

# A Study of Green Marketing in India as a Sustainable Marketing Strategy

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## Abstract

With Green Revolution being a pervasive phenomenon in the world, concerns surrounding sustainable development are rising day-by-day. In a 2015 study of consumer behavior relating to green products conducted by Wong FuiYeng & Rashad Yazdanifard, it was established that consumers want to associate with organizations and products which are green compliant. In fact, they are willing to pay a higher price to acquire a 'greener lifestyle'. The motivation for consumers in seeking out green products is the prospects of leading a healthier life, contributing to preservation of the environment and above all, saving time and money.

This inclination towards green living has also presented a parallel opportunity to the producers- marketing a product based on its 'green quotient'. Green PR as a practical concept is gaining increasing popularity at present. While this phenomenon has presented a revolutionary marketing idea, it has also broadened the prospects of misleading through erroneous green claims. This practice is called 'Greenwash' and this has posed a new and unique threat to the worldwide focus on meticulous endeavours towards green revolution.

This paper aims towards finding out consumer experiences with buying and using green products and analyzing those experiences to understand-

1. Whether the idea of green living is reaching the consumers and non-consumers alike.
2. Whether Green PR functions with the same ideologies as green living and sustainable development.

The research question of this study addresses this discourse in the simplest terms- is Green PR really promoting sustainable development or it is just a brilliant marketing strategy?

It is a quantitative research, conducted through questionnaires and sampling of data. The findings of the research indicate an unusual experience- the consumer behaviour towards green products continues to be positive. Yet, the availability and authenticity of green products create major hindrances for the ideologies of green revolution to be internalized by the consumers at large.

## INTRODUCTION

The World is rapidly transiting into an era where the word "green" is taken very seriously and remains on the desirable list for major economies. In an

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attempt to minimize the effect of human activity on the environment, 'green movements' across the globe have gained traction. The Green Revolution is a pervasive phenomenon in the world, concerning itself with sustainable development which is very much in demand.

The term Green marketing is derived from the "green movement", an ideology which seeks to minimize the effect of human activity on the environment. (Padhy, 2006). Across many instances of consumerism, 'green' products has been seen as the preferred type by customers who have taken to it willingly. Such consumer behaviour has established that consumers want to associate with organizations and products which are amenable to the 'go green' motto. Consumers have also been observed to be willing to pay premium price to opt for a 'greener lifestyle'. The motivation for consumers in seeking out green products is the prospects of leading a healthier life, contributing to preservation of the environment and above all, saving time and money.

Green marketing is a practical concept that communicates an organization's corporate social responsibility or environmentally friendly practices and it is gaining increasing popularity at present.

On one hand, this concept has been offered as a revolutionary marketing idea, while on the other had it has also broadened the prospects of misleading through erroneous green claims. Such practice is called 'Greenwash' and it has posed a new and unique threat to the worldwide focus on meticulous endeavours towards green revolution.

Companies, products and services have increasingly been accommodating for this massive change of being accountable to the consumers and the World we all live in. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) includes philanthropy, programs and volunteer efforts, businesses can benefit society while boosting their brands. Such initiatives are also gaining momentum in India as more and more companies are looking to implement Green PR as a Sustainable Marketing Strategy.

## **Objective of the Research**

This paper aims towards finding out consumer experiences with buying and using green products and analyzing those experiences to understand-

1. Whether the idea of green living is reaching the consumers and non-consumers alike in India.
2. Whether Green products in India functions with the same ideologies as green living and sustainable development.

The research question of this study addresses this discourse in the simplest terms- is Green PR really promoting sustainable development or it is just a brilliant marketing strategy?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The recent trends in the society denote the rising concerns about the nature and environment among the mass, which in turn has contributed to the increasing awareness and interest in eco-friendly products (Garg & Sharma, 2017). Owing to this, the researchers argue that designing a green product, green packaging, implementing green supply chain etc. are perceived in the society to be beneficial for the environment. Green marketing, in fact, strategically promotes the idea of preserving the environment. The researchers have also argued that due to the colossal damage to the natural environment in the past decade, the consumer behaviour has been impacted and as a result, green product market is also expanding remarkably. The researchers also suggest that promoting new innovations in the field of green marketing is in fact the need of the hour, so that it can contribute to the creation of a new market for potential buyers.

Even though the relevance of green product is gaining significance amongst the consumers, there are further interesting observations and implications of green marketing and its concepts. In fact, researchers Rosa Maria Dangelico and Daniele Vocalelli in their research conclude that the definition of green marketing has been modified over a period of time. The latter definitions have incorporated the understanding of green marketing in accordance with the increasing relevance of the concept of environmental sustainability (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017). In this research the researchers have observed that market segmentation in regard to green marketing can also be done in several ways which ultimately lead to converging studies that put more relevance to green *brand* positioning rather than green *product* positioning, to ensure

differentiation. The study also observes that the consumers are willing to pay a premium price for those green products which they find more relevant in terms of their functional attributes, their contribution to a sustainable society and the supply chain logistics. The researchers argue that the advertisement content plays a key role and hence careful deliberation of the same could become one of the most important aspects. Along with this, the eco-labels are also essential according to the researchers.

Further study on the consumer's behaviour towards green product has revealed that despite people being actively engaged in reducing the harmful human effects on the environment, the awareness is still not widespread and is going through an evolution process (Cherian & Jacob, 2012). The researchers argue that this gradual shift of the consumers towards green product has been spotted by different business organizations and they, in turn, exploit the potential of green marketing only to gain an edge over each other. This study also observes a very interesting aspect of green marketing research. It claims that most of the researches related to green marketing have been conducted by the developed countries, whereas such researches in terms of the developing countries have been numbered. This observation of the study indicates that the researchers of the present research have enough scope to develop an academic observation based on Green PR in the Indian market, as India is a developing country.

In fact, with time, most of the firms are adapting the triple-bottom line approach suggested by John Elkington (1997) in order to evaluate their performances in terms of economic prosperity, environmental quality and social justice to make sure that the balance among the profit, planet and people is maintained properly. While the consumers are driven by such an approach and the individual belief that purchasing environment-friendly products makes a difference by contributing to greener living, phenomena like green wash and lack of green credibility continues to tamper with customer's trust and creates confusion and cynicism about green marketing strategies (Cronin, Smith, Gleim, Ramirez, & Martinez, 2011).

The environment in India has been going through a rapid deterioration. The industrial waste and hazards are extremely detrimental to the health of the Indians and hence it is the right time for the Indian corporations to implement green marketing strategies (Aggarwal, 2013). However, the research also argues that only 5% of the marketing messages implemented in the green campaigns are completely true. So, the idea of a green product right now lacks proper standardization and hence there is no reliable authentication process for the consumers to substantiate the green claims.

This lack contributes to malpractices surrounding the green marketing activities as many firms do not reflect their environmental conduct accurately (Szabo & Webster, 2020). Research conducted by Szabo and Webster concludes that such unethical practice like greenwashing is not only related to the product perception or perception of the environment, but also with the happiness of the consumer upon browsing through these products. This indicates towards the importance of managerial practices in green marketing choices. Such literature helps provide a base to this research in terms of finding out the relevance of green marketing in terms of Indian market and how sustainable it is to become as a strategy.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The potential environmental crisis results in due to the dominant social paradigm (DSP). Hence, marketing policy makers should consider such crisis as one of the paradigms for effective strategies and policies (Kilbourne, 1998). According to Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour, the buyer's attitude and intentions determine the behaviour of the buyers. So, green marketing and its effectiveness in dealing with potential environmental crisis can be decided by the consumer's intentions to buy products which are environment-friendly. These theories provide the premise to this research and here, these have been applied to the Indian context of green marketing.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research paper consists of a two way method approach for the data collection and analysis: One of



them being a Sample Survey keeping the Quantitative Analysis in mind and the other one is the Case Study approach following the Qualitative Analysis.

The Sample Survey selection under the Quantitative Analysis was a random one and the sampling frame included a database of 106 Indian respondents incorporating their respective demographical characteristics like the age, gender, educational qualification, and profession. A questionnaire was developed with both objective and subjective questions aimed at the general mass for broader input. The time period for conducting this survey was 7 days and it was designed to help identify the consumer awareness about Green PR practices undertaken by various brands. The survey also throws light on the understanding of the consumers about the Green PR initiatives and their real potential of contributing to the market and to a sustainable lifestyle.

The Case Study selection under the Qualitative Analysis was a concentrated one involving global brands operating in India, who have been the pioneers in incorporating green practices in their business operations and ethos, and also companies who have embraced 'going green' as a part of their business culture in recent years. Most companies across the World have taken to reducing their carbon footprints and with the US joining back the Paris Climate treaty, the main climate target is to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The case study approach tried to evaluate whether Global MNCs are valuing Green PR practices as a sustainable policy for reaching out to all their consumers and customers as a responsible brand.

## **CASE STUDIES**

### **Starbucks**

Starbucks is one of the pioneers in green marketing in the world. The company promotes principles of environmental sustainability across the board. It has achieved Fair Trade Certified and Certified organic coffee for their methods of plantation and production. It also has LED certifications for its new outlets. The company is able to reduce operating costs by creating 'green' stores and also minimize the impact of business practices on the environment.

The green buildings adjust temperatures only between 72o to 75o F and the cabinets are made of 90% post industrial materials to incorporate low-flow water valves. (<https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/>).

### **Hewlett-Packard**

Hewlett-Packard has been one of the first companies to report greenhouse gas emissions. Their further plans aim at reducing emissions and toxic substances used in manufacturing their products.

The activities of HP for various advanced recycling programmes encourage reusing manufacturing wastes. HP, through their advertisements, promotes the importance of environmental responsibility and green initiatives.

(<https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/erichlawson>)  
The future goals for HP include:

- Achieving reduction in greenhouse gas by 50%(GHG) by 2030 and net zero emissions by 2040 and carbon neutrality by 2030
  - Reaching 75% circularity for products and packaging by 2030
  - Zero deforestation for any paper and paper-based packaging
- (<https://www.globenewswire.com/>)

### **HUL**

Hindustan Unilever (HUL) is running an initiative under its "Start a little good" campaign. The initiative focuses on Water Harvesting, Water Conservation and Plastic Waste Management in areas across India and also, encourages consumers to maintain hygienic habits amongst other things. To be fair, Green initiatives are not new from the company. In June, Nestle India helped installed the "Wall of Hope" in Mussoorie, which has been constructed using 15000 plastic bottles to encourage tourists not to litter. (BusinessStandard) Globally, through their on-ground behaviour change programme and other interventions, HUL have helped over a billion people. HUL has multiple programs running in India as well, which promotes hygienic habits, sustainable practices and green initiatives. (Unilever)

### **Google Environmental Innovations**

Google has also embraced a greener future with its green supply chain management practices. Google

has shown commitments towards being green and taken up initiatives like renewable energy sources, hosting farmers' markets, sustainable cooking seminars etc. In fact, they brought in goats to trim grass. The company holds a leading position in the environmentally aware corporate culture. (norcalcompactors)

## Wipro

Wipro has contributed to Net-Zero Greenhouse Gas emissions targets. They have pledged to bring their emissions down by 2040. The company has been fervent about the triple bottom line, also lining their business mandate with an ethical responsibility. They are constantly making greater efforts in making "Sustainability" the core of their business model and business operations. Wipro has brought to light its various initiatives like Circularity and Transition to a Sustainable Future, Energy Management, Environmental Data Management and De-carbonization. (Wipro)

## Nike

Nike has been keen in promoting green initiatives through their advertisements and brand communications with green business practice and culture. Their different sustainable products are made using recycled polyester, environment-friendly materials. They are the constant innovators with the products they manufacture and offer to the market frequently. The company also uses renewable energy sources in their manufacturing. Nike also has encouraged 650 of its suppliers in 52 countries to develop and implement written environmental policies (Nike).

## Survey Data Analysis

The survey questionnaire consisted of 15 questions in total (including the questions to depict the demographic identity of the respondent). Some of the questions were compulsory while some of the questions were optional for the respondents.

**Q1. The first question enquired about which place the respondents belonged to.**

By referring to Chart 1, we can understand that the respondents are from all over India. However,

most of the respondents (57.5%) seemed to be from Kolkata and around.

**Q2. The second question was concerned with understanding their occupation.**

Chart 2 shows that out of 106 respondents, most of the respondents are connected to academia (57.5% being students among them), while a considerable amount of respondents either do a private-sector job or are self-employed. That means in turn that the insight achieved from the research is not only from the buying decision makers of the family, but also

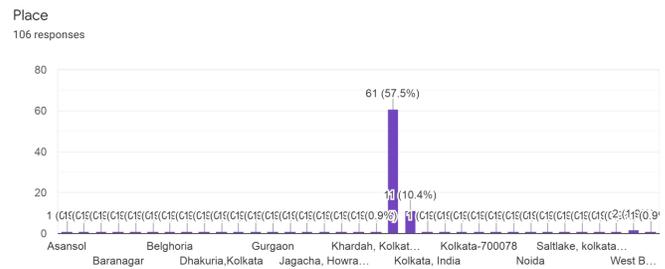


Chart 1

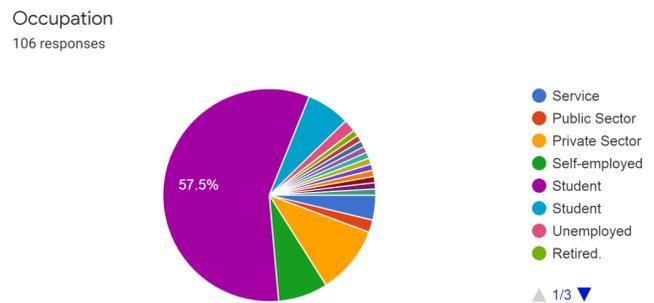


Chart 2

Do you know what a Green Product is?  
106 responses

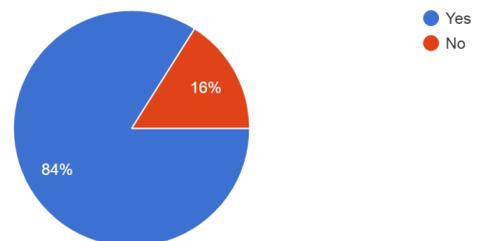


Chart 3

from respondents who contribute to the decision making process.

**Q3. Do you know what a Green Product is?**

According to Chart 3, out of all the 106 respondents, 84% respondents are aware of what green products are. However, 16% of the respondents are unaware of what green products are. While the world is going through a dire need of saving the environment, these many people not even being aware of green product in India definitely provides scope for concern and indicates that awareness about green living needs to be increased.

**Q4. If yes, how did you know about 'green products'?**

This question was not a compulsory question as only the respondents who knew about the green products could answer this question. Chart 4 shows that the researchers got 92 responses to this question. Out of these respondents, 35.9% think that they have read it in printed or online literature, while 27.2% reckons that their knowledge about green products is acquired from advertisements. An interesting statistics here says that similar percentage of respondents (18.5%) has been aware of green products through news or word of mouth. This means, literature (print or online) still plays an important role in building the knowledge about the green products. Closely following this, there are the advertisements which also act as a major platform for building awareness about green products. So, it can be safely concluded that while few of the respondents came to know of green products from books and journal articles or other documents which impart accurate knowledge, most of the respondents developed their awareness based on the intention of the brands and their intended

marketing communication through advertisement (TV, radio, OOH, online etc.) and literature (blogs, magazines etc.), where there is no standardization of accuracy of the knowledge acquired by them. So, most of the respondents are probably making a less-informed choice by choosing green product.

**Q5. Do you use any Green Product?**

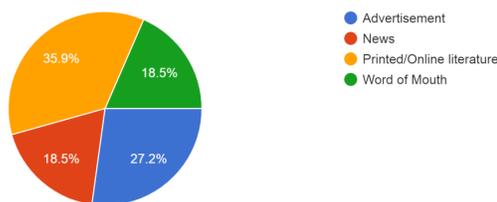
This was a simple question directed towards the respondents to understand what percentage of people use green product in reality. Chart 5 shows that 63.2 % respondents use a green product and 36.8% respondents do not use a green product. This means that even though more than 80% of the respondents are aware of green products, not all of them use these products. This can have two important implications:

1. The idea of a sustainable living is perceived by many respondents but the urgency of it has failed to influence all the decision makers as effectively.
2. Some of the decision makers are aware of the urgency of making green choices; however, they do not trust the green products available in the market.

**Q5.1. If yes, why?**

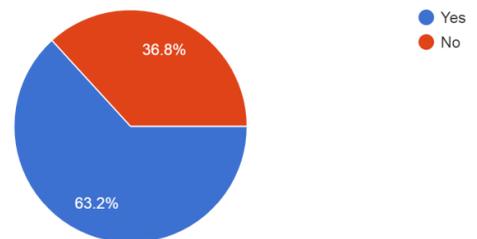
This question again was not a compulsory question and was directed towards only the 63.2% of respondents who admitted to using green products. There were only 61 responses to this question, meaning some of the respondents chose not to answer this. Most of the replies to this question said that they used green products because they wanted to be responsible residents of the planet and they wanted to contribute their bit to the sustainable

If yes, how did you know about 'green products'?  
92 responses



**Chart 4**

Do you use any Green Product?  
106 responses



**Chart 5**

living. Some of the respondents though mentioned that they use green products as the cost is low and these are more durable in the long run. From this analysis, we can presume that there is a huge acceptance of green products among people in India as a choice for sustainable development and green living.

**Q5.2. If no, why?**

This question, another non-compulsory one, dealt with the 36.8% of people (32 responses) who claimed to not have used any green products. Most of the respondents have answered, as they are expected to, that they are not aware of green products. Some respondents have answered that they have not come across any green products while some mentioned that green products are costly and are not easily available. This raises a concern about the accessibility of green products in India for people across all region and class. It also means that not only there is a pressing need of increasing awareness about the green products, but also there is a need of increasing acceptability and accessibility of green products for people to really have a choice to go for a greener life style. Some answers dealt with how they do not find any utility of green products which confirms the assumption of the researchers about people in India not trusting the available green products on their sustainability claims.

**Q.6.1. If yes, did you notice any significant change after using green product?**

This was again a non-compulsory question and was directed towards, only those who have claimed to have used green products. There are 70 respondents to this. It is interesting to observe that the previous question that dealt with users of green product had

only 61 respondents. That means the 9 respondents here either-

1. Have used green products and not responded to the last question.
2. Have not used green product and yet answered this question.

This can contribute to the idea that there exists some confusion regarding the utility of green products among the respondents.

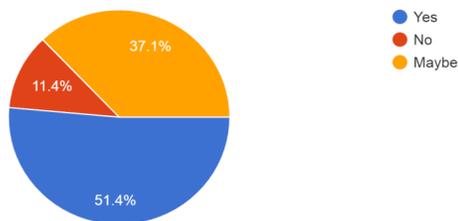
According to Chart 6, 51.4% of the people have used a green product and have noticed a significant change. 37.1% people say that they are unsure about such changes and 11.4% people think they have not noticed any significant change after using the green products. This contributes to researchers' previous assumption that there remains confusion regarding the utility of green products among the users. Some users even have negative take on the utility of green products. This dissatisfaction definitely contradicts the ideals of green revolution and sustainable development and the green products in India cannot be concluded to have perfectly lived up to the standard that is claimed in their promotional activities.

**Q.6.2. If no, do you expect any significant change if you start using green product(s)?**

This question was directed towards the people who said they do not use green products. There were only 52 respondents for this question. It was assumed by the researchers that the people who are not using green products right now expect to notice some important changes once they start using green products.

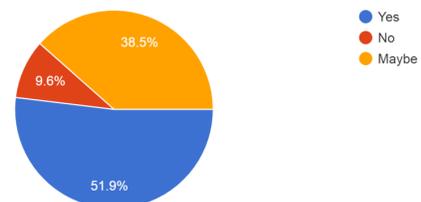
By analysing Chart 7, this assumption was proven to be right as 51.9% people responded in positive to this question. The confusion about the effectiveness

If yes, did you notice any significant change after using green product?  
70 responses



**Chart 6**

If no, do you expect any significant change if you start using green product(s)?  
52 responses



**Chart 7**



of green products remain to be prominent as 38.5% people are unsure about whether they will notice any change or not and nearly, 9.6% of people think green products are not going to bring any significant change to their lifestyle.

**Q.7. Do you want to use a green product in future?**

All the 106 respondents responded to this compulsory question. There were three options to choose from for the respondents- yes, no and maybe.

Here in chart 8, 80.2% of people think that they are interested to use green products in the future and 19.8% people are not sure that they will. However, not a single respondent has decided to not use green products in future. This is a very positive outcome as it shows that most of the Indians have accepted green products as a sustainable choice for future. And despite all the negativity and confusion the researchers came across in the previous questions, the people are not ready to give up on green products yet.

**Q8. Do you think green products are the future of consumer markets?**

This was definitely an interesting question and the answer to the question also turns out to present an interesting analysis.

While no one indicated they would cease to use green products in the future, the percentage of people who think green products are the future of consumer market is comparatively quite less (59.4%). 38.7% of the respondents are not sure that green products are the future of consumer market while a negligible percentage of people also feel that green products are not the future of consumer market.

Do you want to use a green product in future?  
106 responses

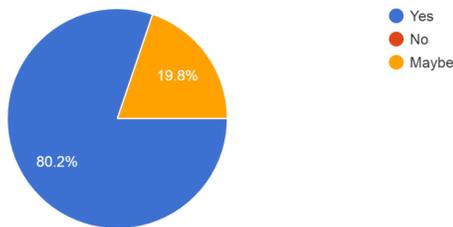


Chart 8

**Q9. Which brand do you think does the best green marketing in India (name only)?**

In order to analyze the consumer approach towards green products in India, the researchers asked the names of some brands that the respondents feel are contributing to the sustainable development of India.

Different respondents named different brands to answer this question. According to the responses mapped in Chart 10, the most acceptable green brands are Classmate, Tupperware, Mammaearth, Unilever, LED light etc.

**Q10. Green Products contribute to a better lifestyle.**

The respondents were asked to state their level of agreement regarding this statement. They had to choose an option from a 5-point Likert scale.

Do you think green products are the future of consumer markets?  
106 responses

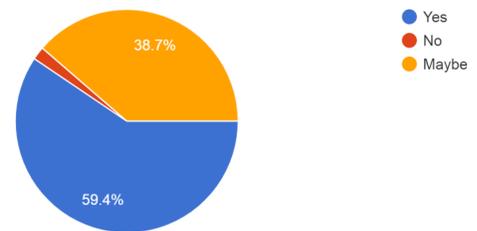


Chart 9

Which brand do you think does the best green marketing in India (name only)?  
45 responses

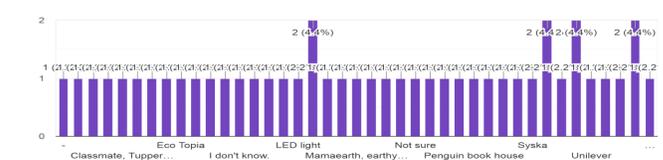


Chart 10

Green Products contribute to a better lifestyle.  
106 responses

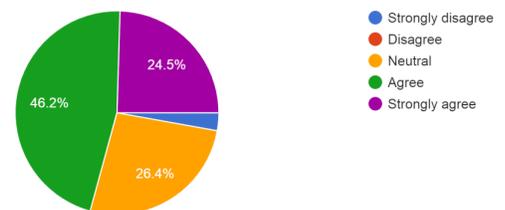


Chart 11

Would you recommend a green product to others?  
106 responses

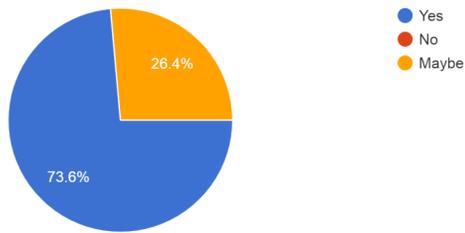


Chart 13

According to Chart 11, 46.2% respondents agree that green products contribute to a better lifestyle while 24.5% of the respondents strongly agree to this statement. 26.4% of the respondents are neutral about this statement. The researchers conclude that no matter how many of the respondents use green product, the confusion around green products contributing to a better lifestyle persists.

**Q11. Green products contribute to sustainable development.**

To this statement also, the researchers observed an interesting fact.

48.1% of the respondents feel that they agree with the statement while 35.8% of the people feel that they strongly agree with the statement. Only 12.3% of the respondents are neutral about the statement. So, even though some respondents are not sure about whether the green products bring about a better lifestyle or not, they are sure that the green products contribute to sustainable development.

**Q12. Would you recommend a green product to others?**

This was the final question that was asked to the respondents. The respondents, as assumed from the previous statistics, replied positively to this question.

The 73.6% of the respondents would recommend green products to others while the rest of the 26.4% people think they may recommend a green product to others. This is definitely a positive take on green products.

**CONCLUSION**

The analysis helped the researchers to reach the conclusion that there is a wide acceptability of

Green products contribute to sustainable development.  
106 responses

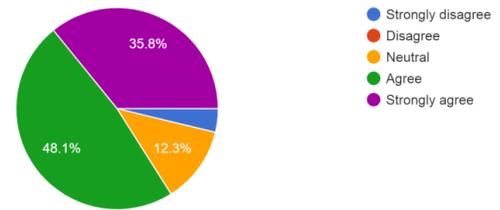


Chart 12

green products in India as a sustainable alternative to lifestyle. However, in this dire need of awareness about green living, a considerable number of people are unaware of green products. The awareness is mostly being facilitated by the green marketing initiatives undertaken by several global brands functioning in the Indian market. Yet, there is a lot of confusion and lack of trust among a certain section of people around green products.

The green marketing strategies need to also clearly define and set a standardization of authentication in order to gain the trust from the consumers. Indian consumers have accepted green products to be the best alternative for a greener lifestyle and the green marketing strategies have a contribution to this. Yet, there needs to be a more expansive approach so that green products are perceived, acquired and afforded by people from every region and class of life.

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