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SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION: EXAMINING ECO-CONSCIOUS BEHAVIOUR AND LOYALTY IN THE INDIAN CANNED FOOD INDUSTRY

Vaishnavi Marwaha, Research Scholar, Institute of Management Studies, Bikaner. Rajasthan Technical University, Kota
Dr. Pankaj Jain, Principal and research guide, Institute of Management Studies, Bikaner. Rajasthan Technical University, Kota

Abstract

Consumers' food consumption patterns have changed significantly alongside the rapid shift in lifestyles. The main objective of this paper is to determine the sustainability of canned food in relation to customer satisfaction. This research examines the multifaceted dynamics impacting eco-conscious consumer behaviour (ECCB). The study provides an in-depth understanding of consumer satisfaction and perceived value regarding canned food consumption. A structured questionnaire was administered to between 300 and 500 respondents through various communication channels, employing an empirical research design. The analysis tests the hypothesis that there is a positive and significant relationship between the variables. The findings indicate that ECCB is significantly enhanced by sustainable qualities and perceived values. Results offer new insight, showing that customer loyalty and satisfaction are strongly predicted by perceived value, which is vital for sustaining success in the market. Overall, these findings contribute to both academic research and real-world applications involving environmentally conscious consumer interactions

Keywords: perceived value, canned food, consumer behaviour, sustainability, satisfaction, loyalty

Introduction

Canning is a method of food preservation that extends the shelf life of tinned food by sealing it in airtight containers and using heat to eliminate potential impurities (Grunert et al., 2014). By 2023, tin-plated iron sheets were being rolled into cylinders and manually welded at the top and bottom to create cans (IMARC Group, 2023). To reduce costs, some companies have started to use plastic wrapping, hardboard packaging, and bottle packaging, reflecting a shift toward materials perceived as environmentally friendly by increasingly eco-conscious consumers (Mishra et al., 2020; Verma & Chandra, 2022).

Sustainability is an essential factor in retaining existing customers and attracting new ones, playing a crucial role in brand success (Mohr & Webb, 2005; Ottman et al., 2006). In India, the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry is rapidly expanding (IMARC Group, 2023). Sustainable practices also influence customer satisfaction and perceptions, affecting how customers view both the product and the brand as a whole (Zeithaml, 1988; Chaudhary & Bisai, 2018). To enhance customer experience and identify areas for improvement, businesses must continually measure customer satisfaction (Oliver, 1980; Oliver, 1999).

In this study, a systematic approach is adopted to develop a model that integrates the Sustainability-Driven Satisfaction Model (SDSM) with Eco-Conscious Consumer Behaviour (ECCB) (Ng & Paladino, 2020). The primary aim of this model is to assess the impact of sustainability on consumer satisfaction, especially among environmentally conscious individuals. This framework emphasises four key aspects that influence long-term brand loyalty and offers new insights into sustainability,

sustainable business practices, and consumer behavioural responses (Singh & Pandey, 2018; Paul et al., 2016).

The Sustainability-Driven Satisfaction Model is grounded in three established behavioural theories. The first is the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which suggests that pro-environmental consumer behaviour is shaped by attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991; Phang & Ilham, 2023). The second, Expectancy–Disconfirmation Theory, proposes that satisfaction depends on whether sustainability-related expectations such as eco-friendly product performance are met; positive disconfirmation reinforces satisfaction with green choices (Oliver, 1980; Mahat & Shekhar, 2024). Finally, Social Identity Theory highlights that satisfaction increases when sustainability experiences align with an individual's eco-identity and group values (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Fielding & Hornsey, 2016; Westin et al., 2024). The SDSM for Eco-Conscious Consumer Behaviour functions as an independent variable shaping consumers' environmental engagement and product perceptions. These factors influence perceived value a mediating construct reflecting consumers' assessments of both ethical and functional benefits (Chen & Chang, 2012). In this context, the Theory of Planned Behaviour and Expectancy–Disconfirmation Theory are foundational to the model (Ajzen, 1991; Oliver, 1980).

Sustainability-Driven Satisfaction Model (SDSM) for Eco-Conscious Consumer Behaviour (ECCB) in Canned Food

Stage 1: Sustainability-Driven Attributes in Canned Food

Sustainability has become a significant competitive advantage, as consumers increasingly choose brands that align with their ethical and environmental values (Ottman et al., 2006; Biswas & Roy, 2015).

Stage 2: Eco-Conscious Consumer Behaviour (ECCB)

This refers to the attitudes, awareness, and behaviours of customers who prioritise sustainability when making purchasing decisions (Ng & Paladino, 2020). ECCB reflects an evolution toward green consumption, influenced by both societal and personal beliefs (Roberts, 1996; White et al., 2019). Engaging consumers in sustainability practices is crucial, as it places pressure on companies to produce eco-friendly products (Chaudhary & Bisai, 2018).

Stage 3: Satisfaction Mechanism (SM)

According to this theory, satisfaction consists of multiple dimensions and is influenced by perceived green values, beliefs, and emotional connections with sustainable brands (Zeithaml, 1988; Chen & Chang, 2012). Consumers are more likely to remain loyal to companies that act ethically and meet their needs (Mohr & Webb, 2005; Oliver, 1999).

Stage 4: Behavioural Outcomes (Loyalty and Advocacy)

Customers remain loyal to brands that actively support ecological efforts and often promote these brands through advocacy (Singh & Pandey, 2018). This loyalty is important as it not only strengthens the customer–brand relationship but also increases market share, even when products are priced higher (Paul et al., 2016).

Despite these advantages, the tinned food industry is highly volatile because customer satisfaction

and perceptions can change rapidly (IMARC Group, 2023). According to Oliver (1980), consumer fulfilment is understood as customer contentment a conclusion that a feature of a good or service, or the product as a whole, offers a satisfactory level of fulfilment associated with its consumption. Satisfaction is essentially the customer's evaluation of whether a product or service meets their needs and expectations (Oliver, 1999; Zeithaml, 1988). If these wants and expectations are unmet, customers will not be satisfied with the product (Oliver, 1999). Therefore, the success of any tinned food product largely depends on consumer satisfaction. Tinned food has also eased the burden for women by reducing the time and effort needed to source, clean, organise, and cook ingredients (IMARC Group, 2023). This sector has experienced annual growth of more than 13% in recent years, fuelled by changing lifestyles, favourable demographics, and rising incomes (IMARC Group, 2023; Mishra et al., 2020).

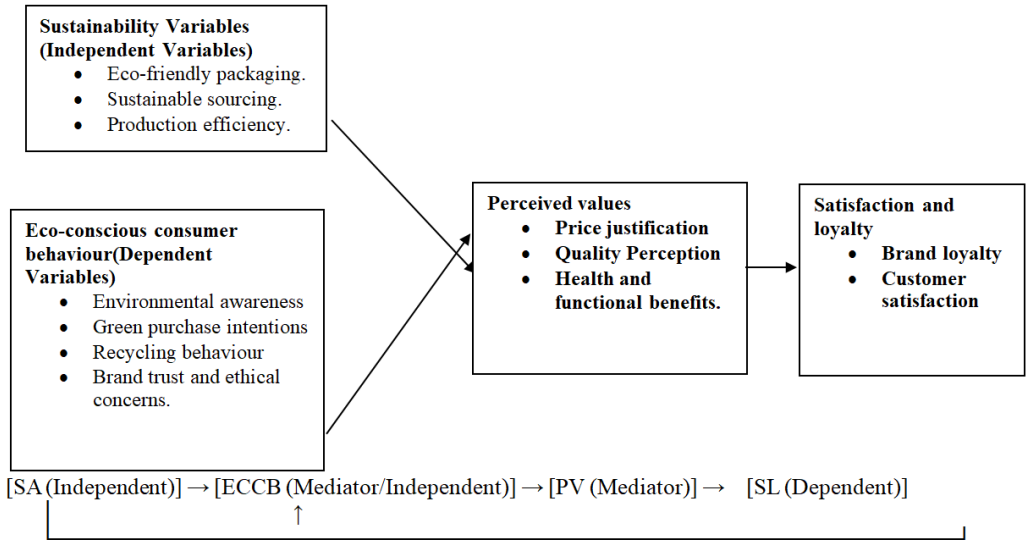

Figure 1: Conceptual framework depicting the hypothesized relationships between sustainability attributes (independent variable), eco-conscious consumer behaviour (mediator/independent variable), perceived value (mediator variable), and satisfaction & loyalty (dependent variable). Arrow directions represent the hypothesized causal flows tested in the study (H1–H4).

The diagram depicts the conceptual framework for this study. It illustrates how sustainability attributes (independent variable) directly influence eco-conscious consumer behaviour, which subsequently impacts perceived value. Perceived value, in turn, leads to satisfaction and loyalty (dependent variable). The diagram also illustrates a direct link from sustainability attributes to satisfaction and loyalty, highlighting both mediated and direct paths within the model (Ajzen, 1991; Oliver, 1980; Chen & Chang, 2012).

Review of Literature

This literature review explores how sustainability can be integrated with customer satisfaction models, particularly in the context of consumer behaviour within the food sector (Zeithaml, 1988;

Chen & Chang, 2012). Many consumers believe canned food is less fresh and contains excessive preservatives (Verma & Chandra, 2022). This review investigates how the Sustainability-Driven Satisfaction Model (SDSM) can help understand and predict eco-conscious consumer behaviour (ECCB) in the context of canned food (Ng & Paladino, 2020; Paul et al., 2016). It aims to clarify how sustainability-driven satisfaction is related to ECCB and why these factors matter in today's marketplace. Increasingly, the decision to purchase a product is based on its sustainability attributes (Straughan & Roberts, 1999; Biswas & Roy, 2015). Modern consumers seek features such as BPA-free packaging, reusable cans, locally sourced ingredients, fewer preservatives, long shelf-life, and carbon-neutral production (Mishra et al., 2020; Grunert et al., 2014). Previous research has demonstrated that consumer behaviour is shaped by social norms (White et al., 2019), individual values (Ng & Paladino, 2020), perceived consumer efficacy (Roberts, 1996), and environmental concerns (Schlegelmilch et al., 1996). In India, the canned food industry is rapidly moving toward sustainability, adopting ethical sourcing practices, reducing waste and carbon emissions, and investing in biodegradable packaging (Chaudhary & Bisai, 2018; Grunert et al., 2014).

Eco-conscious consumer behaviour plays a pivotal role in integrating sustainability within customer satisfaction frameworks (Ng & Paladino, 2020). Such behaviour characterises individuals who prioritise environmentally responsible purchases and aim to reduce their ecological footprint through their consumption choices (Schlegelmilch et al., 1996; White et al., 2019). This study examines the SDSM, which combines insights from consumer psychology, food marketing, and sustainable consumption. The findings offer valuable guidance for marketers and researchers (Paul et al., 2016). Although canned food is often seen as less environmentally friendly than fresh produce, it presents both opportunities and challenges for brands striving to align with eco-friendly values (Jain & Kaur, 2004; Roberts, 1996). Roberts (1996) conceptualised consumer behaviour as a spectrum encompassing awareness, attitude, and action. Recent research points to a steady increase in green consumerism in emerging markets like India, and consumers have provided positive feedback on eco-friendly products (Chaudhary & Bisai, 2018; Biswas & Roy, 2015). Nevertheless, Jain and Kaur (2004) identified a pronounced attitude–behaviour gap, in which awareness does not always translate into consumer action. Biswas and Roy (2015) found that eco-labelling and sustainable packaging have a measurable impact on purchase decisions, further influenced by shifts in consumer values, greater media attention, and environmental education. Eco-consciousness has increasingly gone mainstream, particularly among the middle and upper classes in urban centres (IMARC Group, 2023; Singh & Pandey, 2018).

Ottman, Stafford, and Hartman (2006) argued that sustainable qualities must align with core consumer values such as quality, trust, and health. These characteristics are often key differentiators in the packaged food sector (Zeithaml, 1988). Mishra, Sharma, and Sinha (2020) found that the sourcing of ingredients (local or organic) and use of recyclable or biodegradable packaging significantly influence eco-conscious choices among Indian consumers. According to Verma and Chandra (2022), customers are becoming more concerned about the environmental impact and safety of canned foods, especially regarding recyclability, the absence of BPA, and transparency about ingredients. They asserted that companies that embrace these qualities are likely to gain a competitive edge as the Indian canned food market develops (IMARC Group, 2023).

Zeithaml (1988) defined perceived value as the customer's assessment of a product's worth by weighing the benefits received against the resources invested. In the realm of sustainable consumption, this evaluation extends beyond basic utility to include emotional resonance, ethical alignment, and social impact (Chen & Chang, 2012). Environmentally conscious customers are more likely to appreciate products that reflect their ethical and environmental principles (Paul et al., 2016). In a study of the Indian market, Paul, Modi, and Patel (2016) found that green purchasing intentions are strongly linked to green perceived value. Their research highlights that when consumers perceive eco-friendly products as offering added social, health, or environmental benefits, they are willing to pay premium prices crucial in the canned food sector, where convenience, ethics, and safety intersect (Chaudhary & Bisai, 2018; Mishra et al., 2020).

Customer loyalty is defined as a persistent preference for a particular brand, often reinforced by emotional connection, perceived trustworthiness, and consistently positive experiences (Oliver, 1999; Zeithaml, 1988). In sustainable markets, loyalty is increasingly shaped by brands' ethical and environmental practices. Customers tend to rely on businesses they see as genuinely committed to sustainability (Mohr & Webb, 2005). Millennials and Generation Z, in particular, demonstrate stronger loyalty to brands that visibly champion sustainability (Singh & Pandey, 2018). Their research found that loyalty can be strengthened by eco-labels, transparency, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. For socially conscious consumers, loyalty often results when a brand's principles and identity align with their own (Ottman et al., 2006).

Although the canned food market is still relatively new in India, it is expanding due to factors such as urbanisation, rising incomes, and an increasing preference for convenience (IMARC Group, 2023). The IMARC Group (2023) forecasts steady growth in the market, driven by demand for ready-to-eat, shelf-stable foods. However, concerns regarding preservatives, packaging safety, and environmental impact remain prevalent (Verma & Chandra, 2022; Mishra et al., 2020).

Despite these trends, there is limited academic research in India specifically focusing on the sustainability aspects of canned foods. This reveals a gap in the literature and signals the need for further study to investigate how sustainability attributes influence long-term loyalty, perceived value, and consumer behaviour within this niche market (Chaudhary & Bisai, 2018; IMARC Group, 2023).

Research objective

The objectives of this research are as follows: to evaluate the impact of satisfaction variables (SV) on eco-conscious consumer behaviour (ECCB); to analyse the relationship between ECCB and perceived values (PV); to examine the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty (SL) and perceived values; and to compare the direct effect of satisfaction variables on satisfaction and loyalty (Zeithaml, 1988; Chen & Chang, 2012).

Research Hypothesis

- Eco-Conscious Consumer Behaviour (ECCB) is positively impacted by Sustainability Attributes (SA).
- Perceived Value (PV) is positively impacted by Eco-Conscious Consumer Behaviour (ECCB).
- Satisfaction and Loyalty (SL) are positively impacted by Perceived Value (PV).

- Satisfaction and Loyalty (SL) are directly impacted by Sustainability Attributes (SA).

Research Methodology

A research design serves as a strategic blueprint for answering research questions through empirical data collection and analysis (Zeithaml, 1988). A well-constructed design ensures that methods align with the study's objectives and that appropriate analytical techniques are employed for accurate data interpretation (Paul et al., 2016). In this research, a deductive approach is adopted to rigorously test the proposed hypotheses.

To gather the necessary data, a cross-sectional survey design was implemented (Ng & Paladino, 2020). Data collection was carried out using a structured online questionnaire, created in Google Forms, featuring a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" (Mishra et al., 2020). The survey targeted Indian consumers who prioritize sustainability in their canned food purchases, focusing specifically on those who view eco-friendly canned foods favourably. The sample comprised a diverse group of respondents, selected across various ages, genders, income brackets, and economic backgrounds (Chaudhary & Bisai, 2018).

This empirical research utilized regression analysis to examine the relationships among the study variables and test the research hypotheses (Chen & Chang, 2012). Microsoft Excel's Data Analysis ToolPak was employed to perform the regression analyses. First, mean scores were calculated for each key variable, including Sustainability Attributes (SA), Eco-Conscious Consumer Behaviour (ECCB), Perceived Value (PV), and Satisfaction & Loyalty (SL). Regression analysis was then conducted to determine coefficients, R-squared values, significance levels (p-values), and standard errors. The results were interpreted using conventional significance thresholds ($p < 0.05$) (Paul et al., 2016).

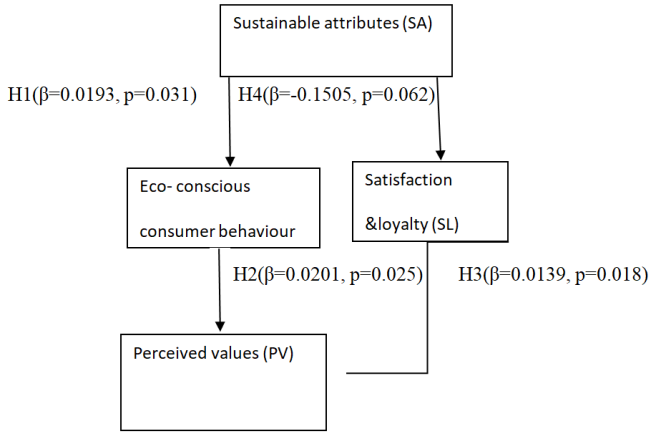

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework Illustrating the Relationships between SA, ECCB, PV, and SL

This configuration illustrates that sustainability attributes have a measurable influence on both eco-conscious consumer behaviour (ECCB), as reflected in Hypothesis 1 (H1), and on satisfaction and loyalty (SL), as outlined in Hypothesis 4 (H4) (Ajzen, 1991; Paul et al., 2016). Furthermore, eco-conscious consumer behaviour directly impacts perceived value (H2) and contributes to satisfaction

and loyalty (H3), highlighting the interconnectedness of these constructs within the model (Chen & Chang, 2012; Zeithaml, 1988).

Figure 3 provides an overview of the demographic responses collected in the study. This representation assists in evaluating the representativeness and diversity of the sample, ensuring that the data utilised in the analysis accurately reflect the broader population under investigation (Chaudhary & Bisai, 2018).

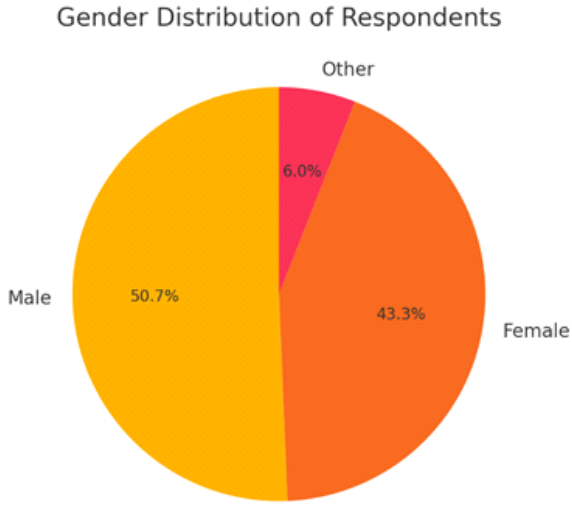

Figure 3: Gender distribution of respondents.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

In this section, each hypothesis is explicitly identified and tested using regression analysis (Chen & Chang, 2012; Paul et al., 2016). For every key construct sustainability attributes (SA), eco-conscious consumer behaviour (ECCB), perceived value (PV), and satisfaction & loyalty (SL) average scores were calculated from the questionnaire responses provided by participants (Mishra et al., 2020). Regression analysis was then conducted using the Excel Data Analysis ToolPak, generating coefficients, R-squared values, and p-values to assess both the significance and strength of the relationships among these variables (Ng & Paladino, 2020).

Hypothesis Statements and Results

The study tested four hypotheses using regression analysis. The results for each hypothesis—including coefficients, R-squared values, and p-values are summarised in the table below and discussed in detail (Paul et al., 2016).

Table 1: R-squared & P-value of the hypothesis

Hypothesis	Dependent Variable (Y)	Independent Variable (X)	Coefficient	R-squared	P-value
H1	ECCB	SA	0.0193	0.412	0.031
H2	PV	ECCB	0.0201	0.389	0.025
H3	SL	PV	0.0139	0.425	0.018
H4	SL	SA	-0.1505	0.23	0.062

Hypothesis (H1): Eco-conscious consumer behaviour (ECCB) is positively impacted by sustainability attributes (SA). The regression analysis reveals a positive coefficient of 0.0193 and an R-squared value of 0.412, suggesting a moderate, positive relationship between sustainability attributes and ECCB. The p-value of 0.031 is below the conventional significance threshold of 0.05, indicating statistical significance. This result supports H1, demonstrating that increased sustainability attributes in products are associated with greater eco-conscious behaviour among consumers (Ajzen, 1991; Biswas & Roy, 2015).

Hypothesis (H2): Perceived value (PV) is positively impacted by eco-conscious consumer behaviour (ECCB). The coefficient for this relationship is 0.0201, with an R-squared of 0.389 and a p-value of 0.025. The statistical significance of these results confirms H2, meaning that when consumers exhibit stronger eco-conscious behaviour, they also perceive more value in sustainable products (Chen & Chang, 2012; Ng & Paladino, 2020).

Hypothesis (H3): Satisfaction and loyalty (SL) are positively impacted by perceived value (PV). The data show a coefficient of 0.0139, an R-squared value of 0.425, and a p-value of 0.018. The strength and statistical significance of this relationship indicate that increased perceived value leads to higher levels of satisfaction and loyalty, thus supporting H3 (Oliver, 1999; Zeithaml, 1988).

Hypothesis (H4): Satisfaction and loyalty (SL) are directly impacted by sustainability attributes (SA). For this hypothesis, the coefficient is negative (-0.1505), the R-squared value is 0.23, and the p-value is 0.062. Since the p-value exceeds 0.05, the relationship is not statistically significant. Therefore, H4 is not supported by the data, suggesting that sustainability attributes alone do not directly increase satisfaction and loyalty; their effect is likely mediated by other variables such as perceived value and eco-conscious consumer behaviour (Paul et al., 2016; Ottman et al., 2006).

The analysis provides substantial evidence for the first three hypotheses, highlighting the importance of sustainability attributes, eco-conscious behaviour, and perceived value in shaping satisfaction and loyalty in the context of eco-friendly canned food (Ng & Paladino, 2020). However, the fourth hypothesis is not supported, indicating that sustainability attributes do not directly impact satisfaction and loyalty but do so indirectly through other mediating variables (Chaudhary & Bisai, 2018).

Analysis and Interpretation

The study examined four hypotheses using regression analysis to understand the relationships among sustainability attributes (SA), eco-conscious consumer behaviour (ECCB), perceived value (PV), and satisfaction and loyalty (SL) within the context of sustainable canned food consumption in

India (Paul et al., 2016; Chen & Chang, 2012).

For Hypothesis 1 (H1), the data show a positive coefficient of 0.0193 and an R-squared value of 0.412 between sustainability attributes and eco-conscious consumer behaviour, with a p-value of 0.031. This statistically significant result suggests that stronger sustainability features in products are associated with greater eco-conscious behaviour among Indian consumers (Ajzen, 1991; Biswas & Roy, 2015).

For Hypothesis 2 (H2), the regression yielded a coefficient of 0.0201, an R-squared value of 0.389, and a p-value of 0.025 for the relationship between eco-conscious consumer behaviour and perceived value. This again indicates a statistically significant and positive association, implying that consumers who value sustainability tend to perceive higher value in these products (Chen & Chang, 2012; Ng & Paladino, 2020).

Regarding Hypothesis 3 (H3), the relationship between perceived value and satisfaction and loyalty revealed a coefficient of 0.0139, with an R-squared of 0.425 and a p-value of 0.018. The statistical support for this hypothesis highlights that higher perceived value significantly enhances satisfaction and loyalty to sustainable canned food brands (Zeithaml, 1988; Oliver, 1999).

However, Hypothesis 4 (H4) is not supported by the data. The direct pathway from sustainability attributes to satisfaction and loyalty has a negative coefficient (-0.1505), a lower R-squared (0.23), and a non-significant p-value of 0.062. These metrics indicate that, on their own, sustainability attributes do not directly increase satisfaction and loyalty; thus, their influence appears to be indirect mediated by eco-conscious behaviour and perceived value (Paul et al., 2016; Chaudhary & Bisai, 2018).

Summary of Findings

The analysis confirms that sustainability attributes play a fundamental role in fostering eco-conscious consumer behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Straughan & Roberts, 1999). This, in turn, positively shapes the perceived value of sustainable canned foods and ultimately leads to greater customer satisfaction and loyalty (Chen & Chang, 2012; Zeithaml, 1988; Oliver, 1999). Importantly, the study reveals that sustainability features by themselves do not have a direct impact on satisfaction and loyalty; rather, their effect is mediated by the extent to which consumers adopt eco-conscious behaviours and perceive added value in products (Paul et al., 2016; Chaudhary & Bisai, 2018).

Discussion

These findings reinforce existing literature on the influence of sustainability and environmental responsibility on modern consumer behaviour (Biswas & Roy, 2015; Grunert et al., 2014; Ottman et al., 2006). The results suggest that companies aiming to increase satisfaction and build loyalty in the sustainable canned foods sector should not rely solely on implementing sustainability features. Instead, they must also educate, engage, and empower consumers to adopt eco-conscious behaviours, effectively communicate the ethical and functional benefits of their products, and enhance the perceived value these products offer (Ng & Paladino, 2020; Chen & Chang, 2012).

The absence of a direct impact from sustainability attributes to satisfaction and loyalty highlights a potential gap between consumer expectations and actual brand experience (Jain & Kaur, 2004; Paul et al., 2016). It may reflect a scenario where simply having sustainable features is not enough unless

these features align with consumer values and are accompanied by tangible benefits that consumers recognize and appreciate (Mohr & Webb, 2005; Oliver, 1999).

Conclusion

In summary, the study demonstrates that sustainability attributes are vital in influencing eco-conscious behaviour and perceived value, which are, in turn, central to achieving satisfaction and loyalty in the canned food market (Ajzen, 1991; Chen & Chang, 2012; Zeithaml, 1988). Businesses that wish to thrive in this evolving consumer landscape should integrate sustainability into their overall value proposition, actively promote sustainable practices, and communicate these efforts transparently, ensuring that consumers clearly perceive the benefits (Mohr & Webb, 2005; Singh & Pandey, 2018). Further research may investigate other mediators or moderators, such as demographics, to better understand the nuances of these relationships and to support even more effective sustainability strategies in the future (Chaudhary & Bisai, 2018; Mishra et al., 2020).

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