



CONSUMER ACCEPTANCE OF ZERO-WASTE RETAIL PRACTICES: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF URBAN CONSUMERS IN ERNAKULAM CITY

Management

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ABSTRACT

Rapid urbanization and increased consumption have significantly contributed to waste generation, making sustainability a critical concern for modern retail systems. Zero-waste retail practices focus on minimizing waste through reusable packaging, product refilling, and environmentally responsible store management. This study examines consumer acceptance of zero-waste retail practices among urban consumers in Ernakulam City. A quantitative research approach was adopted, and primary data were collected from 303 respondents using a structured questionnaire. The study evaluates factors such as environmental awareness, attitude, perceived economic value, social influence, environmental responsibility, and trust. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple regression analysis. The findings reveal that trust, social influence, and environmental responsibility significantly influence consumer acceptance, whereas environmental awareness, attitude, and perceived economic value are not statistically significant. The results highlight the presence of an intention-behaviour gap and emphasize the importance of behavioural and social factors in promoting sustainable retail adoption.

KEYWORDS

Zero-waste Retail, Consumer Acceptance, Sustainable Consumption, Social Influence, Trust, Environmental Responsibility

INTRODUCTION

Rapid urbanization and increased consumption patterns have intensified environmental challenges, particularly waste generation in urban areas. Zero-waste retail practices have emerged as a sustainable solution aimed at reducing waste through reusable packaging, bulk purchasing, and minimal plastic usage (Bogusz et al., 2021).

Consumer participation is essential for the success of such practices. Although consumers increasingly demonstrate environmental concern, this does not always translate into actual purchasing behaviour, resulting in an intention-behaviour gap (Sajid et al., 2022). Factors such as convenience, affordability, trust, and social influence significantly shape consumer decisions.

Despite growing global interest, limited empirical research exists in the Indian urban context. Therefore, this study aims to examine the factors influencing consumer acceptance of zero-waste retail practices among urban consumers in Ernakulam City.

Review of Literature

Zero-waste retailing is closely associated with sustainable consumption and circular economy principles (Bogusz et al., 2021). Studies suggest that environmental awareness positively influences consumer attitudes, but does not necessarily lead to behavioural change (Choi et al., 2022).

The Theory of Planned Behaviour explains that behaviour is influenced by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). In this context, social influence represents subjective norms, while perceived economic value reflects behavioural control.

The Value-Belief-Norm theory emphasizes the role of moral obligation in shaping environmentally responsible behaviour (Stern, 2000). Consumers with strong environmental responsibility are more likely to adopt sustainable practices.

Innovation Resistance Theory highlights barriers such as inconvenience, cost, and lack of trust (Gupta, 2021). Trust plays a critical role in influencing consumer acceptance of alternative retail formats (Jaderná & Volfová, 2020).

Recent studies also emphasize the importance of behavioural and systemic interventions in sustainability, with George and Cekuls (2023, 2024) highlighting behavioural challenges, trust, and systemic support as key drivers of sustainable practices. These studies collectively indicate that behavioural, social, and trust-related factors form the conceptual foundation for sustainable consumption and zero-waste retail adoption.

Methodology Research Design

The study adopts a quantitative and empirical research design.

Data Collection

Primary data was collected from 303 respondents in Ernakulam City using a structured questionnaire based on validated constructs (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Sampling Design

A simple random sampling technique was used. The sample size was based on Cochran's formula; however, 303 valid responses were considered due to practical constraints (Kothari, 2004).

The questionnaire consisted of multiple sections covering demographic details and measurement of variables using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Each construct was measured using multiple items adapted from previous studies to ensure validity. The structured design of the questionnaire helped in capturing consistent and reliable responses from the participants.

Variables of the Study

- **Dependent Variable:** Consumer Acceptance
- **Independent Variables:**

Environmental Awareness, Attitude, Perceived Economic Value, Social Influence, Environmental Responsibility, Trust

Reliability and Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha values for all constructs exceeded 0.7, confirming acceptable internal consistency. Data were analyzed using SPSS, using descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analysis (Setiawan & Rizkalla, 2023).

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the study indicates a moderate level of consumer acceptance of zero-waste retail practices among urban consumers in Ernakulam City. Descriptive statistics reveal that respondents demonstrate relatively high levels of environmental awareness and perceived environmental responsibility, reflecting a general inclination towards sustainable consumption practices.

The demographic profile suggests that the respondents largely belong to urban middle-income groups, with varying degrees of familiarity and engagement with zero-waste practices. This variation provides a comprehensive understanding of consumer behaviour within the urban context.

Correlation analysis shows that all independent variables exhibit a positive relationship with consumer acceptance. Among these, trust and social influence display relatively stronger associations, indicating their importance in shaping consumer preferences towards zero-waste retailing.

The results of multiple regression analysis confirm that the overall model is statistically significant, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis that the selected variables have no impact on consumer acceptance. However, at the individual level, only certain variables demonstrate statistically significant effects.

Specifically, trust ($\beta = 0.270, p < 0.001$), social influence ($\beta = 0.265, p < 0.001$), and perceived environmental responsibility ($\beta = 0.123, p < 0.05$) are found to have a significant positive impact on consumer acceptance of zero-waste retail practices. Among these, trust emerges as the most influential predictor, indicating that consumers place considerable importance on the credibility, reliability, and transparency of zero-waste retail stores.

On the other hand, environmental awareness, attitude towards zero-waste retail, and perceived economic value are not statistically significant predictors. This suggests that although consumers may possess awareness and favourable attitudes towards sustainability, these factors alone are insufficient to drive actual adoption behaviour. The findings indicate that behavioural and social factors play a more dominant role compared to purely cognitive factors in influencing consumer acceptance. The strong influence of trust highlights the importance of perceived authenticity and confidence in retail practices, while the significance of social influence suggests that consumer behaviour is shaped by peer groups and societal trends. Overall, the results emphasize that acceptance of zero-waste retail practices is not solely determined by awareness or attitudes, but is significantly influenced by trust, social dynamics, and a sense of environmental responsibility.

CONCLUSION

Consumer acceptance of zero-waste retail practices is primarily driven by trust, social influence, and environmental responsibility. While awareness and positive attitudes exist, they do not directly translate into behavioural adoption.

Retailers should focus on building trust through transparency and communication. Social influence can be leveraged through community engagement. Policymakers should support sustainable retail through awareness programs and infrastructure development.

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