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# Understanding the Drivers of Responsible Consumption: A Conceptual Framework

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**ABSTRACT:** Over the years, population explosion and subsequent ever-increasing demand have led to natural resource depletion, wreaking havoc that has left its mark on the environment and threatening human lives. SDG12 aims to achieve responsible consumption that can sustain livelihoods for the present and future generations. However, the notion of responsible consumption is vaguely addressed in existing literature. Understanding the idea of consuming responsibly and its distinct nature as an element of sustainable consumption is important. This study focuses on analysing responsible consumption in the organic food sector and the drivers that motivate it. The study conducts a Bibliometric analysis using the Dimensions.AI database to identify relevant concepts related to responsible consumption and utilises them as a construct for developing a conceptual framework. The study finds that ethical and green consumption are important dimensions of responsible consumption. The study also underscores the role of ethical values in creating green purchase intent and how this intent mediates between value and consumption. Since consumption is a crucial element of human lives, its moderation is important for the success of SDG12 and all other sustainable goals. Environmental awareness and values within oneself contribute to developing purchase intent. During marketing a product, if ethical elements are considered, it may help bridge the intent–behaviour gap.

**Keywords:** Ethical Consumption, Responsible Consumption, Sustainable Consumption, SDG12, Green Purchase Intent



## INTRODUCTION

A gradual increase in population has contributed significantly to environmental degradation and depletion of natural resources on Earth. The immediate consequence of the population explosion has been overconsumption and simultaneous overproduction to match the need. This has added to waste generation, adverse climatic impact, loss of biodiversity, and enhancement of pollution. With the passage of time, unsustainable consumption and production are poised to be one of the greatest threats to mankind, requiring immediate attention. As the Earth scrambled to find a sustainable solution, the first formal definition of sustainable development was given by the

Brundtland Commission Report, officially titled "Our Common Future", in 1987. Sustainable development was defined as "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Accordingly, the United Nations in 2015 adopted 17 interconnected sustainable goals to achieve them by 2030. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) serve as a guide for changing global activity toward sustainable development. Although global production and consumption are important drivers of the world economy, they have also resulted in the depletion of the planet's resources and natural ecology. Literature finds that achieving SDGs requires a reassessment of consumer behaviour (Haron et al., 2005) since the rise of global affluence, there has been a surge in consumer spending (Qalati et al., 2021) . Growing consumption is a sign of both economic expansion and improved societal well-being. However, it also poses serious risks to public health, social justice, and environmental sustainability. (Johnson & Chattaraman, 2019; Kautish et al., 2022) . Thus, the terrain of sustainable development is very complex, and consumers are a crucial factor. (Shiel et al., 2020) So, a balancing act about consumption is of utmost importance. Many of our most pressing ecological, health, and social issues are also directly related to consumption. (O'Rourke & Lollo, 2015)This has inspired several parties, including the government, educational and scientific institutions, regulatory bodies, and pertinent international organisations, to integrate sustainable consumption into their corporate and strategic planning levels (Wang et al., 2019) . Sustainable consumption is defined as the use of goods and services that allow future generations to achieve their requirements while having as little adverse influence on the environment as possible. (Glavič, 2021)

SDG-12 calls for "Responsible consumption and production". Implementing an efficient production system that involves business entities as stakeholders is the most common way to achieve it. However, this conventional strategy often fails to mitigate the problem (Baden & Frei, 2021)Since consumption is the cornerstone of economic growth (Vargas-Merino et al., 2023) and the "sole end and purpose of all production" (Smith, 1776) It became evident that moderating consumption is one of the alternative and reliable means to achieve sustainable development. There exists a plethora of studies on sustainable consumption. (Coderoni & Perito, 2020; Dolan, 2002; Haider et al., 2022; Peattie & Collins, 2009; Scott & Weaver, 2018) However, the literature finds that there exists vagueness regarding the definition of sustainable consumption. (Brink et al., 2020; Peattie & Collins, 2009). Again, there exist studies exploring different dimensions of sustainable consumption (Kennedy & Hauslik, 2018), Very few of which focus on responsible consumption. As such, it becomes difficult to understand the distinctive feature of responsible consumption vis-à-vis sustainable consumption and the factors that influence it.

This study undertakes a bibliometric literature review by utilising data from Dimensions AI. It analyses it through the VOS viewer to develop a conceptual framework that helps identify factors motivating responsible consumption. The study also helps understand that sustainable consumption entails environmental consciousness and consuming green, and requires consumers to inculcate a sense of belonging towards society and an ethical mindset to make informed, responsible choices. This study thus considers responsible consumption to be a subset of the overarching goal of sustainable consumption.

The study mainly focuses on the organic food sector and has included the term "…organic food" as a suffix in the keywords used in searching the literature from Dimensions AI. Over the last decades, "sustainability" as a topic has become more relevant, and its scope of application has

become even more diversified. Choosing a particular sector assumes additional significance since it helps to understand the crux of the matter at a micro level.

Although the concept of "organic food" first emerged from developed nations, over the last few years, consumers of developing nations, particularly in Asia, have started to imbibe the idea. The chosen sector in this study is "Organic Food" because the developed framework can be used in these emerging countries.

"Sustainable Consumption" has been defined in "Our Common Future" as "the use of material products, energy and immaterial services in such a way that it minimizes the impact on the environment, so that human needs can be met not only in the present but also for future generations" (WCED 1987. The two words "sustainable" and "consumption" reflects contradictory views, with "sustainability" stressing on minimizing waste and maximizing preservation while "consumption" leading to destruction and waste (Haider et al., 2022) The definition of sustainable consumption highlights a single system with mutually reinforcing three interrelated pillars of environment, economics, and society (Ghimire, 2023; Purvis et al., 2019; Thompson,2017) On the other hand, literature explains consumption in a varied way, like ordinary or inconspicuous, visible or invisible, or even extravagant, addictive, or compulsive (Işıl Arıkan Saltık et al., 2013; Shove & Warde, 1998) The definition of sustainable consumption, as mentioned by (Vargas-Merino et al., 2023)encompasses key aspects like collaboration, where joint efforts of both the stakeholders, business and consumers are required (Vallet-Bellmunt et al., 2023)efficiency and frugality (Spangenberg, 2014) where the idea of sustainable consumption revolves around the necessity of transformation and the aspect of holistic, flexible, or adaptive (Abeliotis et al., 2010) that stresses on social elements like worker well-being, judicious usage of resources, animal rights, fair trade etc. Although it is hard to find an accepted standard definition of sustainable consumption, some of the most agreed-upon features of sustainable consumption are found in varied literature (Abdulrazak & Quoquab, 2018; Fien et al., 2008; Quoquab & Mohammad, 2020) are (1) satisfaction of basic human wants (2) consuming responsibly and efficiently out of concern for future generation and (3) making mindful choices that are beneficial for environment and society. (4) promoting long-term development. Responsible consumption acknowledges the role of consumers in making informed decisions and in using resources judiciously (Nangia et al., 2024)Thus, if sustainable consumption is considered as an overarching goal that requires changes in policy, corporate practices, and production methods, responsible consumption is about making informed decisions that emphasise ethical, social, and environmental (Prothero & McDonagh, 2021) This study thus defines "responsible consumption" as a subset of sustainable consumption, as actively choosing products based on their impact on people, animals, and the planet, such as fair trade, organic products purchase, ethical labour practices, and reducing waste. George Fisk coined the phrase "responsible consumption" in 1973. Effective and responsible consumption raises living standards without endangering the environment or having a detrimental effect on it. Thus, making educated decisions is one of the key requirements of responsible decision-making(Jain et al., 2022). Due to consumer knowledge of the adverse effects of heedless consumption, researchers and environmentalists have recently become interested in responsible consumption (Gonzalez et al., 2009). The advent of varied constructs in behavioural models has compelled researchers to think about consumers' motivations behind sustainable purchases and to understand the mediators and moderators behind such consumption. As an extension of

Sustainable Consumption, the term responsible consumption is also intertwined with terms like 'ethical', 'green', and 'environmental', and each of these constructs relates to a wide range of consumer behaviours (Byrch et al., 2007). Society must reconsider its consumption patterns in light of the increasing demand for resource management. In this regard, consuming organic food is often considered a form of responsible consumption because it promotes environmental sustainability (Tuomisto et al., 2012), ethical farm practices (Fraser et al., 2013), and ensures long-lasting health benefits. Again,(Çam et al., 2025) mentions ethical investing and green consumption as a part of socially responsible behaviour of a consumer.

Green consumption is defined as the consumption of less environmentally intensive products(Kennedy & Hauslik, 2018) in order to cause less harm to nature. Literature points out that many times, environmental concerns motivate consumers to develop a positive attitude toward buying green (L. Chen et al., 2022; Walia et al., 2019) thereby contributing to green purchase intent. However, developing a green purchase intent is a complex issue and, at times, is influenced by values. Studies highlight that values within oneself are reflected in ethical behaviour, which motivates environmentally friendly consumption (Hidalgo-Baz et al., 2017; Shahabi Ahangarkolaee & Gorton, 2021) Thus, both green consumption and ethical consumption are also used as constructs to explain sustainable consumption. The advent of the notion of sustainability has led to discussions and debates on related subjects, thereby raising awareness of shared issues, especially with regard to the environment (do Prado & Moraes, 2020; Santana, 2018)

Gradually, as a sustainable way of life spread in all quarters, the food sector altered agricultural processes and moved into a more chemical-free path to become organic (Y. Kim, 2019) Literature finds that there is an ideological basis of organic production that is way more than just environmental cooperation (do Prado & Moraes, 2020) Similarly, buyers of the organic product, apart from fulfilling the fundamental need, also have a philosophy behind the purchase, like the opportunity to belong to the class of aware shoppers (Y. Kim, 2019) Thus, consumers' intent behind buying organic food is complex. It often cannot be explained by traditional consumption models that assume linear decision choices. It is also a reflection of responsible consumption that is triggered by environmental awareness.

However, awareness about environmental degradation and the adverse effects of too much consumption does not always translate into responsible purchases (Iqbal et al., 2021) There exists an intent-behaviour gap between the positive attitude of consumers and purchasing eco-friendly products (Witek & Kuźniar, 2023) This gap underscores the complexity of consumer behaviour and the need to delve deeper into underlying factors(N. Kim & Lee, 2023) Researching the factors influencing responsible consumption is crucial to understanding the persistent intention–behaviour gap among consumers. Understanding this phenomenon is vital for developing effective strategies to promote sustainable consumer practices (Banytė et al., 2023)

Gap in the study:

1. From the literature review, it is clear that the conceptual definitions and boundaries highlighting dimensions of sustainable consumption and its distinction from responsible consumption are vague in the literature.

2. Subtle behavioural attributes in consumers create green purchase intent, many of which are not translated into consumption. Understanding the factors behind responsible consumption may help to reduce the intention-behavioural gap that exists in many such cases.

Objectives:

1. To study the factors of motivation behind responsible consumption in the organic food sector.
2. To develop a comprehensive framework on responsible consumption.

## METHOD

This study utilises the Dimensions.AI database to examine evidence-based research on the concept of sustainable consumption. The first part of the descriptive study is done with the analyses provided by Dimensions.AI, while the mapping of bibliometric network data is obtained with the help of VOS viewer version 1.6.20. A bibliometric study is a statistical analysis of various publications worldwide on the concerned topic. It involves gathering and interpreting data such as citation counts, authorship patterns, and keyword trends to map out research hotspots, collaborations, and gaps in knowledge. This method utilises citation metrics to identify influential studies, authors, and journals within a field. With regard to the topic of the study, this method has thus helped in understanding the relevance across the globe. Analysing keyword co-occurrence and publication timelines helps in understanding the evolution of research topics and emerging areas of interest (Valenzuela-Fernández & Escobar-Farfán, 2022)Key word co-occurrence in this study has helped identify the relevant subtopics related to responsible consumption that have contributed to developing the conceptual framework.

For the research, data from Dimensions. AI is screened with the keywords. Previous reviews of past literature pointed out common keywords used in studies related to the concerned topic. These keywords, namely "*Responsible consumption…*" "*Sustainable consumption...", "Green Consumption...*", "*Ethical consumption…",* and "*Environmental awareness…"* are used to search publication works in Dimensions. AI. Next, the resultant literature is filtered through restrictions on publication year

and document type. Thus, this study includes titles and abstracts of publications on the concerned topic for the past 26 years (2000-2025).

After the first screening, a second screening is done to match the duplicate items. A combined data set, RC, containing 1244 items, is formed by eliminating the duplicate items of the merged data file (Responsible consumption and Sustainable consumption). Similarly, duplicate items from the ethical consumption and green consumption data sets that match with RC are also eliminated, and the resultant sets contain 118 and 604 items, respectively. Table 1 gives a summary of the screening of the dataset.

The final publication abstracts screened are exported in a CSV file format for analysis. This study incorporates descriptive analysis from Dimensions.AI, which is represented through charts and tables, followed by bibliometric network analyses through VOS viewer, represented through network visualisation diagrams. The study followed the most common units of analysis, specifically journals, documents, and authors (Börner et al., 2003) The units expressed in network analysis are

the nodes represented in circles or rectangles, and the connections among them constitute a graph or a network to show relationships.

**Table 1**. Screening of titles and abstracts: *source Dimensions.AI*

| Keywords | Items after the first screening | Duplicates eliminated | Final items screened |
|---|---|---|---|
| Responsible Consumption of Organic Food | 311 | | |
| Sustainable consumption of organic food | 1496 | | |
| Combined set: Responsible consumption (RC) | 1496+311=1807 | 563 (from combined set) | 1244 |
| Ethical consumption of organic food | 180 | | |
| Combined set | 1244+180=1424 | 62 (from the set of ethical consumption) | 118 |
| Green consumption of organic food | 947 | | |
| Combined set | 1244+947=2191 | 343 (from the set of green consumption) | 604 |

The data for the bibliometric study, after cleaning, includes all the publications that are screened. It is segregated according to type of publication and source titles. Table 2 shows the distribution of publications (screened through keyword search) based on publication type. The publication type includes articles, chapters, preprints, proceedings, edited books, and monographs. Most of the literature included in this research comprises published articles, with the highest number of articles being listed under the keyword "*sustainable Consumption of organic food...*"

**Table 2.** Grouping of publications based on publication type: *source, Dimensions.AI*

| PUBLICATION TYPE | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Keywords** | **Articles** | **Chapters** | **Preprint** | **Proceedings** | **Edited bk** | **Mono graph** |
| Responsible consumption of organic food | 239 | 62 | 6 | 2 | 2 | |
| Sustainable consumption of organic food | 929 | 243 | 27 | 15 | 21 | 8 |
| Ethical consumption of organic food | 90 | 19 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Green consumption of organic food | 443 | 137 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 3 |
| Environmental awareness in organic food | 436 | 94 | 14 | 10 | 10 | 0 |

In research, the link between interactional units is measured and displayed through network analyses (Liu et al., 2017; Parkhe A et al., 2006) In a bibliometric study, networks are visualised through diagrams containing nodes representing points and ties represented by lines. In this study, network analysis of the dataset RC is done. Bibliographic coupling is the process of identifying commonalities in citing a document. The network analysis is shown in Figure 1. It is interesting to note that India has a relatively high link strength of 11373 with 1029 citations and the highest number of publications of 105. However, countries like the US, Italy, China, and the UK also have high link strength and are collaborating in publications on the concerned topic. It establishes the fact that responsible consumption of organic food is a relevant research topic in today's world

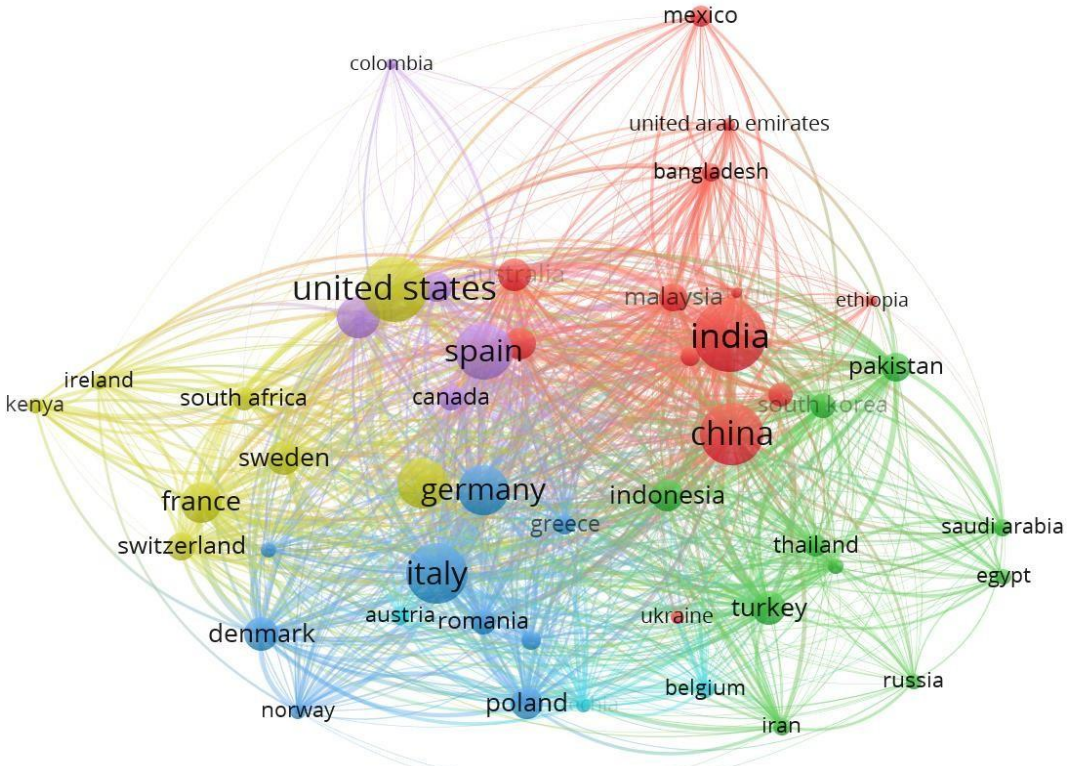


**Figure 1.** Bibliographic coupling of publications on the basis of countries: *source VOS viewer.*

Identifying the related subtopics (constructs): To identify related subtopics, this research undertakes the co-occurrence of terms that show correlations between terms and their strength, highlighting the relevance within a corpus of text (Pilkington A & Meredith J, 2009) An important aspect of co-occurrence of term analysis is that often the words extracted for the analysis are the author's keywords of respective publications, and in their absence, related words from "title" and "abstract". In the VOS viewer, the screening of terms includes a minimum of 10 occurrences, and then the calculation of relevant scores, out of which 60% are selected. This analysis is obtained for three datasets: RC, ethical consumption, and green consumption.

Based on a number of occurrences and relevance score, it can be stated that ethical consumption and green consumption are both components of responsible consumption. With regards to ethical consumption, ethical value has a high relevance score of 3.51, while green purchase intent under green consumption scores a high value of 4.48. Table 3 summarises the analysis. Next, the terms that have scored high in terms of relevance are used as keywords and searched in Dimensions *AI*. Table 4 shows the number of publications listed under the main topics. These are thus categorised as primary

subtopics and secondary subtopics. Thus, primary subtopics include two components of sustainable consumption, namely ethical consumption and green consumption.

**Table 3.** Results of co-occurrence of terms: *source VOS viewer*

| Keywords | Related terms | Co-occurrence of terms | Relevance score |
|---|---|---|---|
| Responsible Consumption | Ethical Consumption | 10 | 2.19 |
| | Green Consumption | 13 | 1.39 |
| | Environmental Concern | 42 | 0.87 |
| Ethical Consumption | Fair trade | 16 | 1.05 |
| | Ethical Value | 12 | 3.51 |
| | Organic farming | 11 | 1.55 |
| Green Consumption | Green purchase intent | 25 | 4.48 |
| | Organic consumption | 37 | 3.68 |
| | Environmental awareness | 23 | 1.81 |

**Table 4.** Classifications are based on the main topics listed below.

| Main Topic | Total publications | Primary Subtopics Identified | Publications included |
|---|---|---|---|
| Responsible consumption of organic food | 1244 | Ethical Consumption | 69 |
| | | Green Consumption | 373 |
| **Primary subtopics** | | **Secondary Subtopics identified** | |
| Ethical Consumption in Organic Food | 118 | Ethical Value | 65 |
| Green Consumption in Organic Food | 604 | Green Purchase Intent | 43 |
| **Secondary Subtopics** | | **Classifications identified** | |
| Ethical Value | 92 | Altruistic values | 26 |
| | | Egoistic values | 15 |

The analysis identifies a number of related topics concerning the responsible consumption of organic food. Green consumption, according to Connolly & Prothero (2008), is the conscious adoption of environmentally responsible purchasing practices. It ensures consumers buy eco-friendly products while achieving economic development, and as such, is a component of responsible and sustainable consumption. Green consumption is defined as consuming fewer environmentally intensive goods (Kennedy & Hauslik, 2018). Although there are ample studies on consumers' green purchase intent (Amin & Tarun, 2021; Biswas & Roy, 2015), it is widely acknowledged that purchase intent does not always translate into consumption. This means that there are a number of factors that contribute to developing the intent. Ethical consumption is defined in the literature as consumers' buying decisions that are motivated by their ethical values (Cooper-Martin & Holbrook, 1993) Studies show that analyses of relationships between values and consumer behaviour often lead to nonlinearity in consumption patterns (Schwartz, 1992) In fact, using value constructs in the research of sustainable consumption is effective since

it is the natural food purchase of consumers (Homer & Kahle, 1988) The theory of Value -Belief - Norm uses egoistic values and altruistic values as variables of interest in influencing (Wei et al., 2022) environmental behaviours. People who operate on behalf of others without anticipating any personal gain are said to exhibit altruistic principles. Self-centred ideals imply taking action on one's behalf, anticipating personal gains, or making an effort to reduce one's pain and suffering. With regard to consumption, organic consumers with egoistic values usually want to consume healthy food. In contrast, those with inherent altruistic values will care about ensuring the environment is not harmed or contaminated. Since the topic of the study concerns responsible consumption, and organic food demonstrates people's concern for both environmental and personal benefits, the rationale for considering both the values as a construct is justified. In fact, literature considers altruistic and egoistic values to analyse the ethical consumption of organic food (Kareklas et al., 2014). Again, studies confirm that ethical values play a vital role in influencing the purchase intent of organic food. (M. Chen, 2020; Magnusson et al., 2003; Teng & Lu, 2016)"Ethical indifference" refers to a state or attitude where an individual exhibits a lack of concern or responsiveness to ethical considerations, moral obligations, or the well-being of others. Literature sometimes mentions convenience-driven behaviour as an indication of ethical indifference in buying green(Hjelmar, 2011). Again, Duong et al. (2025) suggest that strong moral norms and ethical beliefs often counteract ethical indifference among individuals. In fact, factors like usage barriers, value barriers, and risk barriers contribute to consumer resistance, which can be linked to ethical indifference (Kushwah et al., 2019). Thus, while considering ethical consumption, the rationale for using ethical indifference as a construct is well justified. The proposed conceptual framework of responsible consumption is given in Figure 2.

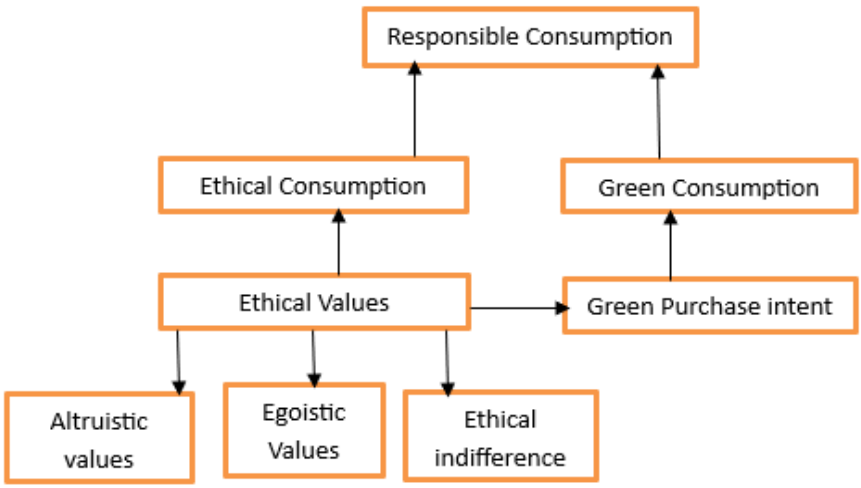


**Figure 2.** Conceptual framework of Responsible Consumption

## RESULT & DISCUSSION

The literature underscores the importance and centrality of individual consumers who can bring about significant change through sustainability. On a daily basis, consumers confront challenges through social practices, using their rationality, motivations, and perceptions (Quoquab & Mohammad,

2020) Different factors contribute to creating perceptions and act as influences. Environmental awareness consists of psychological elements that determine consumers' propensity towards sustainable behaviour (Zelezny & Schultz, 2000) Since positive environmental behaviour lies at the heart of all sustainable activities, it becomes pertinent to analyse the contributing factors behind the same. Literature has found that research on sustainable consumption has been carried out in different disciplines, suggesting varied transformational measures, which, in a way, have given rise to a fragmented and vague notion of the concept. Deeper insight into the ethical value element in consumption helps in creating a distinctive nature of responsible consumption as opposed to sustainable consumption. While making decisions, consumers are becoming more and more concerned with ethical considerations (Bray et al., 2011)In fact, customers are actively considering elements pertaining to promoting fair trade, labour rights, environmental protection, food items made organically, and avoiding goods from unethical manufacturers, before making a purchase decision (Budhathoki et al., 2019; Maaya et al., 2018; Zollo et al., 2018)Responsible consumption behaviour is crucial as it is a move towards a fairer pattern of development (Castaneda et al., 2015) The study emphasises that both ethical consumption and green consumption are important dimensions of responsible consumption. It also highlights that apart from environmental awareness, innate moral values within oneself also help in developing green purchase intent that contributes to the purchase of eco-friendly products. The review asserts that consumers with a strong ethical compass tend to develop green purchase intent (Ogiemwonyi & Jan, 2023) Altruistic values of individuals, emphasising the well-being of others, help in creating environmental concerns, which are reflected in purchases. At times, trust in green claims enhances the willingness to purchase responsibly (Li et al., 2021)The framework asserts that green purchase intent can mediate the relationship between value and consumption behaviour. It can thus contribute to bridging the intent-behaviour gap. The review also highlights that ethical indifference may act as a deterrent to developing the intent of responsible purchase.

## CONCLUSION

This study investigated the factors that motivated responsible consumption with respect to organic food and aimed to develop a conceptual framework that will help to understand consumers' responsible buying patterns. The findings conclude that both ethical consumption and green consumption are important elements of responsible consumption. However, not only environmental awareness but also ethical values can contribute to developing green purchase intent and help in consumption. If marketers consider value aspects while positioning their product, then it will enable more customised offerings.

While this study provides valuable insights into the aspect of responsible consumption, certain limitations may be noted. The data set considered for the analysis includes publications related to the organic sector only. Responsible consumption encompasses many other sectors and allied practices, which are not part of the study. Secondly, the study could have been more exhaustive if publications from other databases had also been included.

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