

# ECO CONSCIOUSNESS AND CONSUMER PERCEPTION: AN EXPLANATORY STUDY OF ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY PRODUCT PURCHASING DECISIONS IN MAKASSAR CITY

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## Abstract

*This study aims to describe and explain consumer perceptions of environmentally friendly products and their impact on purchasing decisions in Makassar City. With increasing attention to environmental issues and changes in urban lifestyles, it is important for businesses to understand how consumers assess sustainability oriented products. This study uses a qualitative explanatory approach with data collection techniques through in depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Twelve research informants were selected through purposive sampling, consisting of 12 active consumers of environmentally friendly products domiciled in Makassar City, conducted over a three month period from January to March 2026. The results show that consumer perceptions of environmentally friendly products are influenced by three main dimensions, namely: (1) environmental awareness (eco consciousness), (2) trust in green claims, and (3) perception of multidimensional product value. These three dimensions together form a positive attitude that ultimately drives purchasing decisions for environmentally friendly products. In line with the findings of (Hasnidar & Ridha, 2025) which confirmed that eco consciousness and perception of sustainable packaging have a significant influence on green purchasing behavior through the mediation of consumer attitudes, this study enriches this understanding with a qualitative perspective that explores consumers' subjective meanings and experiences in depth.*

Keywords: *Consumer Perception, Environmentally Friendly Products, Purchasing Decisions, Green Marketing, Eco Consciousness*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Today's environmental friendly product issues are no longer confined to academic discussions, but have become real issues that directly impact human life. The latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Report, 2023) confirms that global average temperatures have risen 1.1°C above pre industrial levels, and without concrete action from all sectors of life, the rate of environmental degradatison will continue to worsen. In Indonesia, this situation is exacerbated by the country's status as one of the world's largest producers of plastic waste, with an estimated 4.8 million tons of plastic waste flowing into the ocean annually (Lestari, 2022). This phenomenon is not only a public policy issue but

has also triggered a fundamental shift in consumer behavior, particularly in urban areas like Makassar.

Makassar, as a center of economic activity in Eastern Indonesia, has seen a rapid increase in consumption in line with the growing urban population and the rise of the middle class. The city's thriving coffee industry reflects a shift in consumer consumption patterns, which are increasingly lifestyle-oriented. (Hasnidar & Ridha, 2025) note that the cafe and coffee shop sector in Makassar has become a clear reflection of how environmental pressures are changing consumer expectations for responsible business practices, marked by a growing preference for environmentally friendly packaging, the use of biodegradable straws, and *Bring Your Own Cup* (BYOC) initiatives. This phenomenon indicates that Makassar's urban consumers are no longer passive subjects in the consumption chain, but rather active actors who are beginning to consider the ecological impact of each of their purchasing decisions.

Environmentally friendly products, better known as green products, emerged as an industrial response to environmental pressures and changing market demand. These products are designed with minimal environmental impact in mind throughout their life cycle, from sustainable raw material procurement and energy efficient production processes to biodegradable packaging and safe disposal (Vysakh et al., 2025). The global market for environmentally friendly products is experiencing rapid growth, fueled by increasingly assertive government policies, encouragement from civil society movements, and growing consumer concern for the environment. In Indonesia alone, the market for organic and eco-friendly products has grown by an average of 15% per year over the past five years (Kemendag.go.id, 2023), reflecting a momentum that businesses cannot ignore.

Amidst promising market developments, the attitude behavior gap, also known as the green gap, has emerged, ironically and has been extensively studied by marketing researchers. (Carrington et al., 2014) define the green gap as a significant gap between consumers' green purchase intentions and actual purchase behavior at the point of sale. A (Stats, 2024) revealed that 73% of global consumers expressed willingness to change their consumption habits for the sake of the environment, but less than 26% actually realized this intention in actual purchasing decisions. This gaping gap demonstrates that perceptual factors, not just environmental awareness, play a key role in bridging the gap between intention and action.

Consumer perceptions of environmentally friendly products are complex and multidimensional. Consumers not only cognitively process information about a product's environmental attributes but also engage in emotional evaluations, social judgments, and highly personal value judgments. The problem of greenwashing, the practice of exaggerated and misleading environmental claims by manufacturers, further complicates this evaluation process. A study by Delmas & Burbano, 2011 found that over 95% of products claiming to be environmentally friendly in the United States contained at least one form of misleading claim. In Indonesia, a similar phenomenon is beginning to be identified, where

environmentally conscious consumers express high skepticism toward green claims without credible certification support (Pratiwi et al., 2020).

In an academic context, most research on green purchasing behavior in Indonesia is still dominated by quantitative approaches that measure relationships between variables through structured questionnaires. While this approach can produce useful statistical generalizations, it is still limited in explaining in depth the meaning, cognitive and emotional processes, and situational dynamics that shape consumer perceptions. Hasnidar & Ridha, 2025 in their quantitative study in Makassar demonstrated that eco consciousness and sustainable packaging have a positive and significant influence on green purchasing behavior through the mediation of consumer attitude. However, they themselves suggested the need for further research exploring the deeper psychological mechanisms behind these relationships.

This gap is the primary justification for this research. Using an explanatory qualitative approach, this study seeks to go beyond the question of "whether" a relationship exists to address more fundamental questions: "how" and "why" Makassar consumers' perceptions are formed, developed, and ultimately determine their purchasing decisions for environmentally friendly products. This approach provides researchers with the opportunity to understand in greater detail the variations, differences, and complexities of consumer experiences that cannot be explained through statistics alone.

Makassar was chosen as the research location for a strategic reason. As a metropolitan city with a population of over 1.5 million, Makassar boasts a diverse consumer ecosystem with a high level of exposure to global issues through social media and internet penetration. The environmentally conscious consumer community in Makassar continues to grow, reflected in the growth of organic product outlets, zero-waste communities, and active environmental campaigns on local social media. This makes Makassar an ideal location to examine the dynamics of consumer perceptions of environmentally friendly products in Eastern Indonesia, a region that has received little attention in academic studies.

Based on the background description above, this study formulates the following objectives: (1) to describe the dimensions of Makassar consumers' perceptions of environmentally friendly products, (2) to explain the factors that influence the formation of these perceptions in the local socio-cultural context, and (3) to analyze the mechanisms that connect consumer perceptions with purchasing decisions for environmentally friendly products in depth and holistically. The results of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions as well as relevant practical implications for the development of green marketing strategies in the Indonesian market.

### **Consumer Perception**

Perception is a psychological process in which individuals select, organize, and interpret sensory information to form a meaningful picture of the world (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In the context of consumer behavior, perception is one of the most fundamental internal factors determining how a consumer views and evaluates a product. (Solomon, 2019) emphasized that consumer perception is subjective and constructed through the interaction between external stimuli and an individual's internal conditions such as past experiences, personal values, motivations, and sociocultural context.

The process of forming perceptions involves three stages: (1) exposure: exposure to a stimulus; (2) attention: focusing attention on a particular stimulus; and (3) interpretation: giving meaning to the stimulus received (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019). In the context of environmentally friendly products, the interpretation stage is very critical because consumers must evaluate environmental claims that are often abstract and difficult to verify directly. The perceptions formed then influence consumer attitudes, which ultimately determine purchasing decisions.

### **Environmentally Friendly Products and *Green Marketing***

Environmentally friendly products are defined as products that do not contain hazardous materials, use biodegradable or recyclable materials, are produced through energy-efficient processes, and have minimal impact on the environment throughout their life cycle (Chen, 2010). Green marketing as a strategy that aligns marketing activities with environmental sustainability values covers all elements of the marketing mix, from product design, pricing, distribution, to marketing communications (Polonsky, 1994).

Hasnidar & Ridha, 2025 study in Makassar emphasized that green marketing is not merely communicating eco friendly attributes, but rather a comprehensive effort to instill ecological values into product design, operational processes, and brand identity. They found that consumer eco consciousness and perceptions of sustainable packaging positively and significantly influence consumer attitudes and ultimately green purchase behavior . This finding underscores the importance of integrating consumers' internal dimensions (*ecological awareness*) and visible product attributes (*sustainable packaging*) in shaping responsible purchasing behavior.

The biggest challenge in green marketing is the phenomenon of greenwashing, which systematically erodes consumer trust. (Lyon & Maxwell, 2011) define greenwashing as the practice of making exaggerated, unsubstantiated, or misleading environmental claims to boost a brand's image without any real commitment. Consumers who have been exposed to greenwashing tend to develop persistent skepticism, which poses a significant obstacle to manufacturers truly committed to environmentally friendly practices.

## Purchase Decisions in the Context of Green Products

The purchase decision is the stage in the consumer decision making process where the consumer actually makes the purchase (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). In the context of eco friendly products, this process is influenced by additional factors such as environmental values, pro environmental social norms, and the consumer's level of involvement *in* ecological issues.

The Theory of Planned Behavior by Ajzen is the most dominant theoretical framework in explaining green product purchasing decisions. This theory states that a person's behavior is influenced by three factors: (1) attitude toward behavior, (2) subjective norms, and (3) perceived behavioral control. (Ngo et al., 2025) confirmed that environmentally friendly attitudes, subjective norms toward behavior, and perceived behavioral control significantly influence green purchase intentions and green purchase behavior, thus confirming the mediating effect of green purchase intentions. (Hasnidar & Ridha, 2025) confirmed the relevance of TPB in the context of green purchase behavior in Indonesia, where consumer attitude was shown to be a critical mediator linking eco-consciousness and packaging perceptions with actual purchasing behavior ( $\beta = 0.487$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).

## The Relationship Between Consumer Perception and Green Product Purchase Decisions

Various studies confirm a significant relationship between perceptions and purchasing decisions for environmentally friendly products. (Aman et al., 2012) found that environmental knowledge and awareness positively influence purchase intentions for green products. (Joshi & Rahman, 2015) in their systematic review identified that perceptual factors such as perceived quality, perceived value, and trust are the strongest predictors of green purchase intentions. In Indonesia, (Pratiwi et al., 2020) demonstrated that perceived quality and value of organic products positively influence purchase intentions among millennials.

Yadav & Pathak, 2017 emphasized the mediating role of attitudes in converting environmental values into actual purchasing behavior, a mechanism also empirically confirmed by (Hasnidar & Ridha, 2025) in the context of Makassar coffee shop consumers. The implication is that consumer perceptions of the value and credibility of green products shape attitudes, which then influence purchase intentions and ultimately actual purchase decisions. Within the TPB framework, perceptions, attitudes, intentions, and behavior are the main pathways, although there is often a gap between intentions and actual actions. (Mabaso et al., 2025).

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with an explanatory research type. A qualitative approach was chosen to understand the phenomenon in depth, contextually, and holistically

through the perspective of the research subjects (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The explanatory type not only describes the phenomenon but also explains the causal relationship between consumer perceptions and purchasing decisions through a deep understanding of the underlying processes and mechanisms (Miles et al., 2014). The constructivist paradigm is used, which views reality as a social construction formed through the experiences and interactions of individuals with their environment. The research was conducted in Makassar City, South Sulawesi. Makassar was selected as the economic center of Eastern Indonesia, with a dynamic consumer ecosystem and a growing penetration rate of environmentally friendly products.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling techniques based on the following criteria: (1) at least 18 years old, (2) domiciled in Makassar City, (3) having purchased environmentally friendly products at least 3 times in the last 6 months, and (4) willing to participate voluntarily. The number of informants was set at 12 people based on the principle of data saturation where additional informants no longer produce significant new information (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The composition of informants included a variety of age backgrounds, gender, education level, and occupation to ensure a diversity of perspectives.

**Table 1.** Profile of Research Informants

Code	Age	Gender	Main Green Products	Purchase Frequency
I-01	28	Woman	Organic cosmetics	4x/month
I-02	34	Man	Organic food	5x/month
I-03	31	Woman	Green household products	3x/month
I-04	22	Man	Sustainable fashion	3x/month
I-05	45	Woman	Organic food & beverages	6x/month
I-06	29	Woman	Organic cosmetics	5x/month
I-07	38	Man	Biodegradable packaging	4x/month
I-08	25	Woman	Organic drinks	7x/month
I-09	42	Man	Green household products	3x/month
I-10	27	Woman	Organic food	4x/month
I-11	33	Man	Sustainable fashion	3x/month
I-12	36	Woman	Organic cosmetics & baby products	5x/month

Source: Primary Data (2026)

Data collection was conducted through three techniques. First, semi-structured in-depth face-to-face interviews lasting 30–60 minutes per informant, guided by expert-validated interview guidelines. All sessions were audio-recorded with the informant's consent and transcribed verbatim. Second, participant observation at various points of sale of eco-friendly products in Makassar, including organic stores, supermarkets, and eco-product exhibitions. Third, documentation in the form of online product reviews, consumer

social media content, and relevant eco-friendly product promotional materials. The analysis used the interactive model of Miles, (Miles et al., 2014): (1) data collection, (2) data condensation, (3) data presentation, and (4) drawing conclusions/verification. The coding process was carried out in three stages: open coding to provide conceptual labels, axial coding to identify categories and subcategories, and selective coding to integrate all categories into the main research theme.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Dimensions of Consumer Perception of Environmentally Friendly Products

Data analysis revealed three key dimensions of consumer perception that consistently emerged throughout the data. Here's a summary of the key findings per dimension:

**Table 2.** Summary of Consumer Perception Dimensions of Environmentally Friendly Products

Dimensions	Sub-Dimensions	Key Indicators	Number of Informants
Eco-Consciousness	Personal ecological concern	Concerns about pollution, climate change, plastic waste	12 (100%)
	Environmental knowledge	Understanding the impact of products on the ecosystem	10 (83.3%)
	Community involvement	Active in the green/ <i>zero-waste community</i> of Makassar	7 (58.3%)
Trust in Green Claims	Certification evaluation	Official organic label/ <i>eco-label verification</i>	11 (91.7%)
	<i>Greenwashing</i> skepticism	Be wary of exaggerated claims without evidence	9 (75.0%)
	The influence of social reviews	Trust in community & social media recommendations	10 (83.3%)
Multidimensional Value Perception	Functional value	Health benefits and product quality	12 (100%)
	Emotional value	Satisfaction from real contribution to the environment	11 (91.7%)
	Social values	Identity as a responsible consumer	8 (66.7%)
	Economic value	Justify premium prices through long-term benefits	9 (75.0%)

Source: Processed Primary Data (2026)

#### Environmental Awareness (*Eco-Consciousness*) as the Foundation of Perception

All informants (100%) stated that concern for environmental conditions was the initial motivation in considering environmentally friendly products. This finding aligns with (Hasnidar & Ridha, 2025) definition of eco consciousness as consumer awareness and

commitment to environmental issues that drives preferences for responsible brands and products. Informant I-02 said: *"I can't turn a blind eye to the increasing plastic waste at Losari Beach. That's what made me start switching to products that are truly environmentally friendly"* (Informant I-02, 34 years old).

The study found that Makassar informants eco consciousness was formed not only from exposure to digital information but also from direct experience with urban environmental degradation, a contextual dimension that reinforces Joshi and Rahman's (2015) finding that emotional engagement with nature strengthens green consumption orientation. Informants active in Makassar's zero-waste community (7 out of 12) demonstrated higher levels of eco-consciousness and were more critical in evaluating green claims.

**Trust in Green Claims**

Eleven of the 12 informants (91.7%) expressed the importance of third-party certification as a primary requirement for trust in green claims. The phenomenon of greenwashing experienced or observed by informants was a major catalyst for the development of critical skepticism.

Informant I-07 stated: *"In Makassar, there are many products labeled 'natural' or 'organic' without certification. Now I always check for the presence of the SNI organic logo or BPOM certification before purchasing"* (Informant I-07, 38 years old).

This finding extends the argument of Hasnidar and Ridha (2025) who showed that positive perceptions of sustainable packaging supported by tangible signals of a brand's environmental commitment significantly influence consumer attitudes ( $\beta = 0.438$ ;  $t = 7.031$ ). In a qualitative context, this study revealed that trust is built through five indicators used by consumers: official certification, composition transparency, consistency of company practices, brand reputation, and recommendations from trusted communities.

**Table 3.** Consumer Confidence Indicators towards Green Claims

Trust Indicator	Manifestation (Field Findings)	Frequency Called
Recognized third party certification	SNI Organic Label, BPOM, ISO 14001, international eco-label	11 (91.7%)
Product information transparency	List of raw materials, production process, carbon footprint listed	10 (83.3%)
Consistency of company practices	Business operations that meet claims ( <i>zero-waste</i> , BYOC, etc.)	9 (75.0%)
Brand reputation and track record	History of environmental commitment, response to public issues	10 (83.3%)
Community & opinion leader recommendations	Reviews on social media, Makassar green community, environmental influencers	10 (83.3%)

Source: Processed Primary Data (2026)

### Multidimensional Product Value Perception

This study found that consumer perceptions of value toward environmentally friendly products are multidimensional and mutually reinforcing. Functional value (health benefits and quality) was mentioned by all 12 informants, while emotional value (satisfaction from a tangible contribution to the environment) was expressed by 11 informants. Informant I-05 explained: " *For me, the higher price is not a problem, because I know the impact on my body and the environment is very different. It's an investment, not a regular expense*" (Informant I-05, 45 years old).

Social values related to identity as a responsible consumer were expressed by 8 informants (66.7%) and were highly relevant among informants active on social media. This finding strengthens the argument that green product purchasing decisions cannot be explained solely by rational economic calculations, but rather involve socio-cultural dimensions of identity and self-expression—a nuance not captured in (Hasnidar & Ridha, 2025) quantitative study but provides an explanation for why consumer attitudes act as a strong mediator.

### The Mechanism of the Influence of Perception on Purchasing Decisions

Based on data analysis, the study identified three mechanistic pathways linking perceptions to purchasing decisions, summarized in the following table:

**Table 4.** Mechanism of Influence of Perception on Purchasing Decisions

Mechanism Path	Process	Main Trigger	Major Obstacles
Cognitive-Evaluative	Rational processing of product information, cost-benefit comparison, claims evaluation	Existence of certification, composition transparency, product comparison	Complexity of information, distrust of claims
Affective	Emotional boost from a sense of contribution, moral satisfaction, pro-environmental identity	Direct experience with environmental degradation, community involvement	Environmental information fatigue, ecological pessimism
Normative-Social	Influence of group norms, social pressure from green communities, <i>desire for social approval</i>	Makassar's zero-waste community ecosystem, a green social media trend	Premium price, limited product accessibility

Source: Processed Primary Data (2026)

These three pathways operate simultaneously and reinforce each other. A consumer motivated by the affective pathway (emotional satisfaction from a green lifestyle) will

further strengthen their cognitive evaluation (seeking more information and verification) and become more responsive to the social-normative influences of their community. This dynamic explains why interventions in one pathway alone are insufficient; an effective green marketing strategy must address all three pathways simultaneously.

Identified perceptual barriers include: perception of unaffordable premium prices (expressed by 9 informants), perception of limited product accessibility in Makassar (7 informants), skepticism about product effectiveness (6 informants), and discomfort with changing consumption habits (5 informants). These barriers function as negative moderators that weaken the conversion of positive perceptions into actual purchasing decisions, a finding that reinforces the green gap phenomenon identified by (Carrington et al., 2014).

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

Theoretically, this study develops an integrative consumer perception model by identifying three main dimensions (eco-consciousness, green claim belief, multidimensional value perception) and three mechanisms of their influence on purchasing decisions (cognitive, affective, normative social). This model complements the quantitative study of (Hasnidar & Ridha, 2025) which proved the statistical significance of the relationship between eco-consciousness and sustainable packaging with green purchase behavior, by providing an in depth understanding of 'why' and 'how' the relationship operates in the real experiences of Makassar consumers.

Practically, these findings provide operational guidelines for marketers of green products: (1) prioritize recognized certification and transparency of product information to build trust; (2) communicate multidimensional values that go beyond purely environmental aspects; (3) build a green consumer community ecosystem as an effective normative social channel; and (4) develop accessibility strategies that lower price and distribution barriers. These implications are particularly relevant for the F&B and retail industries in Makassar, which are transforming towards more sustainable practices.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

This study successfully identified three main dimensions of Makassar consumers' perceptions of environmentally friendly products: eco-consciousness as the foundation, belief in green claims as a critical filter, and multidimensional value perceptions as a purchase justification. These three dimensions interact and influence purchasing decisions through three simultaneous mechanisms: cognitive-evaluative, affective, and normative-social.

These findings reinforce and extend the study by (Hasnidar & Ridha, 2025), which quantitatively demonstrated the significant role of eco-consciousness and sustainable packaging in shaping consumer attitudes and green purchasing behavior in Makassar. This research adds a qualitative layer of understanding that uncovers the psychological mechanisms behind these figures and identifies concrete perceptual barriers that explain the green gap phenomenon in the local market.

Limitations of the study include the use of purposive sampling which limits the generalizability and scope of the study to one city. For further research, it is recommended to: (1) conduct comparative studies across cities in Eastern Indonesia, (2) combine mixed methods approaches to cross-confirm the findings, (3) investigate the moderating role of demographic and lifestyle variables, and (4) explore the impact of specific green marketing campaigns on shifts in consumer perceptions longitudinally.

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