

Consumer Willingness to Pay for Sustainability Verified Through Technology : A Review

Dr. Sudipta Majumdar ^{*1}, Dr. Pragya Prashant Gupta ^{*2}

^{*1} *Lincoln Global Postdoctoral Researcher and Research Associate, Lincoln University College, Malaysia*
Associate Professor, School of Business, Adamas University, India

^{*2} *Adjunct Research Faculty, Lincoln University College, Malaysia*
Professor and Dean, Future University, India

Abstract: As sustainability becomes a mainstream concern, consumers are increasingly seeking products that align with their environmental and ethical values. However, this rising demand is tempered by widespread skepticism about the authenticity of corporate sustainability claims. The prevalence of greenwashing has led to a significant trust deficit, highlighting the need for reliable, transparent verification mechanisms. Emerging technologies—such as blockchain, QR codes, sensors, and artificial intelligence—offer potential solutions by providing verifiable and traceable sustainability information throughout the supply chain.

This study proposes to investigate how technology-verified sustainability influences consumers' willingness to pay (WTP) a price premium. While existing literature confirms a growing intent among consumers to support sustainable products, a persistent attitude-behavior gap indicates that intention does not always translate into action. The central research question addresses whether and how technology-enabled verification can build consumer trust and drive actual purchasing behavior.

The study's objectives include measuring the influence of technology-based verification on WTP, identifying the most trusted technologies, examining moderating factors like product category and demographics, and understanding consumer perceptions of these technologies. Through a mixed-methods approach—combining discrete choice experiments, focus groups, and interviews—the research aims to provide a multi-dimensional understanding of consumer behavior.

Expected findings suggest a positive correlation between technology-verified claims and WTP, especially among younger, environmentally conscious, and tech-savvy consumers. However, the impact is likely to vary across different technologies and product types. Limitations include potential biases in stated preferences and the nascent adoption of verification technologies in real-world contexts.

This research will address key gaps in consumer behavior and sustainability literature, offering actionable insights for businesses and policymakers. By enhancing trust through technology, the study aspires to contribute toward narrowing the attitude-behavior gap and fostering a more authentic market for sustainable consumption.

Keywords: Technology-Verified Sustainability, Consumer Willingness to Pay (WTP), Greenwashing and Trust, Sustainable Consumption Behavior, Blockchain and Eco-Labeling Technologies

1. Introduction

The Rise of Sustainable Consumption and the Need for Verification
The global landscape of consumer behaviour is undergoing a significant transformation, marked by an increasing awareness and concern regarding the environmental and social ramifications of consumption patterns.

A substantial portion of consumers now report that their purchasing decisions are influenced by environmental impact, indicating a growing demand for products that align with their values.

This shift is further underscored by findings from the PwC 2024 Voice of the Consumer Survey, which reveals that a considerable majority of consumers have firsthand experience with the disruptive effects of climate change, leading them to prioritize consumption that integrates sustainability.¹ This heightened consciousness suggests that sustainability is transitioning from a niche market segment to a mainstream consideration for a significant portion of the consumer base. However, this growing demand for sustainable products is accompanied by a parallel rise in consumer skepticism towards the authenticity of sustainability claims made by businesses.⁶ Nearly 70% of consumers report conducting some form of research before trusting a brand's sustainability assertions, indicating a need for credible validation mechanisms.⁶ This caution is justified by the documented prevalence of "greenwashing," where companies make exaggerated or misleading claims about the environmental benefits of their products or practices. For instance, a European Commission study found that a notable percentage of green claims were either false or deceptive.¹⁰ This erosion of trust presents a significant challenge to the widespread adoption of genuinely sustainable products.

In response to this need for verifiable sustainability information, technology has emerged as a powerful tool. Technologies such as blockchain offer the potential to provide transparent, immutable, and decentralized records of a product's journey and its sustainability attributes.¹⁰ The inherent characteristics of these technologies can enhance the credibility and traceability of sustainability claims, offering a means to overcome consumer skepticism and foster greater trust in the market for sustainable goods.

2. Problem Statement and Research Objectives

The central challenge lies in the fact that while consumers are increasingly willing to pay for sustainability, the lack of trust in unverified claims and the well-documented "attitude-behavior gap" continue to impede the widespread adoption of sustainable products. Despite surveys indicating a significant percentage of consumers are willing to pay a premium for sustainably produced or sourced goods¹, the actual market share of these products remains relatively low. This discrepancy suggests that willingness alone is not sufficient and that factors such as trust, perceived value, and ease of identification play crucial roles in translating intentions into real purchasing behavior.

Therefore, this research proposal aims to address this gap by focusing on the role of technology in verifying sustainability and its impact on consumer willingness to pay. The specific objectives of this research are:

- a) To investigate the degree to which technology-verified sustainability information influences consumer willingness to pay a price premium for products.
- b) To identify which types of technology (e.g., blockchain, QR codes, sensors, artificial intelligence) are most effective in building consumer trust in sustainability claims and subsequently increasing their willingness to pay.
- c) To explore the various factors that moderate the relationship between technology-verified sustainability and consumer willingness to pay, such as the specific product category, consumer demographics, and the individual level of environmental concern.
- d) To understand consumer perceptions and preferences regarding different methods of technology-based sustainability verification.

3. Related Literature Review

3.1 Consumer Willingness to Pay for Sustainable Products

A substantial body of literature has explored the concept of consumer willingness to pay for sustainable products across various sectors and geographical locations.¹ These studies generally indicate a positive trend, with consumers expressing a willingness to spend more on products perceived as environmentally and socially responsible. For instance, a global survey conducted by PwC in 2024 revealed that consumers are, on average, willing to pay a 9.7% premium for sustainably produced or sourced goods.¹ Similarly, a Bain & Company study in 2023 indicated a global average willingness to pay a 12% premium for products with a lower environmental impact.¹⁶ However, despite this stated willingness, the actual market share of sustainable products often remains relatively low, suggesting a complex interplay of factors.

Several factors have been identified as influencing consumer willingness to pay for sustainable products. Heightened environmental concerns and awareness play a significant role.¹ Consumers who are more conscious of environmental issues and perceive the direct impacts of climate change are more likely to prioritize sustainability in their consumption habits and express a greater willingness to pay a premium.¹ Ethical considerations and a sense of social responsibility also contribute to this willingness.² A significant portion of consumers prioritize purchasing from companies with ethical sourcing practices and may even boycott companies perceived as unethical.² Furthermore, consumers evaluate the perceived product quality and value in relation to the potentially higher price of sustainable options.¹² They often expect sustainable products to meet or exceed the quality and performance of conventional alternatives to justify a price premium. Demographic factors such as age, gender, and income have also been shown to influence willingness to pay, with younger generations and higher-income consumers often exhibiting a greater inclination towards sustainable consumption.

Despite the positive attitudes towards sustainability and the reported willingness to pay a premium, a persistent attitude-behavior gap exists.¹⁸ Consumers' stated intentions to purchase sustainable products do not always translate into actual buying behavior. This gap can be attributed to various factors, including the higher real-world prices of sustainable products, a lack of trust in sustainability claims, the influence of ingrained purchasing habits, and the perceived inconvenience of choosing sustainable options.

3.2 Technology for Sustainability Verification

3.2.1. Blockchain Technology:

Blockchain technology has emerged as a promising solution for enhancing transparency and verifying sustainability claims across complex supply chains.⁸ Its decentralized and immutable ledger system allows for the secure recording and tracking of product information, providing a verifiable history of a product's origin, manufacturing process, and sustainability attributes.¹¹ This inherent transparency and immutability can significantly enhance consumer trust by addressing concerns about greenwashing and providing an auditable record of sustainability efforts. Several major companies, including Nestlé and Walmart, have already begun utilizing blockchain technology to track the provenance and sustainability of their products, demonstrating its practical application in the industry.¹² Research indicates that the transparency afforded by blockchain can lead to increased consumer trust in brands and a positive influence on their purchase intentions, particularly for less established brands seeking to build credibility.¹² By offering verifiable information about product quality and sustainability, blockchain can help foster "swift trust" with consumers.

3.2.2 QR Codes:

Quick Response (QR) codes offer another accessible technological tool for providing consumers with immediate access to product information and verifying sustainability claims.⁴² Easily scannable by smartphones, QR codes on product packaging can bridge the sustainability information gap by linking consumers directly to detailed information about a product's environmental and social impact, ethical sourcing, and relevant certifications.⁴³ This digital transparency can empower consumers to make more informed purchasing decisions aligned with their sustainability values. Studies suggest that the transparency provided through QR codes can enhance brand credibility and build stronger relationships with environmentally conscious consumers, fostering trust and loyalty.⁴³

3.2.3 Sensors and IoT:

Sensors and the Internet of Things (IoT) play an increasingly important role in monitoring and verifying sustainability practices within production and supply chains.⁵⁸ These technologies enable the collection of real-time data on various environmental parameters, resource consumption, and production processes, providing an objective basis for verifying sustainability claims and improving efficiency.⁵⁸ Artificial Intelligence (AI) can further enhance this process by analyzing the vast amounts of sensor data to provide comprehensive assessments of environmental impacts and identify areas for optimization.⁵⁸

While these technologies offer significant potential for enhancing the accuracy and objectivity of sustainability verification, consumer perception and trust in AI-verified eco-labels might be influenced by concerns regarding the transparency of AI algorithms, potential data bias, and data security.

3.3 Intersection of Sustainability and Technology

Research exploring the intersection of sustainability and technology in the context of consumer behavior indicates that consumer awareness and adoption of technologies for sustainability verification vary across different regions.²² For instance, the adoption of blockchain and DNA traceability for food verification shows significant differences between countries. Studies on consumer trust in technology-verified eco-labels highlight the potential of AI to enhance credibility but also underscore the importance of addressing concerns related to algorithmic transparency and data integrity.⁵⁸ Furthermore, technology has the potential to play a crucial role in bridging the attitude-behavior gap by providing consumers with more reliable and accessible information about product sustainability, thereby empowering them to make purchasing decisions that align with their values.¹⁸

4. Research Gaps

4.1. Limited Research on Consumer Willingness to Pay Specifically for Technology-Verified Sustainability

The existing body of research offers valuable insights into consumer willingness to pay for sustainable products in general and the potential of technology for sustainability verification. However, a notable gap exists in the specific investigation of the price premium consumers are willing to pay because a product's sustainability is verified through technology.¹⁷ While consumers may express a willingness to pay more for sustainable products, it remains unclear whether the added assurance of technological verification further increases this willingness. This distinction is crucial for businesses considering investments in these verification technologies.

4.2. Insufficient Understanding of Consumer Preferences for Different Verification Technologies

Current research has not adequately explored which specific types of technology (e.g., blockchain, QR codes, sensors, AI) are most valued by consumers for the purpose of sustainability verification. Understanding consumer preferences for different verification technologies, including the reasons behind these preferences (such as perceived security, ease of use, and the type of information provided), is vital for businesses to make informed decisions about technology implementation and communication strategies.

4.3. Need for Research on the Interplay of Technology Verification and the Attitude-Behavior Gap

While technology offers the potential to provide more transparent and trustworthy sustainability information, there is a need for further research on how this information effectively translates into actual purchasing behavior and contributes to closing the attitude-behavior gap in sustainable consumption.¹⁸

The mechanisms through which technology-verified information influences purchasing decisions and overcomes other barriers to sustainable consumption require more in-depth investigation.

4.4. Lack of Studies on the Role of Consumer Literacy and Understanding of Verification Technologies

The effectiveness of technology-based sustainability verification is likely contingent on consumers' level of literacy and understanding of the technologies involved, particularly more complex ones like blockchain and AI.⁵⁸ Research is needed to assess consumers' comprehension of these technologies and their ability to interpret the verified information they provide. Low levels of technological literacy could significantly limit the impact of even the most robust verification systems.

4.5. Limited Research Across Different Product Categories and Consumer Segments

Much of the existing research may be concentrated within specific product categories or focused on particular consumer demographics.¹⁷ This limits the generalizability of findings and highlights the need for more research that explores consumer willingness to pay for technology-verified sustainability across a wider range of product categories and diverse consumer segments to account for potential variations in behavior and preferences.

Table 4.1: Key Research Gaps Identified

Research Gap	Description	Relevant Snippets
Limited WTP(Willingness to Pay) for Technology-Verified Sustainability	Lack of studies specifically examining the price premium consumers are willing to pay <i>for</i> technology verification, beyond general sustainability.	Consumer Perceptions of Sustainable Products: A Systematic ..., accessed May 11, 2025, https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/15/11/8923
Insufficient Understanding of Preferences for Different Verification Tech	Limited exploration of which verification technologies (blockchain, QR codes, sensors, AI) consumers value most and why.	Consumer Trust in AI Verified Eco Labels → Scenario, accessed May 11, 2025, https://prism.sustainability-directory.com/scenario/consu

		mer-trust-in-ai-verified-eco-labels/
Role of Consumer Literacy and Understanding	Insufficient investigation into consumers' understanding of verification technologies and their ability to interpret the provided information.	Consumer Trust in AI Verified Eco Labels → Scenario, accessed May 11, 2025, https://prism.sustainability-directory.com/scenario/consumer-trust-in-ai-verified-eco-labels/
Interplay with Attitude-Behavior Gap	Unclear how technology-verified information translates into actual purchasing behavior and helps close the intention-action gap.	Bridging the Gap: Determinants of Consumers' Willingness to Pay for Environmentally Friendly Packages of Leafy Greens - MDPI, accessed May 11, 2025, https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/16/8/3128
Limited Scope Across Product Categories and Consumer Segments	Research may be concentrated in specific areas, limiting the generalizability of findings regarding WTP for technology-verified sustainability.	Consumer Perceptions of Sustainable Products: A Systematic ..., accessed May 11, 2025, https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/15/11/8923

Source ; Researcher's Analysis

5. Expected Findings

5.1 Positive Correlation between Technology-Verified Sustainability and Willingness to Pay

It is anticipated that the presence and clarity of technology-verified sustainability information will positively correlate with consumers' willingness to pay a price premium.¹ Consumers who perceive sustainability claims as credible due to technological verification are expected to be more inclined to pay a premium for the added assurance.²⁷ This expectation aligns with findings that certifications can increase the perceived value of eco-friendly brands and consumer willingness to pay.⁷

5.2. Differential Impact of Verification Technologies

Different verification technologies are expected to have varying impacts on consumer willingness to pay and trust. For instance, blockchain, with its strong emphasis on security and immutability, might elicit a higher premium for product categories where authenticity and traceability are critical.¹² Conversely, QR codes, known for their ease of use and accessibility, might influence a broader range of consumers across diverse product types.⁴³ The perceived complexity and transparency of each technology are likely to be key factors influencing consumer acceptance and their subsequent effect on willingness to pay.

5.3. Moderating Role of Consumer Characteristics

Consumer characteristics such as age, level of environmental concern, and familiarity with technology are expected to moderate the relationship between technology-verified sustainability and willingness to pay.² Younger, more environmentally conscious, and tech-savvy consumers are hypothesized to be more receptive to and influenced by technology-verified sustainability information, potentially exhibiting a higher willingness to pay a premium compared to other consumer segments.²

5.4. Potential for Technology to Reduce the Attitude-Behavior Gap

Providing clear, trustworthy, and easily accessible technology-verified sustainability information is hypothesized to help reduce the attitude-behavior gap by increasing consumer confidence in their purchasing decisions and mitigating the perceived risks associated with unverified sustainability claims.¹⁸ The transparency and accountability offered by technologies like blockchain and QR codes can empower consumers to act on their positive attitudes towards sustainability by providing the necessary validation for their purchasing choices.

5.5. Influence of Product Category

The impact of technology-verified sustainability on willingness to pay is anticipated to vary across different product categories. It might be more significant for products where sustainability concerns are higher or where there is a greater risk of greenwashing, such as in the food, cosmetics, and fashion industries.¹² Consumers might place a higher premium on verified sustainability for products with significant environmental or social impacts.

6. Limitations

6.1. Methodological Limitations

Research relying on stated preference data, such as surveys and choice experiments, might not perfectly reflect actual purchasing behavior due to the potential for hypothetical bias.¹⁸ Consumers may express a higher willingness to pay in hypothetical scenarios than they would in real-world purchasing situations

with budget constraints and other influencing factors. Additionally, isolating the specific effect of technology verification on willingness to pay from other factors influencing consumer behavior, such as brand reputation and price, can be challenging.¹⁷ Furthermore, potential biases in consumer responses, such as social desirability or a lack of understanding of the verification technologies, could affect the accuracy of the findings.⁷

6.2. Scope Limitations

The research might focus on specific types of verification technologies or particular product categories, which could limit the generalizability of the findings to other technologies or product sectors.¹⁷ The effectiveness and consumer perception of technology verification might vary significantly across different contexts. Moreover, cultural and geographical variations in consumer behavior, technology adoption rates, and levels of environmental awareness could influence the results, potentially limiting the global applicability of the findings.²

6.3. Practical Limitations

Accessing and collecting real-world data on actual consumer purchases of products with technology-verified sustainability information might be challenging due to the relatively early stage of widespread implementation of such systems. Much of the data on consumer behavior in this specific area might be proprietary or not yet systematically collected. Furthermore, the rapidly evolving nature of both sustainability practices and the technologies used for verification could make the research findings time-sensitive, as new technologies and changing consumer preferences could quickly alter the landscape.

7. Conclusion

This research proposal outlines a study to investigate the critical intersection of consumer willingness to pay for sustainability and the role of technology in verifying sustainability claims. By reviewing existing literature and identifying key research gaps, this proposal sets the stage for future research that aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of how technology-verified information influences consumer behavior. The expected findings suggest a positive relationship between technology verification and willingness to pay, with variations based on the type of technology, consumer characteristics, and product category. However, the study also acknowledges several methodological, scope, and practical limitations inherent in researching this complex and evolving field. Addressing the identified research gaps will contribute valuable insights for both academic understanding and practical applications for businesses seeking to leverage technology to enhance consumer trust and promote the adoption of sustainable products.

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