that influence Women's decisions to practice responsible consumption.

Methodology

Scaling technique	Sampling method	Sampling frame	Sample size	Statistical analysis tools	Reason for choosing these tools

Likert scale (1-5) & focus group interview	Convenience sampling (non-probability sampling method) including Google form survey & focus group interview	Indian women (age 14+ years)	n = 102 for questionnaire & n = 4 for focus group interview	Mode, bar graph	Since this research is an exploratory, qualitative research that collects categorical data, regular statistical analysis tools such as mean and standard deviation cannot be used here. The ordinal, discrete nature of Likert scale data and open-ended approach of the focus group interview, measures of variability cannot be employed.
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Focus group interview screenshot

Focus group interview video link:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/183A4WPndt2ikrtuD_q6MOINiNXuPBIGs/view?usp=sharing

Analysis

Study 1: Focus Group Interview:

This research presents a comprehensive picture of Indian women's perspectives on market-based sustainable consumption. “Do they consider the environment when they shop? Do they believe the things they purchased are environmentally friendly or not? Do they consider their overall consumption to be harmful? There are comprehensive solutions in this study.

- Meeting started: Aug 15, 2023, 5 pm
- Mode of meeting: Online, via Google Meet
- Meeting duration: 30 min
- Meeting participants:
 - a. Focus group discussion participants (interviewees): Bakshi Tisha Vaid, Muskan Gokhru, Sivakoti Lasya, Sivangi Das
 - b. Moderator: Kanishk Mehta
 - c. Research team: Sri Ram Scandha Mahadev, Sathya Padala, Kumar Pranay, Manvi Attrey

Highlights of the Interview:

Kanishk: Today, through this session, we aim to assess your stances on Responsible Consumption, its need, importance, prevalence, and scope for effective incorporation, exclusively with regards to women in India.

Tisha: So, I was recently purchasing groceries and one of the products was labelled as cruelty-free, like it didn't harm the environment or any animals. So, after that, I started to look for similar products.

Lasya: Companies today, just by putting the tag of “organic”, can increase the price of a product. We're already paying the pink tax, why should I be willing to spend any more of my savings for the environment.

Muskan: From my observation, during the pandemic, the rising prices of even the most common essential products compelled people to think twice before choosing their higher-priced sustainable alternatives. For me too, this was a major roadblock towards practising responsible consumption.

Sivangi: I think, women have always had the knowledge and inclination towards using organic products, just consider a common example of a mother preferring a tulsi-chai over a cough syrup for her sick child. Financial independence, on the other hand, is just a catalyst for the changes we ought to bring in the society and the environment.

Kanishk: Now that we, as a society, have started, just started by the way, to acknowledge women for the contributions they have been making at home or the workplace, they will soon assume the driver's role in propagating responsible consumption behaviour patterns.

Study 2: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This report reveals and analyses the data collected by us via Google form survey (n = 102)

Demographic Data:

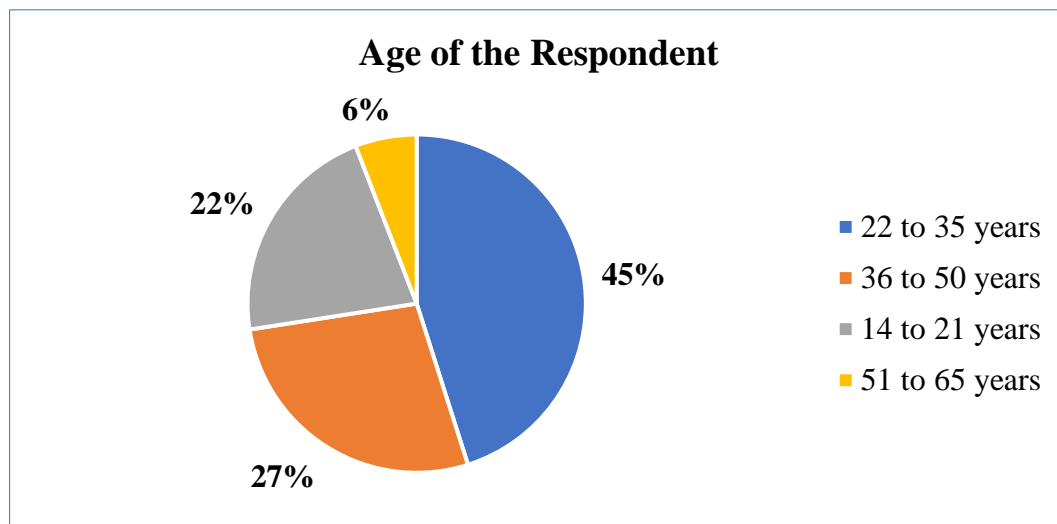


Fig 1

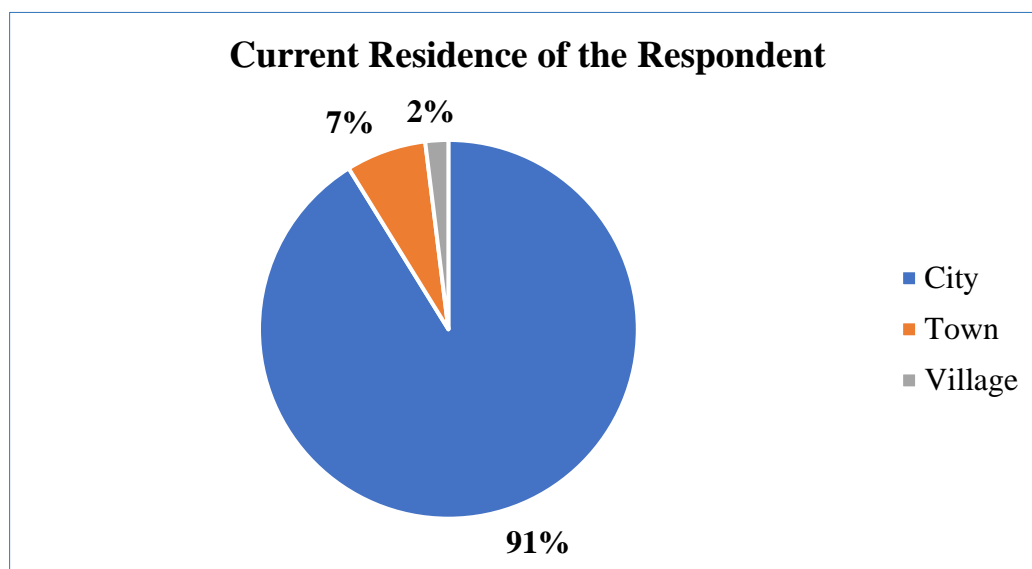


Fig 2

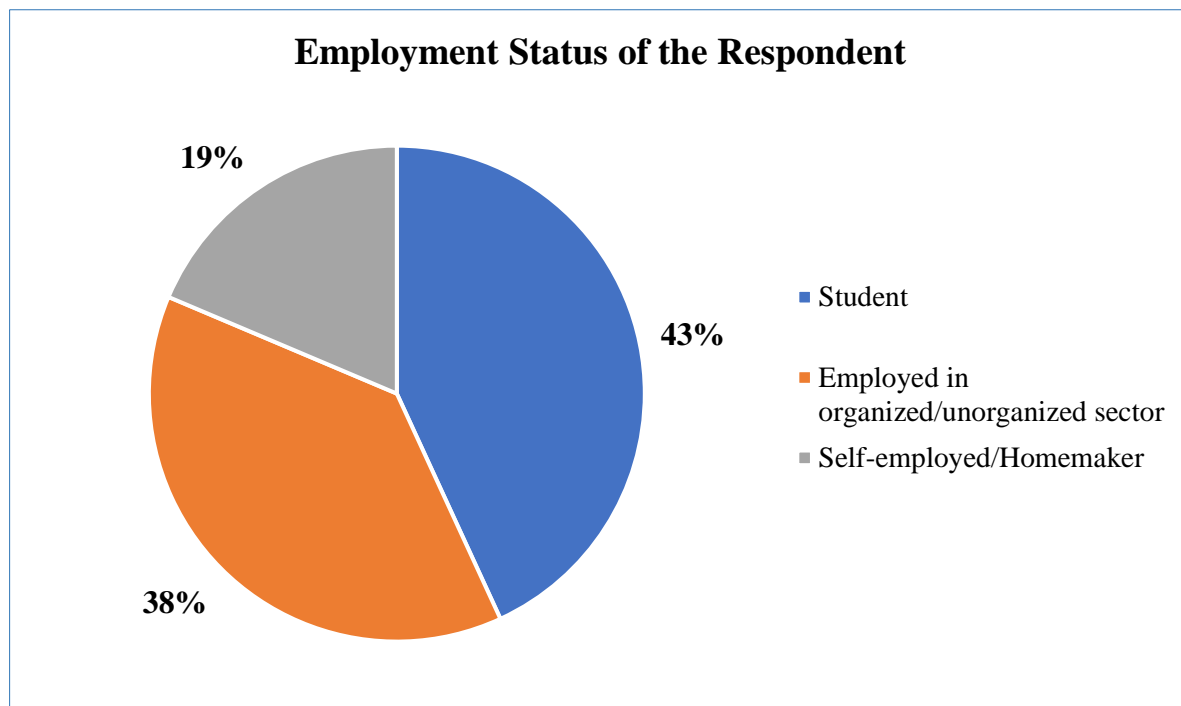


Fig. 3

The above three figures depict that maximum responses are from the women who are in the age group of 22-50 years, they are from cities and either a student or employed with some organization.

Awareness regarding responsible consumption

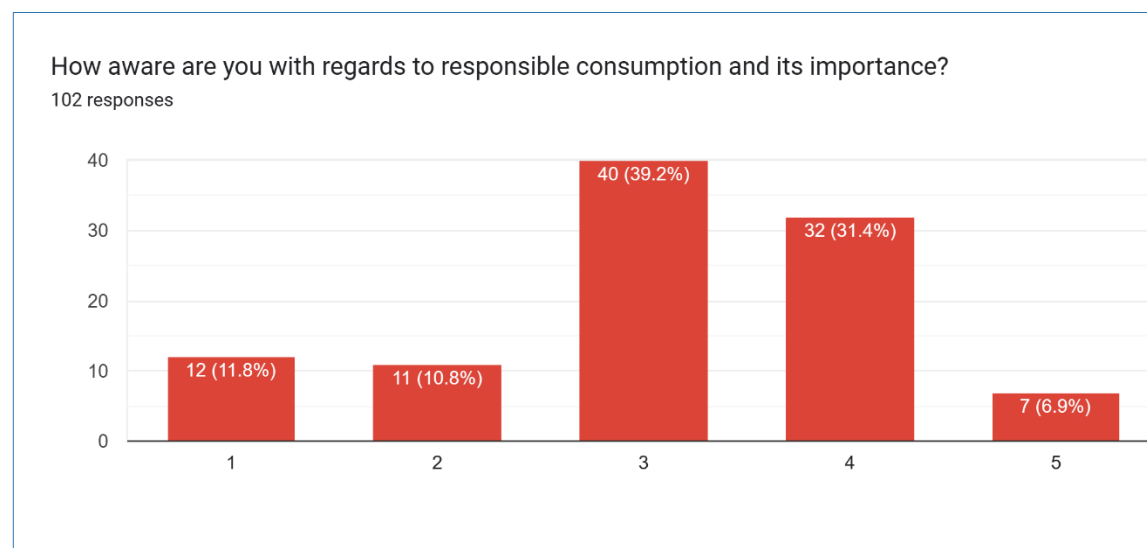


Fig.4

The survey results showed that 40% of respondents know the importance of responsible consumption, while 32% are somewhat aware of it. The remaining 28% are either unaware of it (12%) or unaware of it at all (11%).

According to the survey, most Women are cognizant of the significance of practising responsible consumption. This is a cheering outcome, indicating that Women are becoming more conscious of the environmental effects of their consumption patterns.

Factors Concerned

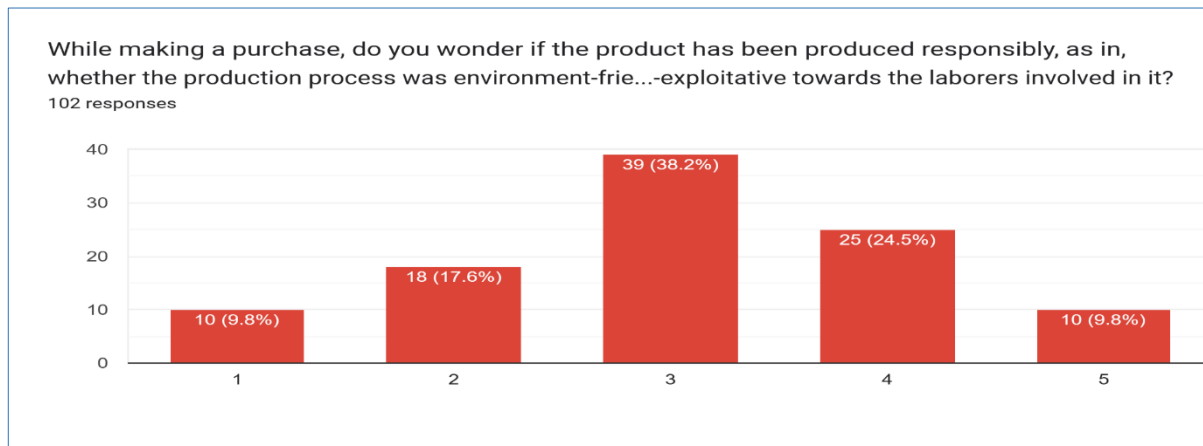


Fig.5

According to figure 5, 39% of respondents are concerned about the environmental impact of the production process, while 25% are concerned about the labour practices involved. The remaining 36% are either not concerned about any of the factors or are not sure about it.

Based on the survey, it may be concluded that women are becoming more aware about the impact of consumer patterns and may be all set to minimize the impact on planet.

Consequence on environment

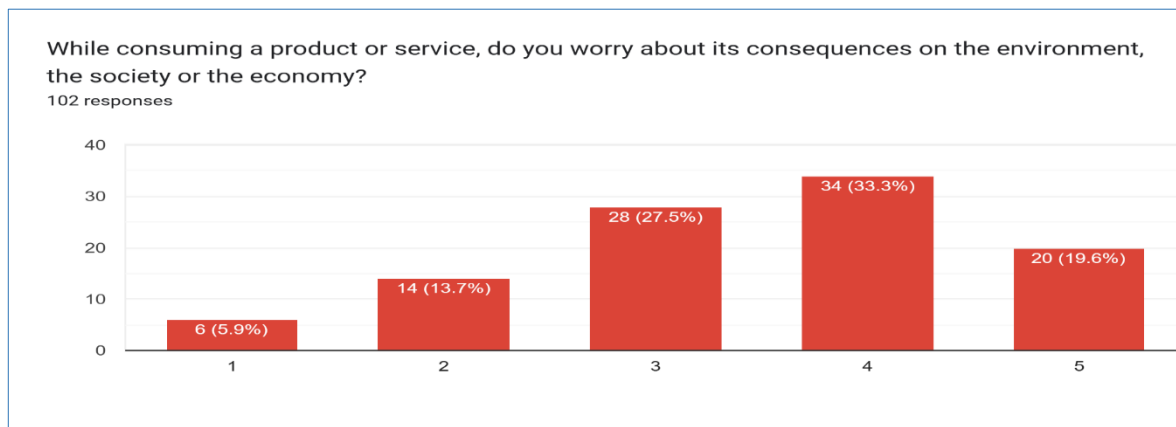


Fig.6

The survey results showed that 34% of respondents are concerned about the environmental consequences, followed by 28% who are concerned about the social consequences. The remaining 20% are concerned about the economic consequences, and 6% are not concerned about any of the consequences.

According to the survey, Women are becoming more aware of the social and environmental consequences of their consumption decisions. This is a hopeful trend as it indicates that Women are becoming more open to modifying their consumption patterns to minimize their impact on the planet and those around them.

Women are becoming more conscious of the environmental issues caused by unsustainable consumption, like pollution and climate change. Women are being influenced by social media and other communication methods that promote sustainable living. Regardless of the cause, the survey indicates that Women are starting to take responsible consumption

more seriously. This is a positive step as all of us must play a part in decreasing our impact on the planet and those around us.

Decision Making



Fig.7

The results of the poll show that 43.1% of women believe that it does make a difference, 26.5% believe that it does not make a difference, and 29.4% are unsure.

The poll results suggest that individual actions can have a positive impact, and that it is important for everyone to make responsible consumption choices whenever possible.

The reason for the obtained result might be individual actions can be multiplied when many people make the same decision as when businesses see that consumers are demanding sustainable products and services, they are more likely to offer those products and services. Governments can also be influenced by public opinion to adopt policies that promote sustainability.

Harmful to Environment



Fig.8

The graph shows that 43.1% of women are likely to stop the purchase, 33.3% are unlikely to stop the purchase, and 23.6% are unsure.

The graph suggests that a significant number of women are willing to make changes to their consumption habits if they are aware of the environmental impact of their choices. This is a positive sign, and it suggests that there is a growing awareness of the importance of sustainability.

The reason for the obtained result might be the severity of the environmental impact. If the environmental impact is severe, such as contributing to climate change, people are more likely to be willing to make changes. The availability of alternatives. Women who are more concerned about the environment are more likely to make changes to their consumption habits.

Exploitation of people

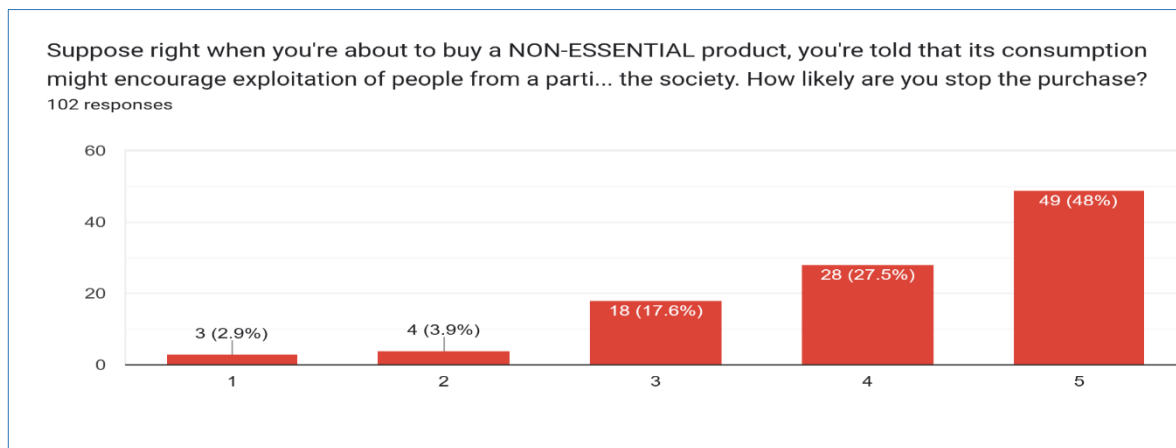


Fig.9

The graph shows that 48% of women are likely to stop the purchase, 27.5% are unlikely to stop the purchase, and 24.5% are unsure.

It shows significant number of women are willing to make changes to their consumption habits if they are aware of the potential for human exploitation in the production of the product. This is a positive sign, and it suggests that there is a growing awareness of the importance of social responsibility.

The reason for the obtained result might be the person's own social values. People who are more concerned about social justice are more likely to make changes to their consumption habits.

Negative Consequences on Environment

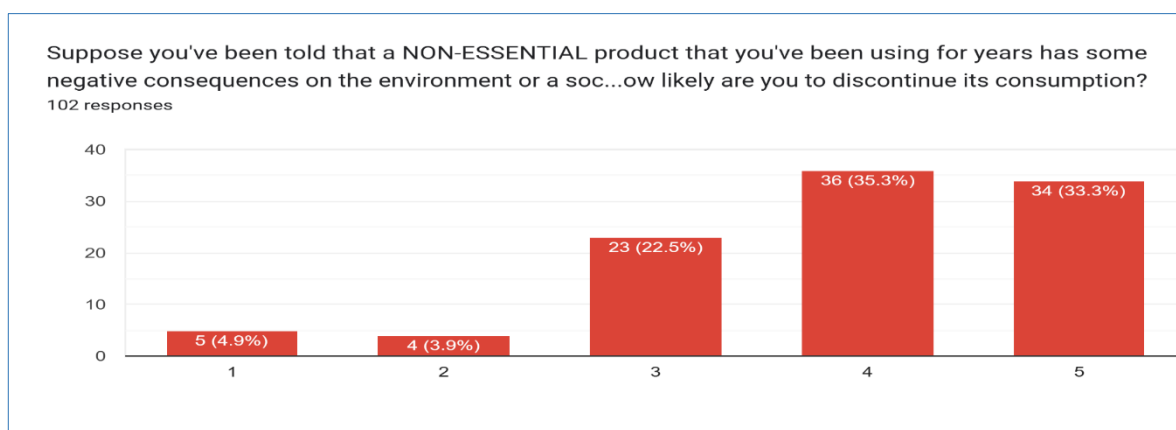


Fig.10

The survey says the results that 35% and 33% of respondents are strongly and very strongly agreeable to the NON-ESSENTIAL PRODUCT that using from the years make negative consequence to the environment while 23% are like neutral to the response. The remaining 4% and 5% respondents are not agreeable at all.

According to the survey, most Women are known about the negative consequence that are happening to the environment from the usage of NON-ESSENTIAL PRODUCTS. The figures replicates that most of the women have some idea on the products that are in usage which are beneficial which are not to the environment.

It appears that Women are becoming more conscious towards their environment. This show that the women are trying to minimise the usage of that NON-ESSENTIAL PRODUCTS with the concern towards their environment.

Price Hindrances

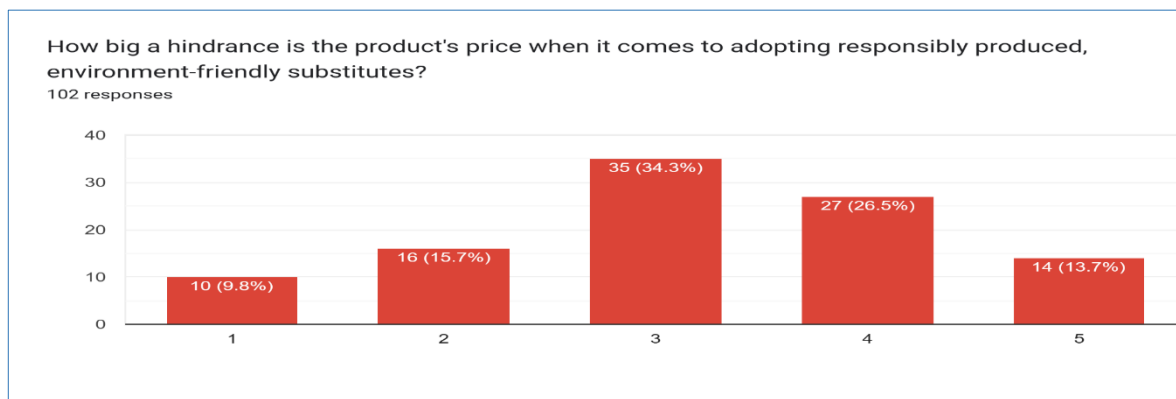


Fig.11

The survey results showed that 35% of respondents are neutral about the adaptable pricing for the products which can be used as substitutes, while 25% and 14% are hindrance towards the price adaptability. The remaining 26% are willing with changes for the substitutes (16%+10%).

According to the survey, Women are a bit confused about the accepting products pricing for substitutes. And some women are facing big hindrance on pricing while shifting to eco-friendly substitutes. Comparatively very a smaller number of women are willing towards the pricing on substitutes

Women must think on the eco-friendly substitutes which is beneficial to the environment even the product price is a bit high.

Alternative product

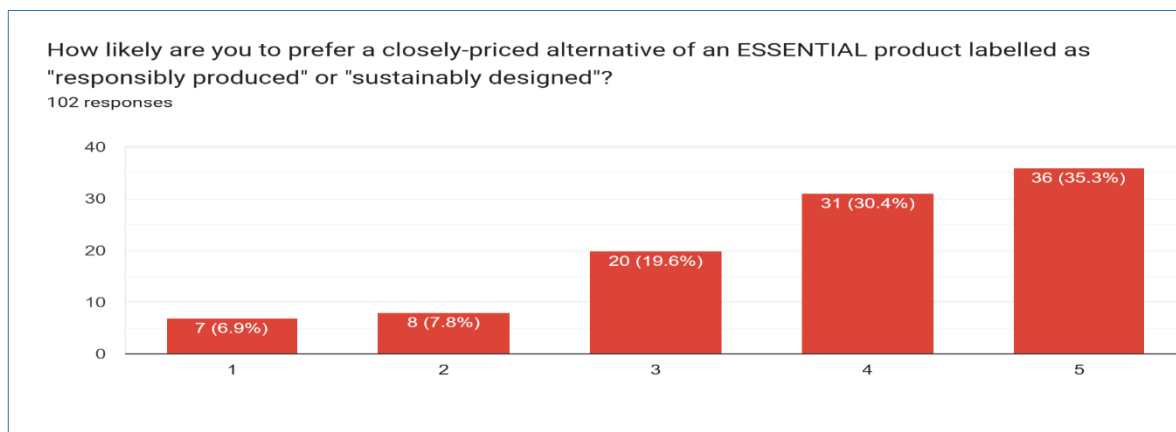


Fig.12

The survey results showed that 36% of respondents are concerned about the price alternative for the essential product, followed by 20% who are neutral about the alternative price. There are a smaller number of respondents who are not willing for the changes towards the products labelled as responsibly produced or sustainably designed.

According to the survey, Women are likely to prefer the price alternative for the essential product in the survey. This is a hopeful trend as it indicates that Women are becoming more open to modifying their consumption patterns to beneficial to the environment.

Women are welcoming the close price alternatives in the market with the name of sustainably produced products or relatively produced products. It is better to have an idea on price that are essential towards the women.

CONCLUSION

The act of integrating social, environmental, health and ethical habits into buying decisions is responsible consumption. In spite of many researches have been conducted in this domain still lot is there to explore and women play a pivotal role in responsible consumption. Hence, an attempt has been made to understand the responsible consumption as perceived by women.

This study has been successful in deciphering the awareness and scale of practice of responsible consumption among Indian women, while laying out the managerial and social implications of this study and specifying the vast scope for further research that this complex topic encompasses.

The hypotheses H1 and H2 have been rejected while the hypotheses H3, H4 and H5 turned out to be true.

It's been found that despite the low to moderate familiarity with the term "responsible consumption" among Indian women, they tend to be innately conscious about the environmental and social effects of their buying decisions and consumer behaviour. The causes of attribution of these values, though, stay unclear.

Although higher price of sustainable products remains a barrier towards their acceptance and utilisation, women are optimistic that widespread awareness and regular reminders regarding the necessity and urgency of practising responsible consumption shall encourage people to inculcate these values more reverently.

While women in India have some solid suggestions as to how public policies should be moulded with calibration to the SDGs, they seem to realise their individual responsibility and accountability towards the environment and the society.

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