Impact of green marketing of eco-friendly products on the green behaviour of a selected group of consumers in Colombo District, Sri Lanka: Evaluating the influence of green products, environmental awareness, and the role of media

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Abstract Sri Lanka is a country that tends to be more environmentally friendly due to the growing awareness of the severe damage that has been done to the environment. Sri Lanka's marketing strategy is less concerned about promoting ecologically friendly goods. At present, urban people have developed a trend of choosing eco-friendly products over alternatives. This study was based on consumers using supermarkets to buy their daily essentials in the Colombo District. Colombo was specially selected as it is the commercial capital of Sri Lanka. The aim of the present study was to find whether the green products influence consumer purchasing behaviour, how the media impacts the consumers and the environmental awareness of consumers. The data were collected using a self-administered online questionnaire consisting of multiple-choice questions. Questions were based on gathering information on the demographic factors of consumers, factors that are considered when buying a green product and the role of media in green marketing. Altogether, 130 volunteer respondents participated in this study, and the response rate was 86.66%. Data reliability was around 65% (Cronbach alpha: 0.647). According to the results, the female population with higher income and education showed a higher buying attitude towards green products than males. Price is the most crucial factor when buying a green product. Social media was identified as the primary influencer of green marketing in the Colombo District. The statistical analysis found a significant relationship between reasons to reject green products and items bought from supermarkets, the characteristics of green products and reasons to reject them and gender and characteristics of green products ($p< 0.05$). A statistically significant relationship was found between media and the marketing elements and between gender and marketing elements ($p < 0.05$).

Keywords: Environmental awareness, Green consumer, Green marketing, Green products

Introduction

With rapid globalisation and massive economic growth, followed by changing consumption patterns, serious environmental problems have occurred. This includes loss of biodiversity, increased global warming, and depletion of natural resources (Boztepe, 2012). A significant public concern occurred in most developed countries about protecting the environment with green efforts and a recent rapid awakening in developing countries (Sewwandi & Dinesha, 2022). Most industries pay attention to formulating products characterised by eco-friendly, recyclable, and zero-carbon properties (Laroche et al., 2001). Most industries have recognised that they can simultaneously reduce environmental pollution and increase profit (Maheshwari, 2014).

Green marketing is a creative and innovative way of taking products to the consumers. This marketing strategy consists of two major purposes. According to Boztepe (2012), these purposes are to create products that can attract the consumer with sensible prices and manufacture eco-friendly products causing the minor environmental damage. Consumer attraction can be achieved by promoting high-quality products, demonstrating ecological sensitivity, and producing environmentally friendly goods and services. As a result, the philosophy of green marketing emerged with the approach of environmentally friendly products and services associated with marketing strategies (Boztepe, 2012). This strategy helps to improve the company's image and reputation and increase market share (Maheshwari, 2014). Manufacturers are responsible for achieving sustainable development and becoming greener, and their intention must be to

create markets for more environmentally friendly products and services. Most importantly, to educate and influence customers to change (Hart, 1997). Due to people's growing awareness about the effects of environmentally friendly products, their buying behaviour changed from traditional products to green products (Sewwandi & Dinesha, 2022). According to consumer demands, firms follow green strategies to expand their market share.

As the trend changed to green consumerism, manufacturers altered their products to a socially acceptable style and satisfied the customers' needs to achieve profit in the modern market (Kotler et al., (2013). According to Molina-Azorin et al., (2009) and Huang & Kung (2011), "green management" has shown a positive effect on the financial performance of firms. The concept of "green" aims to reduce environmental damage by tapping into consumer demand and seeking consumption to create sustainable development. According to Elkington (1994), going green significantly contributes to the triple bottom line of business (people, profit, and planet).

A green consumer is defined by Peattie (2003) as "someone who voluntarily engages in consumer practices that are regarded as environmentally friendly by marketing academics and practitioners". According to Shamdasani et al., (1993), a person who accepts environmentally friendly behaviours and purchases green products over alternatives is considered a green consumer. These consumers believe purchasing ecologically friendly products is their prime responsibility towards the goodwill of the future. Typically, these consumers think the government should address this environmental protection behaviour, as well as scientists and environmentalists (Boztepe, 2012).

Green purchasing behaviour depends on demographic factors like age, education level, income, and gender, with a positive correlation (Soonthonsmai, 2007). According to Chan & Yam (1995), an individual's environmental behaviour significantly depends on their intention, knowledge, and ecological effect. Jolibert & Baumgartner (1981) stated that the young, educated generation's ecological attitudes are not income-related. Technological advancements, such as 5G technology, have gained popularity as convenient communication methods. So, many consumers believe that media equipped with modern technology significantly influence buying behaviour (Nazida, 2019).

Sri Lanka is a country which practised an agricultural economy based on its civilisation history (Jayathilaka, 2021). The ancient Sri Lankans followed environmentally friendly waste management, water, and food management practices (Jayathilaka, 2021). After industrialisation, these eco-friendly practices disappeared and led to adverse environmental effects, placing the country's ecological value far behind that of developed countries (Sewwandi & Dinesha, 2022). However, after understanding the severe ecological consequences, the buying behaviour of customers, especially in the urban community, has changed in Sri Lanka (Samarasinghe & Samarasinghe, 2013). According to Wanninayake & Randiwela (2008), Sri Lankan customers are responsive to eco-friendly products and willing to consume sustainable goods and services.

Colombo district is the centre of the economy in Sri Lanka, as thousands of businesses are operating in the area. The district is enriched with a chain of supermarkets that provides facilities to buy all the everyday essentials under one roof (Gajanayake et al., 2011). The supermarket industry is one of the fastest-growing industries on the island, and it was brought into Sri Lanka during the 1980s (Gajanayake et al., 2011). This concept gradually captured many customers, especially in urban areas, and distributed nationwide. Over 300 supermarket outlets are owned by various companies, and some leading companies are John Keels, Cargills, and Richard Pieris (Gajanayake et al., 2011). Colombo is the district with the highest technology usage in the country. The highest internet access was recorded in Colombo district at 26.9% (lirneasia.net, 2024). With a busy lifestyle, most people gain information via the internet as the fastest mode of communication. Not only that, the district also has the highest proportion of technological facilities and infrastructure on the island due to the rapid development rate.

Moreover, the Colombo district marks the highest population density on the island (Manawadu & Wijerathna, 2021). People of different age categories, education levels, income levels, religions, and cultures reside there. According to FAO (2024), in 2020, the total area of the Colombo district was about 37 km^2, and around 612,535 inhabitants lived in the district (2020) (FAO, 2024).

According to the statistics, the population density of the area is around 13,364 people per square kilometre. Most people living in Colombo have faced severe environmental issues in the past few years, due to less ecological consideration (for example, the collapse of the open garbage dump in Meethotamulla; buckling the land under it and pushing houses and mounds of garbage onto the neighbourhood in a deadly wave, resulting 32 deaths). So, the latest trend of urban people is to pay more attention to protecting the surrounding environment than in the past.

This study aims to search for the aspects of green products that attract customers and the major demographical factors that impact buying behaviour, as well as to find out about the influence of media on green marketing in the Colombo district, Sri Lanka. As the concept of "going green "is much broader, the major objectives of this study were narrowed down as follows. To analyse the important aspects of green products and their effect on consumers, determine the effect of factors influencing buying behaviour, and examine the environmental awareness and role of media in green marketing.

As environmental concerns continue to rise globally, understanding green consumer behaviour and the effectiveness of green marketing in Colombo, Sri Lanka, is crucial for businesses and manufacturers. Despite increasing environmental awareness, there is limited research on how it influences purchasing decisions in this region. With a growing demand for eco-friendly products, businesses need insights into consumer motivations and barriers to adopting sustainable choices. Additionally, the media plays a key role in shaping consumer perceptions of green products, yet its impact remains underexplored. This study aims to bridge these gaps by evaluating the influence of green products, environmental awareness, and media on consumer behaviour in Colombo. The findings will provide valuable insights for businesses to enhance their green marketing strategies and for manufacturers to develop initiatives that encourage sustainable consumption, ultimately contributing to a more environmentally responsible market in Sri Lanka.

Materials and Methods

The methodology is based on collecting primary and secondary data. The primary data collection was done by using a self-administered questionnaire (Maheshwari, 2014). Previous research was studied to gather information on the background and identify any research gaps. These researches were also used to form hypotheses and outlining what type of data should be collected in this study (secondary data collection). People living in the Colombo District of Sri Lanka (Figure 1), who use supermarkets to buy their essentials, were selected for the sample. The sample selection was based on non-probability convenience sampling (Tan et al., 2022), and all the respondents contributed voluntarily. This method was used because the study is preliminary and was conducted within a limited timeframe.

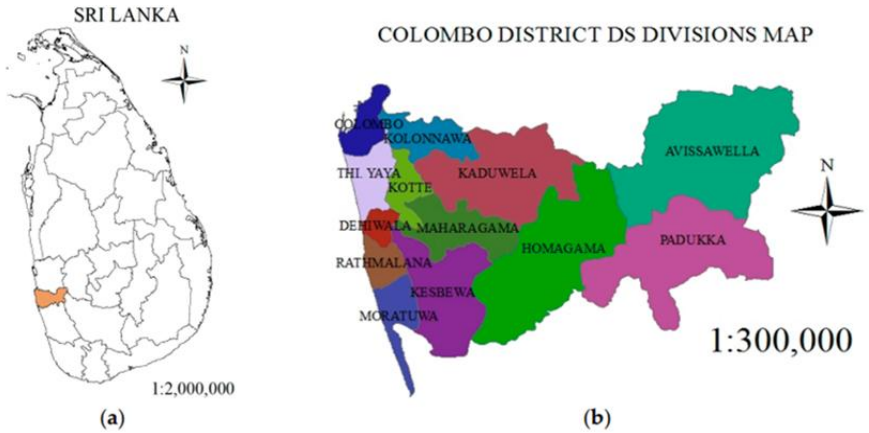

Figure 1. The study area (a) Colombo, Sri Lanka, (b) Colombo District Divisional Secretary Divisions Map (Li & Pussella, 2016)

A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed (January, 2024), for data collection. The sample was expected to cover different age categories, gender, income, and occupation and education levels. The questionnaire comprised 20 closed-ended questions. The questions included the selection of mostly agreed-choice and multiple-choice questions. The online questionnaire was a Google form, distributed via email and social media platforms (Whatsapp, Facebook and LinkedIn) (Correia et al., 2023) using a separate link. The questionnaire consisted of three major sections. The first part was about demographic factors, the second was about consumer behaviour, and the third was about the media's role in green marketing (Dagher et al., 2015). IBM SPSS Statistics software version 29.0.2.0 (20) was used to analyse the collected descriptive data. This research was conducted to test the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1 - Gender of the selected group of consumers significantly influences the items they buy from supermarkets, the characteristics considered when buying a green product and reasons to reject a green product in

Hypothesis 2 - There is a significant difference between the use of media as a source of knowledge about green products, marketing elements (promotion, price cut, product characteristics, brand), marketing strategies (advertisement, certification, self-explanatory labels, education campaigns, packaging) with the gender of the selected group of consumers.

Hypothesis 3: Income level of the selected group of consumers has a positive impact on the items bought from supermarkets, their characteristics, and reasons to pay more for green products

Hypothesis 4: Job category of the selected group consumers has a positive impact on items bought from supermarkets, awareness about green products, and reasons to reject green products

Hypothesis 5: Education level of the selected group consumers has a positive impact on the awareness about green products, characteristics of green products, and reasons to reject green products

To test the first two hypotheses, non-parametric two-way ANOVA test (Friedman test) followed by pairwise comparison (to determine the significance between every two parameters) was applied. To test the 3rd, 4th and 5th hypotheses, multiple linear regression analysis was done.

Results

A total of 130 completed questionnaires were returned (March, 2024), resulting in a response rate of 86.66% (56.92% of female and 43.07% of male). The data represented their demographic factors, important aspects of green products and methods of awareness building about green products by media. As the major assumptions, the data's consistency and normality were tested first. Cronbach alpha test has been done to test the reliability of data. The Cronbach alpha value is 0.647 (64.7%). So, the survey data consistency is nearly 65% reliable. The data was then tested for normality and was not normally distributed because the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test significance level was less than 0.05. For hypothesis testing purposes, the non-parametric tests were conducted.

Demographic factors

Most respondents were between 21 - 30 years old (31.53%), and this included the young generation who effectively used supermarkets to buy their everyday essentials (Table 1). In this survey, most respondents had at least a bachelor's degree, nearly 48% of the total respondents. The income level of most of them was above Rs. 103,000 (nearly 39%), and the lowest was between Rs. 20,000-Rs. 40,000 categories (nearly 5%) (Table 1). Overall, the females who were between 21 years and 30 years old, had at least a bachelor's degree, and had a monthly income above Rs. 103,000 were the highest category of people in the Colombo District who visit supermarkets to buy their essentials. The vast majority of the respondents were aware of green products (96.9%), and only 3.1% were unaware. Neutral awareness means the respondents have heard of green marketing but do not have a strong opinion or preference about it (Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	56	43.1
	Female	74	56.9
Age (Years)	11-20	3	2.3
	21-30	41	31.8
	31-40	23	18.7
	41-50	37	28.7
	51-60	10	7.8
	61 or older	15	11.6
Educational level	Primary (1-5)	0	0
	Secondary (1-11)	1	0.8
	Advanced level (1-13)	16	12.3
	Diploma	12	9.2
	Bachelor's degree	62	47.7
	Master's degree	38	29.2
	PhD or above	1	0.8
Income level (Rs.)	20,000 or below	21	16.7
	21,000 - 40,000	6	4.8
	41,000 - 61,000	20	15.9
	62,000 - 82,000	20	15.9
	83,000 – 103,000	9	7.1
	104,000 or above	50	39.7
Occupation category	Student	21	16.2
	Health sector	06	4.6
	Education	27	20.8
	Government offices /Administration	11	8.5
	Engineering/ Construction	24	18.5
	Other private sector	23	17.7
	Business/Management/Banking	9	6.9
	Retired	5	3.8
Green product awareness	Mostly aware	40	30.8
	Somewhat aware	67	51.5
	Neutral	19	14.6
	Unaware	04	3.1

Important aspects of green products

Attributes such as the product categories people buy from supermarkets, the characteristics considered when buying a product, reasons why they are willing to pay or not to pay more for green products, and the environmental impact of green products are considered under this section. According to Figure 2, females were the largest group (more than 60%) to buy food items as green products from supermarkets than males. In both genders, clothing items were the lowest category bought from the supermarkets. About 53.9% of respondents were satisfied with the green products. Among the factors considered when buying a green product, the price was the most important factor for both males and females. Moreover, the brand was the least concerned factor for females, while the certifications were the least considerable for males (Figure 3). Regarding the reasons for paying more for green products, the female group mainly considers enhancing the quality of life. In contrast, the male group has future concerns and equally enhances the quality of life (Figure 4). Both genders tend to reject green products if the products are high in price (Figure 5). Around 53% believe that green products will significantly impact the environment by reducing harm to the environment.

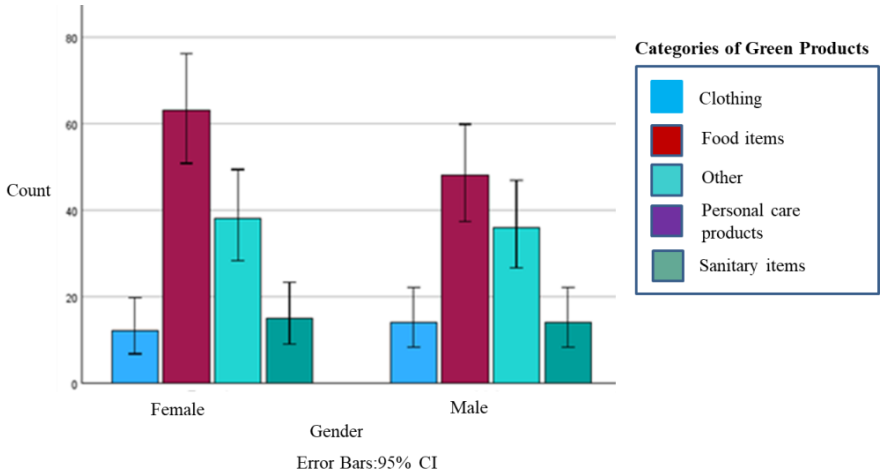

Figure 2: Graph showing the count of respondents by gender and the categories of green products bought from the supermarket

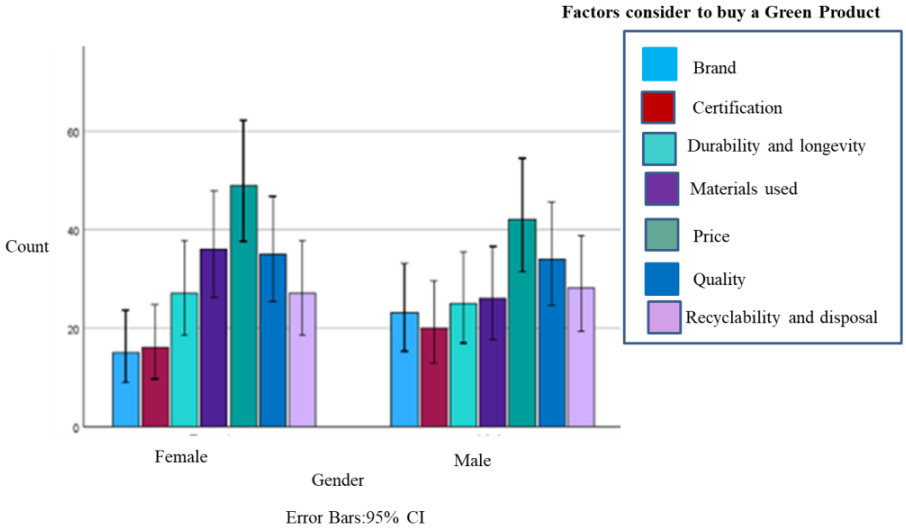

Figure 3: Graph showing the factors that consider when buying a green product for each gender

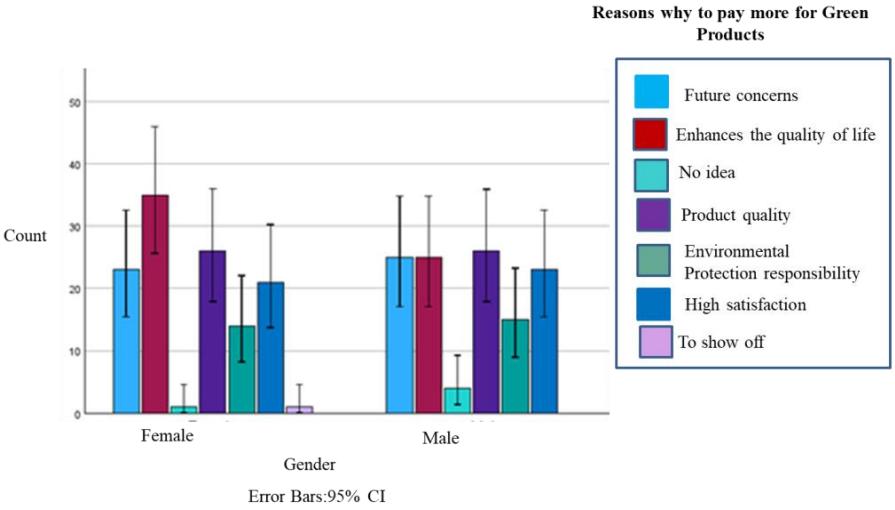

Figure 4: Graph showing how the gender connects with the reasons why to pay more for green products

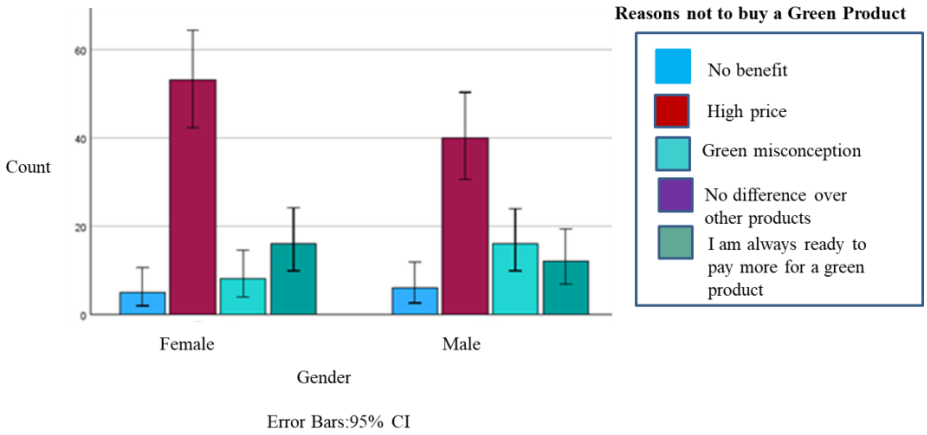

Figure 5: The graph showing the connection between gender and reasons to reject a green product

Role of media on green marketing

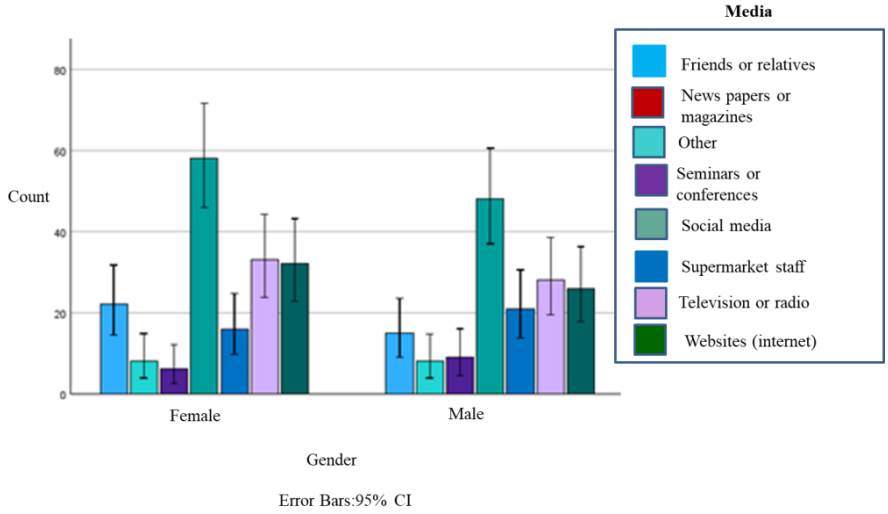

Figure 6: Graph showing gender and sources of media of green marketing

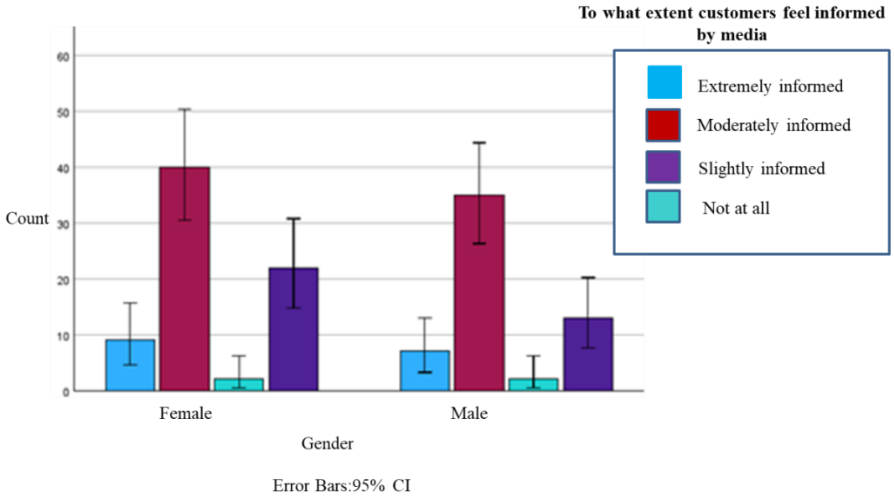

Figure 7: Graph of gender and marketing elements that influence green consumers

According to the results, social media was the major influencer in sharing information about green products, and followed by television or p category (Figure 6). Other information sources had the least influence on both males and females. When considering the marketing elements (Figure 7), promotions were the most influential marketing strategy for green consumers, while the brand was the lowest. Among the respondents, 45% believe that media coverage influences their perception of the importance of environmental sustainability in product choices, while only 9% believe there was no influence from media on their perception. More than half of the respondents (57.4%) believed the media were moderately informative about green products, and most agreed that they occasionally came across advertisements about green products. The majority of the sample (47.3%) had a neutral idea about the trustworthiness of the information in media about green products. The most effective marketing strategy was the advertisements on green themes, and the least effective strategies were packaging and self-explanatory labels, according to the female group and male group respectively (Figure 6). According to the results of the survey, the media were moderately informed about green products (Figure 7). The majority's idea was that media plays a significant role in shaping the trend of green marketing.

Evaluation of the difference between genders for preference of items to buy as green products, factors considered when buying a green product and reasons to reject green products were tested as mentioned in hypothesis 1. According to the analysis, the p-value was less than 0.05 ($p<0.05$). So, the null hypothesis is rejected. The results of pair-wise comparison were as mentioned in Table 3.

Table 3. P values of pair-wise comparison

Characteristic	**Items bought from supermarket as green products**	**Characteristics of green products**	**Reasons to reject green products**
Gender	0.144	0.016	1.00
Items bought from supermarket as green products	-	1.00	-
Reasons to reject green products	0.003	0.00	-

Statistical analysis showed significant relationship between reasons to reject green products (high price, no benefit, green misconceptions, no difference between other products and items bought from supermarkets, the characteristics of green products (such as price, materials used, quality, durability and longevity, recyclability, and disposal) and reasons to reject green products and gender and characteristics of green products ($p<0.05$). There was no significant relationship between gender and reasons to reject green products, gender and items bought from the supermarket and their characteristics.

In testing hypothesis 2, the obtained p-value was less than 0.05 ($p<0.05$) and the results of the pair-wise comparison were as follows in Table 4. The statistical analysis showed a significant relationship between media and the marketing element and gender, and the marketing element ($p<0.05$). There was no significant relationship between gender and media, media and marketing strategy, gender and marketing strategy and marketing strategy and marketing element.

Table 4. P values of pair-wise comparison

Characteristic	Usage of media to know about green products	Marketing strategy	Marketing element
Gender	1.00	0.585	0.00
Sources of media	-	0.247	0.00
Marketing strategy	-	-	0.65

In testing hypothesis 3, the results of the statistical analysis were as follows. Adjusted R^2 value = 0.092, F (3,126) = 5.37, P = 0.02. As the value obtained for the Durbin-Watson test was 1.887, there was no relationship between residual and independent variables. As the p-value was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. So, as predicted by income level, there was a positive impact on items bought from supermarkets, their characteristics, and reasons to pay more for green products.

To test hypothesis 4, the analysis was performed on items bought from supermarkets, their characteristics, and reasons for buying those items as green products. The results were, Adjusted R^2 value = -0.002, F (3,126) = 0.915, P = 0.436. As the value obtained for the Durbin-Watson test was 1.704, there was no relationship between the residual and independent variables. As the p-value was more than 0.05, the null hypothesis was accepted. So, there was a negative impact on supermarket items, awareness about green products, and reasons to reject green products, with job categories.

The results of testing 5th hypothesis (awareness about green products, factors considered when buying a green product, and reasons to reject a green product) were as follows. The Adjusted R^2 value 0.075, F (3,126) = 4.462, P = 0.005. As the value obtained for the Durbin-Watson test was 1.893, there was no relationship between the residual and the independent variables. As the p-value was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. So, there was a positive impact on awareness about green products, characteristics of green products, and reasons to reject green products with education level.

Discussion

According to the demographic characteristics evaluated, females in Colombo, use supermarkets, to buy green products than men in the selected group of consumers (Corriea et al., 2023). The females are more concerned about environmental protection responsibility when compared to men. When considering the age group, the young people (21-30 years old) are the highest proportion to buy the green products as previously found by Majeed et al. (2022). Ureña et al., (2008) have compared Spanish female and male and observed that females have high intension to purchase green products. The gender differences in Hong Kong young consumers' green purchasing behaviour and concluded, females scored significantly higher in green purchasing behaviour than males (Lee, 2009). Radman (2005) also showed that females buy green products more often than men. The highest proportion of green consumers had a bachelor's degree and the highest income category compared to all the other respondents (Majeed et al., 2022; Corriea et al., 2023). However, Rokka & Uusitalo (2008) showed that there is no relationship between green preferences and education level. Nearly 50% of the respondents were somewhat aware of the green products. But high prices and the lack of items as green products in Colombo supermarkets seem to be the reason for the lack of awareness and popularity of green products among people.

There was a significant relationship between the gender and characteristics of green products that consumers consider in the selected group of consumers and Gan et al. (2008) has shown the same results of no significant relationship between gender and items such as food items, clothing, sanitary items, and personnel care products. They buy from supermarkets as green products. Both males and females reject green products for high prices and green misconceptions like no benefits. The same result was shown in a research done using Portuguese customers, as very less amount of them agree to buy high priced green products (Do Paco et al., 2019; Majeed et al., 2022) has shown the price

of the green product is one of the highest concerned factors that influence the buying behaviour. The income level was a major reason for the impact of green product items, their characteristics and reasons people place more value on green products (Henion, 1972). Moreover, Sandahl & Robertson (1989) have shown that green consumers are less educated and have a lower income than the average American.

The results suggested that the media influences the consumer buying behaviour in the selected group of consumers. The marketing elements (promotion, price cut, product characteristics such as colour, packaging, and brand affect the gender when determining the buying behaviour. Majeed et al., (2023) has shown premium and pricing have a significant influence on green purchasing with the research done using consumers in Pakistan. Moreover, the type of media has shown a relationship with the marketing element. It is crucial to enhance media literacy to raise consumer awareness, foster environmental consciousness, and promote a more sustainable attitude, ultimately encouraging greener behaviour in the future (Dagher et al., 2015).

This study has some limitations. This research was not focused on a special category green product. The reason is that the green products are not very commonly available in Sri Lankan supermarkets. As in most surveys, convenience sampling has been employed in this research. This may lack the generalisability and overrepresentation certain groups. Future studies can be carried out covering all the geographical locations in the Colombo District to confirm these research findings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has shown the items buy as green products, characteristics of green products and gender has a significant relationship on reasons to reject green products. Moreover, the types of media and gender have a significant relationship on marketing elements used by the media. There is a growing trend among young consumers with high income to buy green products, indicating a shifting preference towards eco-friendly products over alternatives. Even though there is a positive trend towards green products, price sensitivity remains a significant factor influencing purchasing decisions. Media is a key factor in shaping the trend of green consumerism and green marketing in Sri Lanka. However, the media still has less influence towards making a trustworthy, positive impact on consumer behaviour.

Acknowledgement

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Author Contribution

K.G. Senevirathna contributed to the data collection, application of statistical analysis, finding a methodology, and coordination responsibility for the writing the original research paper.
D. Halwathura was involved in finding the research concept, planning, and editing for the research, supervising the research study and project administration.

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