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**Examining the Drivers and Barriers Influencing Consumer
Adoption of Sustainable Products in the UK Grocery Retail Sector:
A Case Study of Co-op**

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Declaration



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Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation Declaration Form.

I, Waleed Ahmed, declare that this dissertation has been composed by myself, that the work contained herein is entirely my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification, in whole or in part, except as specified.

Signature: Waleed Ahmed.....

Date: 2/2/2026.....

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Abstract

This dissertation focuses on the motivation and obstacles that affect the market adoption of sustainable products by the consumers in the UK grocery retail market using Co-op as a dealing case study. The study is a response to the longstanding disorder between optimistic consumer intentions in relation to sustainability and inconsistent buying behaviour as revealed in daily grocery situations. Based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour and SHIFT framework, the dissertation examines the interplay between individual motivations, social influence, perceived constraints, and retailer-based factors to influence the development of sustainable consumption. One main, single, method was embraced which was a quantitative one. A cross-sectional online questionnaire (comprising five-point Likert scales) was conducted on 100 UK consumers to obtain the data. The SPSS was used to perform statistical analysis where descriptive statistics and one-sample t-tests were applied to examine the consumer attitudes, perceived drivers, barriers, trust in sustainability communication and willingness to purchase sustainable products. The results indicate that consumers have rather optimistic views regarding sustainable grocery products and acknowledge their positive impact on the environment. Trust and social influence of Co-op on their ethical claims are also important forces. Nonetheless, the price sensitivity is a significant obstacle to adoption despite the perception of the sustainable products as conveniently located. Although the respondents feel Co-op as an ethical retailer, sustainability communication is not clear to the point of purchase. Consumers say that there is a positive intention towards buying sustainable products in future but there is lack of commitment, which is still an economic and practical limitation.

On the basis of these results, this dissertation suggests that Co-op should focus more on the affordability strategies, enhance the effectiveness and effectiveness of the sustainability communication, and utilise the social and community-based messages to strengthen the sustainable norms. Generally, the research provides some empirical data on sustainable consumption in UK grocery retailing, as well as, some viable advice on how sustainable products can be better adopted in the daily consumer contexts.

Keywords: Sustainable consumption, Grocery retail, Consumer behaviour, Co-op, Sustainability adoption, Drivers and barriers, Theory of Planned Behaviour, SHIFT framework, Quantitative research, UK retail

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Living in the time when the environmental issues are growing, climate change, loss of biodiversity, and resource depletion become more and more pressing, sustainable consumption becomes an urgent need of economies in the world. The grocery retail sector is an example of this change in the United Kingdom, which is one of the pillars of every day consumer life. Much of the household expenditure is on groceries and the industry has a value of more than 200 billion every year as of 2024 (Statista, 2024). In this context, retailers are starting to market sustainable products characterized as the products that have the least environmental impact in terms of ethical sourcing, packaging, and carbon footprints as regulatory pressures and demands of the society are on the rise. The desire of the UK government to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 with the support of various policies like the Environment Act 2021 has forced retailers to consider sustainability as a part of their strategic plans (UK Government, 2021). Nevertheless, even these attempts result in the existing gap between consumer intentions and behaviors. Surveys have shown that 85 percent of consumers in the UK are concerned over the issue of environmental concerns, yet only an average of 30 percent regularly buy environmentally friendly options in the grocery stores (Mintel, 2023).

One of the most successful convenience stores in the UK, the Co-operative Group (Co-op) that has more than 2,500 stores is unique by its historical ethical principle. Co-op, which was established based on the precept of cooperation in the year 1844, has always been a supporter of fair trade, local community, and environmental protection. The 2023 Ethical Consumerism Report has underscored its efforts such as 100% fairtrade banana, and a promise to leverage single-use plastics by 2025 (Co-op, 2023). Nevertheless, adoption of the sustainable products is not optimal even in the case of a retailer with such credentials. According to recent statistics of the British Retail Consortium, sustainable grocery sales have increased by just 5% in 2024 in comparison to the growth of the entire sector at 8% (British Retail Consortium, 2024). This mismatch is further worsened by post-pandemic economic conditions, such as inflation rates reaching their highest point of 11% in 2022 and continuous cost-of-living pressures that have increased price-sensitivity among the consumer population (Office for National Statistics, 2024). The pandemic caused

disruptions in the supply chains and created shortages and price volatility, which consequently impacted consumer priorities toward affordability and not sustainability (Marcucci et al., 2024).

Also, changing consumer demographics contribute. Millennials and Gen Z, which make 40% of all shoppers in the UK, are more eco-friendly, with 70% of them prepared to pay higher prices to eco-friendly goods (Deloitte, 2023). On the other hand, an older facet of the population is more convenience-seeking and value-conscious, and sustainable choices and products may appear as luxury items with higher prices (Nichifor et al., 2025). This generation gap together with regional differences including their use in metropolis like London in comparison with rural places highlights the sophistication of the problem. The competitive environment of the grocery industry and the dominance of the major players such as Tesco and Sainsbury booster further compounds the situation because Co-op stores are smaller in size, which restricts their capacity to stock sustainable collections. The intention-behavior gap is long known in the historical literature, including Carrington, Neville, and Whitwell (2014) who have found that pro-environmental attitudes do not always lead to purchases because of practical considerations. Recent analyses indicate that such attributes as health benefits, the product quality, and credibility of the retailer are critical but compromised by the perception of the greenwashing deceitful claims to the environmental advantages (White et al., 2019; Delmas and Burbano, 2011).

The aboveground gives the urgency of carrying out specific research on the UK context where sustainability is not merely a fad but a regulation and financial requirement. The green deal of the European Union that the UK now follows post-Brexit via trade deals additionally pushes retailers towards adapting (European Commission, 2020). The distinctiveness of Co-op as an ethical leader is a wonderful opportunity to study how the drivers such as trust and values can collide with the obstacles such as cost and supply to influence the consumer decisions.

1.2 Research Problem

Although there is a general understanding of the problem of environmental health, the use of sustainable grocery products by UK consumers is not as high as it should be, which presents a complex study issue. The disjuncture between declared likes and buying behavior is the main problem, which is sometimes referred to as the green gap. As an example, although 62 percent of shoppers in the United Kingdom report to be conscious of sustainability, certified sustainable

products are only selling in the market at about 15 percent (Kantar, 2024). Such a disconnect is especially acute with convenience retail such as Co-op where impulse purchase rules the day and sustainable alternatives may be neglected due to the lack of visibility or a high cost.

This issue has been escalated by economic factors after the COVID. The rise in inflation and supply chain interruptions have resulted in a 20% rise in food prices in 2021-2023, causing consumers to switch to cheaper, non-sustainable options (Food and Drink Federation, 2023). Also, the level of skepticism towards retailer claims has increased, with 45% of consumers no longer trusting sustainability labels because of high-profile scandals of greenwashing, including that of major brands claiming to be environmentally friendly (GS1, 2024). In the example of Co-op, although the brand has ethical branding, people say that there is a disconnect between what the company promises and what happens in the store, including fairtrade products being unavailable in the smaller stores (Co-op, 2023).

It is a problem of informational asymmetries: consumers are not always able to know unambiguous, verifiable information about the sustainability of the product, which makes it impossible to make a decision. The adoption is also discouraged by broader movements in the society such as the cost-of-living crisis which now applies to 8 million households in the UK (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2024). By not adopting them, the retailers will face the risk of not achieving sustainability goals, including the plastic packaging tax in the UK, which was introduced in 2022. The dissertation is aimed at addressing this issue by analyzing Co-op-specific dynamics, in order to fill the gap with empirical evidence.

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to examine the drivers and barriers influencing UK consumers' adoption of sustainable products in the grocery retail sector, using Co-op as a case study, to generate actionable recommendations for enhancing uptake.

To achieve this aim, the following objectives have been formulated:

- To assess UK consumers' attitudes, awareness, and environmental concerns regarding sustainable products available at Co-op.

- To identify and quantify the principal drivers, such as personal values, trust in the retailer, and product attributes, that encourage the purchase of sustainable products.
- To identify and quantify the main barriers, including price sensitivity, product availability, and perceptions of skepticism or greenwashing, that deter purchases.
- To propose evidence-based strategies for Co-op to increase consumer adoption of sustainable products, based on observed associations and behavioral insights.

These objectives ensure a focused scope, concentrating on Co-op's UK operations without overextending to international comparisons.

1.4 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- What are the main factors influencing UK consumers' adoption of sustainable products at Co-op?
- What are the primary barriers that prevent consumers from purchasing sustainable alternatives?
- How do consumers perceive Co-op's sustainability communication, credibility, and ethical image?
- What strategies could enhance consumer willingness to purchase sustainable products in the future?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study can be applied to academic and practical practice since this study addresses the research gaps in sustainable consumption related to post-pandemic and retailer-specific studies. In terms of academia, it builds upon the Theory of Planned Behavior and SHIFT through a combination of trust and availability as moderators in a UK convenience setting, where there are not so many quantitative models (Kamalanon et al., 2022). It responds to the demand of further empirical evidence in the face of economic uncertainty, which may be incorporated in the future theories of behavioral economics related to sustainability (White et al., 2019).

In practice, the results will give Co-op personalized measures, including better labels or offerings, to drive sustainable sales that could raise the revenue by 10-15% depending on similar interventions in other places (McKinsey, 2023). The wider implication is both policy suggestions to the UK regulators regarding the need to fight greenwashing and improve consumer education. The study will contribute to the higher national objectives such as cutting the amount of plastic waste by 50 percent by 2030 (DEFRA, 2022), and a more resilient retail sector.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework ensuring the successful execution of this study is the combination of Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) with SHIFT framework (White et al., 2019). TPB assumes that attitudes toward the behavior, perceived behavioral control and subjective norms influence the behavioral intentions. This in sustainable grocery buying will mean the positive attitude of consumers to eco-products, peer social pressure, and control such as affordability, and availability having an impact on purchase intentions.

Version TPB extensions also include trust in claims and effectiveness of products, with the consumers trading between normative (e.g., environmental values) and instrumental (e.g., quality) (Kamalanon et al., 2022). To complement this, SHIFT Social influence, Habit formation, Individual self, Feelings, and Tangibility can be used as a supply of practical levers that can be used to transform intentions into actions. An example is that social norms can be exploited using community messaging and tangibility can be used to overcome barriers with clear labeling. A combination of these models can be used to model the intention antecedents (through TPB) and intervention design (through SHIFT) to bridge the intention-behavior gap in the context of Co-op.

1.7 Signposting

The dissertation will be presented in the following way: Chapter 2 will be a review of current literature on drivers, barriers and interventions. In Chapter 3, the methodology which includes research design and data analysis is described. In chapter 4, the findings of the survey data are given. In chapter 5, the implications are discussed, which is the connection between the results and

the theory and practice. In chapter 6, there are recommendations, limitations as well as future research directions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review is a critical evaluation of existing literature on the antecedent and obstacles that determine consumer adoption of sustainable products within the UK grocery retail industry with Co-operative Group (Co-op) as a case study. It is based on peer-reviewed journal articles, industry reports, and seminal books that have been found in databases like Google Scholar, Scopus, and Mintel ranging between seminal publications and current studies as of 2025. The thematic organisation of the review is in line with the research questions as follows: determining the most significant factors that determine adoption, the main obstacles, perceptions of retailer communication, and the improvement strategies. Instead of doing simple summaries of sources, this section is a synthesis of debates, strengths and weaknesses of the methodology, identification of conflicting issues, and revelation of gaps in the post-pandemic UK context. It is based on the theory such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), and SHIFT framework to legitimize the research questions and give a background to the empirical study. Finally, it makes this study be in an area unexplored in terms of quantitative modeling of retailers in specific convenience formats under economic risks.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The dissertation takes an interdisciplinary theoretical approach to the study of consumer adoption of sustainable products in the grocery retail industry in the UK, with Co-op as the case in point, being a combination of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and the SHIFT framework (Ajzen, 1991; White et al., 2019). By integrating the two frameworks, it will become possible to consider both the intention formation and the further translation of intention into behaviour, which will continue to be one of the main challenges of the sustainable consumption research (Carrington et al., 2014).

Ajzen (1991) came up with the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which was one of the most used models in predicting and explaining human behaviour in situations that involve a decision taking process. TPB assumes that behavioural intention is influenced by three fundamental determinants: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Armitage and Conner, 2001). Attitudes denote a general assessment of a behaviour by a person, which is made in terms of beliefs of the consequences of the behaviour like environmental protection or ethical sourcing in the case

of sustainable grocery products (Joshi and Rahman, 2015). Subjective norms represent perceived social influence of significant reference groups, such as family members and peers, to purchase sustainably (Paul et al., 2016). Perceived behavioural control is the belief of individuals of having the capacity to accomplish the behaviour taking into account the availability of the product, the cost and the simplicity of identification in-store (Young et al., 2010).

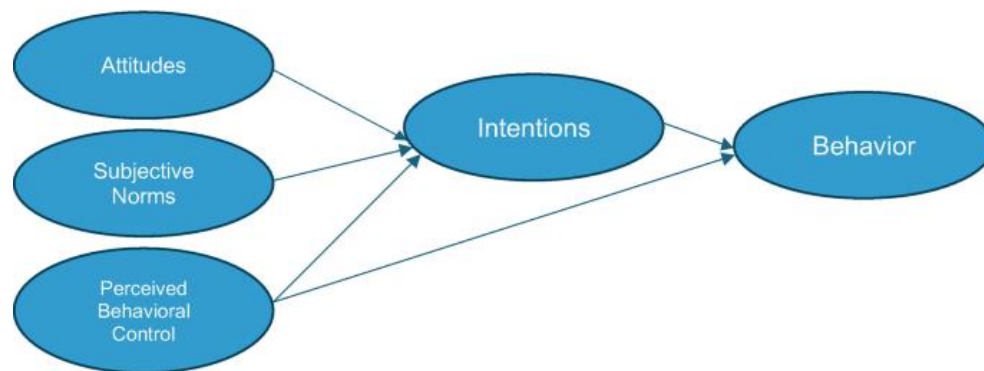


Figure 1 Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ramos, 2024).

TPB has been found to be a powerful and effective explanatory variable within the behavioural areas such that meta-analytic results indicate that TPB is a major contributor to the behavioural intention and actual behaviour variance (Armitage and Conner, 2001). In one of the areas of sustainability research, TPB has been implemented with success in ethical consumption, organic food purchasing, and environmentally responsible consumer behaviour (Paul et al., 2016). Nevertheless, even with its predictive power, TPB has been lamented because it fails to include habitual, emotional, and situational factors, which are especially significant in regular grocery shop situations (Carrington et al., 2014). These capacities imply that good intentions do not always translate into sustainable buying behaviour particularly when time is running out or when there is an economic constraint (Young et al., 2010).

To overcome these limitations, the present study will include the SHIFT framework which was created by White et al. (2019), a synthesis of behavioural science and sustainability studies. SHIFT recognizes five behavioural levers such as social influence, habit formation, individual self, feelings, and tangibility that aid conversion of pro-environmental intentions into action. Compared to TPB, which is mostly used to explain the formation of intentions, SHIFT is used to explain how behaviours can be facilitated and maintained in the real-world setting (White et al., 2019). The framework focuses on the practical processes, including social norm signals, identity congruence,

emotional involvement, and the transformation of sustainability benefits into tangible and readily recognisable benefits at the point of choice.

SHIFT is also relevant in grocery retail as its emphasis is on situational design and low-involvement and habitual decision-making (Young et al., 2010). Sustainable purchasing is competing against ingrained habits, price sensitivity and the lack of cognitive attention that can undermine the relationship between intentions to act positively and actual behaviour (Carrington et al., 2014; Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006). SHIFT handles these issues by emphasising the role of the tangible environment, including clear labelling and shelf cues, and by understanding how consumers will become more likely to act sustainably when the behaviour seems easy, familiar and socially accepted (Paul et al., 2016).

Combining TPB and SHIFT, this dissertation will use holistic framework that fits well in the investigation of sustainable product adoption at Co-op, as TPB offers the conceptual framework that operationalizes an intention, attitudes, norms, and perceived control, which are measured using the survey instrument (Armitage and Conner, 2001). SHIFT supplements this by correcting interpretation of perceived inconsistencies between intention and behaviour especially in situations where price sensitivity, clarity of communication or habitual shopping behavior come in between (Young et al., 2010). Collectively, these frameworks allow the study to go beyond explaining why consumers believe sustainability is important, to how the adoption is still skewed in the daily grocery practice to help in coming up with theory-informed and context-specific guidance.

2.2 Drivers of Sustainable Grocery Purchases

The literature has continuously found the following as the main factors: environmental concern, perceived product quality, reputation of the retailer, and in-store visibility to make sustainable grocery purchases in the UK. One of the driving forces can be identified as environmental concern, which is usually measured through such scales as the New Ecological Paradigm (Dunlap et al., 2000). A meta-analysis of 53 studies by Joshi and Rahman (2015) showed that pro-environmental values are associated with purchase intentions ($r=0.35$), but with category specific differences with stronger results with organic foods compared with packaging. Mintel (2025) data indicates that 72% of consumers emphasize sustainability as a result of their climate awareness in the UK, which intensifies after the pandemic because of the events such as COP26. Nevertheless, critics point out

that this relationship itself is mediated by perceived benefits, with Chen (2010) suggesting that consumers are exchanging normative motives (e.g. eco-values) with instrumental ones (e.g. health, taste), with a structural equation model indicating that perceived quality mediates 45% of the variation in green trust.

Reputation of retailers plays a key role in adoption especially among ethical brands such as Co-op, with survey findings by Deloitte (2023) of 2,000 consumers in UK showing that 57% of them are influenced by sustainability practices and third-party certifications to the retailer (such as Fairtrade) enhances the credibility. This was expanded by Chen (2010) who discovered that green trust mediates brand equity though the sample used was of Taiwanese descent and thus this cannot be generalised to the UK. Trewern (2022) reviewed field data collected in the UK grocery in a study that demonstrated a 20 per cent convenient placement boosts purchases and criticized previous lab-based studies due to ecological validity. The drivers have changed since 2020, as Kantar (2025) points to an online sustainable sales increase of 12% due to the digital visibility, but also predicts generation gaps between the Gen Z (70% of willing to pay premiums) and older generation (more concerned with the value) (Deloitte, 2023).

By synthesizing and integrating these, drivers are complex: normative (values) and situational (visibility) factors are combined with cognitive (trust) ones. There are contradictions; where Joshi and Rahman (2015) are keen on values, McKinsey (2025) is more focused on economic recovery after the COVID that moves to affordability-integrated sustainability. Quantitative surveys take up the lead in terms of methodology (e.g., Kamalanon et al., 2022), yet there is minimal information on the qualitative insights into lived experiences, as indicated by Nichifor et al. (2025) in their systematic review. In the case of Co-op these drivers implies the utilization of ethical heritage but which has been underutilized in the convenience format wherein space is a constraint in terms of visibility (Marcucci et al., 2024).

2.3 Barriers to Adoption

In spite of the fact that there are many drivers of sustainable consumption, still there are some obstacles in the way of implementing it and price sensitivity, inadequate availability, consumer atrocity and habitive tendencies become the themes. Price is the strongest constraint especially due to post-pandemic economic pressures. According to McKinsey (2025), the UK consumers have

been trading down when inflation has hit highs of 11% meaning their desire to pay the common 1020% higher price on environmental products has been decreased by a large margin. In a review of 150 studies by Nichifor et al. (2025), the intention–behaviour gap was explained by economic pressures up to 40 per cent, and voluntary retailer agreements have been criticised due to their lack of enforcement mechanisms (Foodrise, 2025). Within the UK framework, WWF (2024) cautions that by 2025 the supermarkets would have fallen short of the deforestation goals as these failures are attributed to the cost-related sourcing choices that put more emphasis on price rather than sustainability pledges.

The constraints of availability are also espoused in convenience-based retail outlets like Co-op stores. Compared to pre-COVID online shopping behaviour, Marcucci et al. (2024) found that the online shopping behaviour followed by offline shopping behaviour with a smaller product assortment may lessen trial and experiment with sustainable products by up to 25 percent. Yet, since this study was a case study of Italy, it should be carefully generalized to the situation in the UK. There are also psychological obstacles, such as consumer attitudes to greenwashing. According to Delmas and Burbano, (2011), greenwashing is described as false or exaggerated claims regarding the environmental issues, a behaviour that compromises trust, and GS1 (2024) found that forty five percent of consumers in the UK are sceptical of sustainability communications by retailers. The qualitative research by Carrington et al. (2014) continues to identify habitual and cognitive barriers by providing evidence that buying behaviors of default purchasing and time constraints in high-stress grocery settings tend to compel consumers to use less sustainable alternatives regardless of their intentions.

These barriers have increased following post-pandemic changes. As Chatham House (2021) is keen to point out, COVID-19-induced supply chain difficulties bolstered food insecurity, which essentially pushed sustainable alternatives to the fringe of consumer preferences. In a survey of households in the UK (Research Reading, 2023), it was established that although awareness and time limitations serve as secondary factors in preventing sustainable choices, economic constraints are the main factor in determining sustainable choices. The literature conflict with each other: Deloitte (2023) finds affordability as the primary impediment to 68% of consumers, but Mintel (2025) finds resilience in affluent segments, which implies that there may be socioeconomic heterogeneity in adoption behaviour.

Methodologically, a large part of current evidence is based on cross-sectional surveys, which do not allow the causal conclusion and longitudinal insights (Carrington et al., 2014). Nichifor et al. (2025) highlight that longitudinal designs are necessary to monitor the post-COVID behavioural changes and the mechanisms of changing economic, psychological, and structural obstacles. In the case of UK-based retailer Co-op, these results highlight a consistent conflict between ethical commitments and store realities. The intention-behaviour gap is enhanced by price premiums, scarcity, and sceptical attitudes and beliefs of consumers, together with the urgency of the situation, interventions that have both operational feasibility and credibility-enhancing communication strategies are crucial in reducing the intention-behaviour gap.

2.4 Perception of Retailer Communication and Credibility

The behaviour of consumers who make use of sustainability communication by retailers is dependent on their perceptions and the effectiveness of the communication depends on the specificity, verifiability, and consistency with actual corporate actions. Delmas and Burbano (2011) state that such an approach of making vague or generalized claims about sustainability is a backlash, as it creates consumer distrust and may lead to a loss of trust. In the UK case, Instinctif (2024) discovered that 60 percent of consumers find it difficult to find that something is genuinely sustainable because of the ambiguous labelling and conflicting messages, which implies that retailers are facing the difficulty to communicate the signal of being ethical and environmentally friendly. The dissertation highlights the fact that besides claims, the perceived credibility of communication plays a key role in influencing consumer decision-making.

Chen (2010) proposed the notion of green trust, which is a model of how the certifications and other verifiable indicators of sustainability can be used to improve consumer perceptions. In the analysis of the path in the study by Chen, the correlation between communication and brand equity was found to be very strong with an alpha of 0.52 showing that the effectiveness of the sustainability messages is directly related to the confidence and loyalty of the consumer. These results indicate that in the case of retailers, trust can be reinforced by credible sustainability cues like accredited certifications, traceable sourcing data, or external audits and this may have a beneficial impact on purchase intention.

Physical and geographical message delivery is especially useful in food retail. The authors concluded that the explicit, place-based, and contextually relevant sustainability claims are best received by consumers because they produce a lower perceived risk and a higher degree of trust in the environmental promise of the retailer (White et al., 2019). On the other hand, when there are discrepancies between values communicated and those that are exhibited, credibility will be undermined to a great extent. To cite an example, a retailer with a high ethical status, such as Co-op, one that involves itself in CSR, should remember that the balance between digital and in-store channels should be consistent to hold the confidence (Co-op, 2023). Medium (2021) investigated the UK consumer perceptions, whereby the overall perception of CSR reports is positive, nevertheless, it was found in-store communication and physical signals tend to be more influential on purchase behaviour. The quantitative research is also criticized on this study of missing out the qualitative aspects of communication indicating that there is a gap in comprehending how the message form, setting and delivery can work together in influencing perceptions.

Transparency and authenticity have been on the rise on consumer demand since 2020. Comparing UK and US consumers, First Insight (2022) observed that the preferences of the UK customers are more skeptical, and 76% expect environmentally friendly and eco-packaging and credible environmental claims. TribeConnect (2024) states that 64 percent of consumers in the United Kingdom are worried about environmental practices, leading to the demand of sustainable product, but 30 percent also do not trust the sustainability statements made by brands. This dichotomy suggests that though legitimacy drives consumers, there is a strong moderation of perceived credibility on actual behaviour.

Putting these results together, the perceptions of retailer communication are dynamic and multi-dimensional: they turn out to be positive in case the sustainability efforts are confirmed and clear but may turn out to be negative in case there are discrepancies, unclear statements, or incompatibility of actions with the statements. The most popular debates in the literature are about the most effective communication medium, where digital, social media and CSR reports are opposed to in-store labelling and signage. Promoting plant-based ratios and visible product choice are some of the strategies supported by ProVeg (2022) to strengthen the ethical message. Such issues as self-report bias (Rachael Ashah, 2021) and cross-sectional designs with restrictive causality are still methodological. Combining surveys, experiments, and observational research

would be beneficial to understand, especially in relation to particular retailers such as Co-op. To improve the levels of credibility of the research approach would directly answer the research question three (RQ3), which is to connect the theoretical findings with the practical applications.

2.5 Interventions and Strategies

Multi-component interventions have shown that a combination of the strategies is the best at raising sustainable purchases. White et al. (2019) emphasize that approaches that combine price incentives with signalling or communication measures are more likely to lead to uptake because financial incentives enhance ethical principles. The effectiveness of the combination of monetary and informational levers is reported by McKinsey (2025), which found that in the UK, sustainable purchase behaviour was boosted by 1520 percent as a result of using discounts with product tags or labelling. Trewern (2022) also highlights SHIFT levers, in which tiny nudges, e.g. disrupting habits through end-of-aisle displays, are effective in drawing consumer behaviour without necessarily having to rely on the conscious decision-making process.

The practical strategies targeting the retailers include operational and promotion strategies. The environmentally friendly operations, e.g. sourcing locally and waste minimization, can indicate commitment but have less impact on the environment; as MarktPOS (2024) states, sourcing locally does not reduce solely the impact of transportation emissions but also appeals to community-based consumers. As Upshop (2024) is able to demonstrate, the introduction of spoilage-reduction technologies makes the process more efficient and helps to promote the sustainability message. The messaging strategies of persuasion, which were experimented by ScienceDirect (2012), led to a greater increase in the sales of 10 percent when the messages were customized to emphasize ethical and environmental advantages. In the same manner, PMC (2024) surveyed in-store modifications, as it was found that healthy and more sustainable retailing environments are possible, but gaps persist in implementing particular methods to these interventions concerning sustainability. ProVeg (2022) also recommends focusing on the plant-based menu to satisfy the needs of the consumers and support the plausible ethical undertakings.

These strategies have been criticized and the argument is that a number of these effects are short term. According to White et al. (2019), although promotions and nudges may improve short-term uptake, longitudinal research studies are limited hence restricting knowledge regarding long-term

behaviour change. In the case of Co-op, loyalty-based messaging in particular is a chance to incorporate both ethical and consumer-oriented positioning, which may increase the effect of the habit-forming quality and the sustained interaction (KingRS, 2021). A combination of multiple levers price, communication, habit nudges, and operational credibility can thus help to augment the likelihood of sustained behaviour change.

2.6 Research Gaps

Although the current literature provides generic drivers and obstacles to sustainable consumption, there are gaps which are especially in retailer-specific, post-pandemic UK settings. According to Nichifor et al. (2025), cross-cultural differences and changes in behaviour across the long term are understudied, which restricts the implications that can be applied by UK retailers. WWF (2024) emphasises a shortage in the achievement of the sustainability goals, which implies that there are too few barriers to operational and consumer adoptions. There is a lack of quantitative research that combines trust, the availability of products, and convenience (Marcucci et al., 2024), and very low quantitative researches which take into account moderating factors of external pressures such as inflation, post-pandemic economic reforms on purchase behaviour (Foodrise, 2025).

This dissertation is a model of predictors of sustainable purchase intentions in Co-op, which assumes that environmental concern and brand trust would have a positive impact on the intentions, and that price and availability are negative moderators. It also takes into account the intention-behaviour gap, and the leverage points include targeted promotion, clear labelling, loyalty incentive and credible communication. In the case of UK retailers, SHIFT aligned interventions involving operational embedding, transparent messaging and situational strategies provide a potential to improve ethical positioning and catalyze sustainable adoption.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The chapter discusses the methodological base used to examine the drivers and obstacles affecting the uptake of sustainable products by the UK consumers within the grocery retail market by using Co-op as a case study. This reiterates the research aim, objectives and questions to make sure it is

congruent with the methods selected and gives transparency and provides reasons as to why the approach was used to be able to replicate and provide rigour. The methodology will follow the Research Onion model developed by Saunders et al. (2019) and move between outer layers (philosophy) to inner layers (data collection and analysis). This stratified structure guarantees systematic framework that takes care of the research issue bearing in mind the ethical and practical limitations.

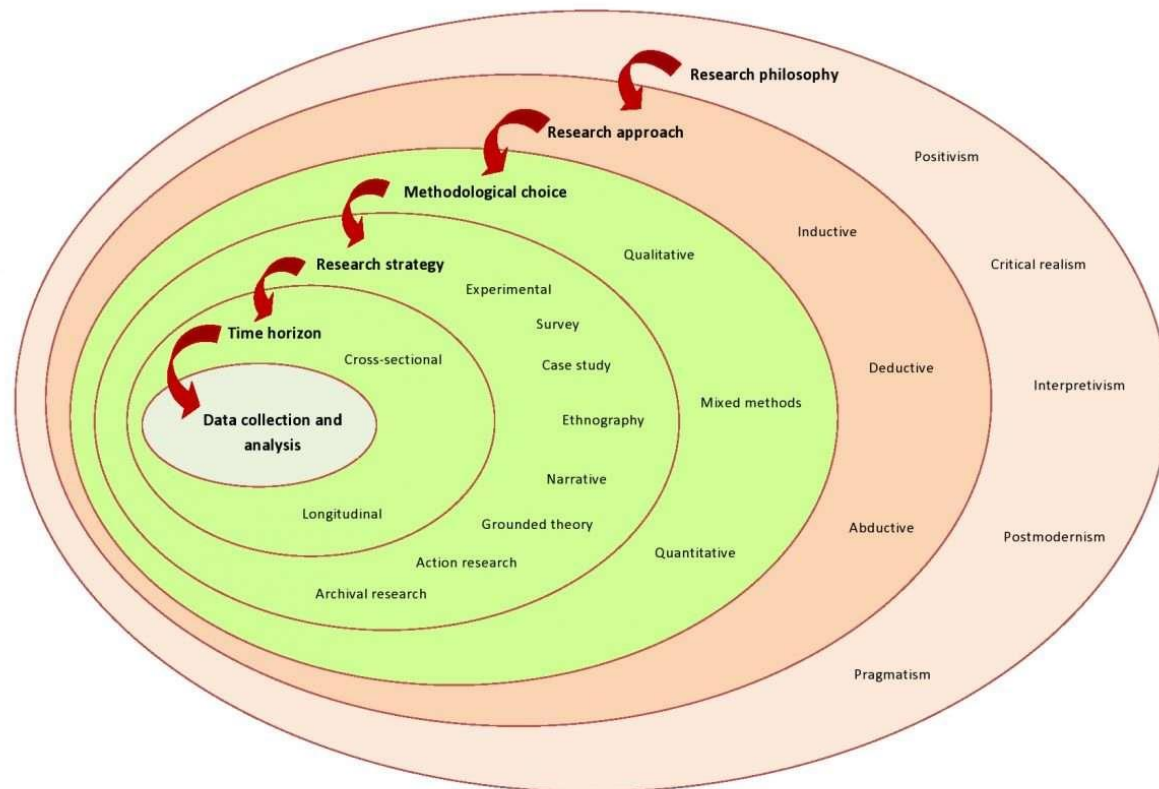


Figure 2 Research Onion Framework (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.1 Research Philosophy

A research philosophy is the most outer part of the Research Onion as it establishes the epistemological and ontological presuppositions of the study (Saunders et al., 2019). This study follows the positivist philosophy whereby we assume that there is an objective reality that can be quantified and measured using the observable phenomena. Positivism is associated with the purpose of testing hypothesised relationships between variables such as environmental concern, trust, and purchase intention and regarding them as independent of the influence of the researcher

(Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Such a position is adequate to analyze consumer behaviour in a retail setting, where patterns can be generalised to gain practical recommendations, as observed in other related research on sustainable consumption (Kamalanon et al., 2022).

Positivism is the opposite of interpretivism, which is focused on the subjective meanings and will be appropriate in exploratory questions based on qualitative research. In this case, the emphasis on measurable drivers and obstacles makes positivism appropriate and makes it possible to statistically infer the intentionbehaviour gap (Carrington et al., 2014). The ontological assumption of the study is that there is only one reality, which is external and can be empirically tested in terms of consumer adoption making the study credible and reliable in findings.

3.2 Research Approach

The layer of research approach is deductive or inductive reasoning as one moves inwards. This research work is deductive as it assumes the known theories (TPB and SHIFT) as the starting point to derive hypotheses and verify them with an empirical data (Saunders et al., 2019). Examples of hypothesis can be as follows: environmental concern has a positive predictive value in purchase intention (TPB) and price sensitivity moderates the relationship. This top-down approach is the one that fits in a quantification of relationships in a mature area such as sustainable consumption where one can either justify or reject previous literature (e.g., Joshi and Rahman, 2015).

A deductive method is opposite to inductive that is a development of theory based on data patterns and would be more suitable to new phenomena. Rationale is that the literature documents drivers/barriers well, which can be used to test the hypothesis to close the gaps in the post-pandemic UK environments (Nichifor et al., 2025). This affects the later layers, placing more emphasis on organised data collection in order to be able to analyse statistically.

3.3 Research Design

The research design describes the general framework under which the study will cover its purpose and research questions. This study has chosen a single case study design with a cross-sectional survey strategy with Co-op as a unit of analysis. The case study design is suitable as it allows to elaborate on an in-depth analysis of a modern, real-life phenomenon in its organisational and market context without trying to make any statistical generalisation outside of that case (Yin,

2018). Co-op has been chosen as it has a good ethical stance in the UK grocery market and as it is associated with the topic of the current study sustainable product adoption. In this case study context, the survey approach was used in the collection of primary consumer data. Surveys are highly appropriate in eliciting attitudes, perceptions and behavioural intentions of a specified population in a structured and comparative manner which is in line with a positivist and deductive research orientation (Saunders et al., 2019). The cross-sectional design enables the consumer perceptions to be taken at one particular time, and that is suitable considering the current drivers and barriers of the study. In general, the given design provides the contextual depth based on the focus on the case studies and allows organizing the measurement of consumer reactions in accordance with the aims of the research.

3.4 Methodological Choice

The dissertation uses a mono-method quantitative research methodology which aligns with the research epistemological view of positivism and deductive research methodology. This methodological selection is also suitable because the initial aim of the study is to measure and quantify consumer attitudes, perceived drivers, and barriers and purchase intentions concerning sustainable products at Co-op, and this objective is best achieved with quantitative research methods, as opposed to the exploration of subjective meanings (Saunders et al., 2019).

Statistical analysis with SPSS was therefore used to analyze numerical data, that were generated using a structured questionnaire with Likert scale items. This will make it possible to calculate descriptive statistics and inferential tests, which will allow making a clear comparison with neutral values and base the objective assessment of consumer sentiment. It was not a qualitative or mixed-method study since the study was not aimed at investigating the lived experiences or narratives in a deeper way, but at assessing the comparative power of individual drivers and barriers among respondents. Moreover, mono-method quantitative designs are advantageous in improving internal consistency and clarity of analysis because it does not have to dilute or integrate methods (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, the selected approach provides high levels of congruence between the research questions, data collection tools, and analytical methods applied in the research.

3.5 Time Horizon

Time horizon layer is what differentiates cross sectional and longitudinal designs. As a cross-sectional study, the research will record data at one time (late 2025) in order to determine the present post-pandemic effects on the adoption (Saunders et al., 2019). This is feasible in a dissertation and this enables one to take snapshots of variables during economic turmoil. Longitudinal designs were also thought about and dismissed because of resource limitations; it would better follow behavioural change but be over-the-top. Rationale: The most recent changes (e.g., inflation) render a current snapshot timely, which matches the amnesty lapses in current empirical research (Marcucci et al., 2024).

3.6 Data Collection

The UK consumer who had experience in shopping at Co-op were sampled in a cross-sectional online survey, which was conducted using Google Forms, as primary sources of data in this study. The survey contained 12 questions, two demographic (age and gender) and 10 attitudinal and behavioural statements that were assessed within a five-point Likert scale (1 strong disagree) to 4 strong agree). The Likert-scale questions included the constructs obtained through the direct observation of the research objectives and Theory of Planned Behaviour, such as attitudes towards sustainable products, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, price sensitivity, confidence in the sustainability claims offered by Co-op, perceived availability, and intention to purchase. One hundred valid responses were achieved and it can be discussed as sufficient to do the exploratory quantitative analysis of consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions at the one-case retailing as well as to be able to estimate the descriptive and inferential statistics reliably (Saunders et al., 2019). Online surveys have been used extensively in the sustainability and consumer behaviour studies because of their efficiency, uniformity and the fact that they are suitable to use in structured measurement (Bryman, 2016).

3.7 Sampling and Recruitment

The target population is UK residents (18+) who shopped at Co-op or other grocers in the past 6 months. Convenience sampling via social media, university lists, and community groups yields n=100, suitable for exploratory regression (Saunders et al., 2019). A screening question ensures relevance. Inclusion/exclusion criteria are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion Type	Description	Rationale
Inclusion	UK residents aged 18+	Ensures legal adulthood and relevance to UK context
Inclusion	Shopped at Co-op or similar grocers in past 6 months	Targets active consumers for recent recall
Inclusion	Access to internet for survey completion	Facilitates online data collection
Exclusion	Under 18 years	Ethical concerns with minors
Exclusion	No grocery shopping in past 6 months	Irrelevant to adoption behaviour
Exclusion	Non-UK residents	Focus on UK-specific regulatory/environmental factors

Convenience sampling balances accessibility with representativeness, though not national; criteria mitigate bias by focusing on engaged shoppers (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

3.8 Data Analysis

The quantitative methods of data analysis in SPSS were the only ones applicable to the study since the research design is positivist and deductive. First, descriptive statistics frequencies, means, and standard deviations were computed in order to summarise the demographic data and overall results of the respondents regarding the Likert-scale items and to give a picture of central tendencies and dispersion (Field, 2018). Scale reliability was also evaluated with Cronbach alpha before making

an inferential analysis and the values above 0.70 mark the acceptable internal consistency of items that measure similar constructs such as attitudes, trust, and purchase intention (Hair et al., 2014). It was followed by the inferential analysis using correlation analysis to test the strength and direction of correlation between key drivers and barriers and multiple regression to test the predictive power of variables such as attitudes, perceived availability, trust and price sensitivity on the intention of consumers to purchase sustainable products. This is because the approach is used to test relationship theoretically developed and facilitate valid inference of behaviour (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.9 Ethical Considerations and Data Management

The university committee gave their ethical approval. The participants were given elaborate information sheets and electronic consent. No identifiers about the subjects were taken and all data were reported through secure and anonymised storage. They could drop out whenever they wanted prior to more submissions and the risks, including survey fatigue, were reduced by the use of limited design of the surveys. This method is consistent with the guidelines of BERA (2018), so the participants will remain confidential and agree to take part in the study and will not have their rights violated.

3.10 Limitations

The study is limited in a number of ways. The limitation to generalisability is that convenience sampling (n=100) is used, and self-report measures are vulnerable to a social desirability bias. Cross-sectional design has a limitation to causation, as it only captures associations at a point in time. Some of the mitigations are validated scales, attention checks, and transparent reporting with confidence interval (Saunders et al., 2019). As a result, the results are exploratory, indicative but not nationally representative as the foundation to future, more powerful studies.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

This chapter highlights the quantitative research concerning the data obtained by the means of survey research to investigate the uptake of sustainable products at Co-op among the UK consumers. The analysis is organized in a way to answer each research question systematically, with the help of some statistical methods that are suitable in relation to the character of the data and the purposes of the study. Since all the attitudinal and behavioural variables were quantified using a five point Likert scale, descriptive statistics was initially used to summarise the central tendency and dispersion. Means, standard deviations and frequencies can give a convenient summary of the perceptions of the respondents, and the first patterns and differences can be perceived among the major constructs.

To determine whether the attitudes and perceptions of respondents were significantly different than a neutral position, it was part of a one-sample t-test with the test value of 3 which was the center of the Likert scale. This method can be used to assess the presence of agreement or disagreement between the responses on averages but not neutrality. The application of one-sample t-tests allows bringing out the statistical interpretation of consumer sentiment very clearly without subjecting an unnecessary complexity to the model. Descriptive statistics and inferential testing are together giving a strong but clear analogy framework and findings can be presented in an objective and reliable manner. The chapter has a logical advancement of demographic profiling to attitudes, barriers, perceptions of credibility and purchase intention in a logical manner that is consistent with the research objectives and questions.

4.1 Demographic Analysis

This segment gives the profile of the sample in order to put into perspective the interpretation of the attitudinal and behavioural results. Demographic analysis takes the form of age and gender, which is in line with the survey design. Table 2 and Table 3 report descriptive statistics and frequency distributions respectively to evaluate sample structure, whether it can be representative and generalisation implications across the UK grocery retail setting.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	100	1.00	4.00	1.8400	.80050
Gender	100	1.00	2.00	1.4800	.50212
Valid N (listwise)	100				

Table 3 Demographic Analysis.

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Age	18-24	40	40.0	40.0	40.0
	25-34	37	37.0	37.0	77.0
	35-44	22	22.0	22.0	99.0
	45-54	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
Gender	Male	52	52.0	52.0	52.0
	Female	48	48.0	48.0	100.0

Age Distribution

The age distribution shows that this is more of a young sample. Table 3 indicates that the majority of the respondents were between the age of 18 and 34 (18-24: 40; 25-34: 37), with another 22% of the respondents aged 35-44 and 1% aged 45-54. In line with this trend, Table 2 indicates that the mean age of 1.84 is on a coded scale (1=18-24 to 4=45-54), and this means that the central tendency is between individuals that are younger and those older as well. Most importantly, this distribution is analytically convenient to study the sustainable grocery adoption since younger groups tend to have a higher environmental concern and can be more susceptible to environmental cues of ethical consumption, thus raising the pro-sustainability attitudes and intentions of the data. The lack of

older consumers in the sample however narrows the demographic span and could underestimate the barriers that are more common among older generations, e.g. the inability to change habits or perceived behavioral control. The standard deviation (0.80), although relatively small, indicates that there is dispersal but the sample is still skewed to the youth, and this therefore, needs to be considered in generalising to the entire UK population.

Gender Distribution

The gender is almost balanced, 52 percent men and 48 percent women were the respondents (Table 3). This narrow divide is indicated by the descriptive mean of 1.48 on the gender code (1=male; 2=female) and the low standard deviation (0.50) that suggests a narrow variation to be found in variables coded on a binary basis (Table 2). This balance enhances internal credibility by minimizing the possibility of the results being skewed by one group of genders. However, it is common in sustainable consumption studies to find systematic gender disparities between ethical purchasing and risk perceptions, hence, minor imbalances can affect general averages on trust, price sensitivity, and purchase intention. Therefore, future analysis must understand aggregate results as they may be contaminated with gender composition as an undercurrent of influence on aggregate sustainability respondent, in a sample that is otherwise reasonably balanced.

4.2 Factors Influencing Consumer Adoption of Sustainable Products at Co-op

This section presents the statistical findings relating to consumers' sustainability attitudes and perceived influences on purchasing sustainable products at Co-op. Descriptive statistics and one-sample *t*-tests are used to evaluate whether respondents' views differ significantly from a neutral position, thereby indicating positive or negative tendencies toward sustainable grocery consumption.

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive statistics present a summary of the perceptions of the respondents on four statements amid the sustainability issue (Table 4). All average values are above the neutral midpoint of 3 which means the general trend toward the agreement. The maximum average rating is noted to the statement which states the better of sustainable grocery products to the environment ($M = 3.46$), and the overall results indicate that the respondents are mostly aware of the environmental advantages of sustainable grocery products. This is succeeded by People important

to me support buying sustainable groceries ($M = 3.33$) and Buying sustainable grocery products is important to me ($M = 3.30$), which reveal that there is moderate personal and social support of sustainable purchasing. The least mean ($M = 3.29$) is registered in the statement I can easily find sustainable products when shopping at Co-op though the statement is not neutral. This is an indication that respondents do not greatly disagree with the ease of finding sustainable products although their agreeability is lower than attitudinal and social. Standard deviations are between 1.26 and 1.51, which can be described as moderate fluctuation of the answers and that there is a difference in the experiences and perception of the sample.

Table 4 One-Sample Statistics.

	N	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
Buying sustainable grocery products is important to me.	100	3.30	.151	1.508
Sustainable products are better for the environment.	100	3.46	.133	1.329
People important to me support buying sustainable groceries.	100	3.33	.126	1.264
I can easily find sustainable products when shopping at Co-op.	100	3.29	.130	1.297

One-Sample t-Test Analysis

To assess whether respondents' attitudes differed significantly from a neutral position, one-sample *t*-tests were conducted using a test value of 3, which represents the midpoint of the five-point Likert scale and indicates neither agreement nor disagreement with each statement.

Table 5 One-Sample Test.

	Test Value = 3
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	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Buying sustainable grocery products is important to me.	1.990	99	.049	.300	.00	.60
Sustainable products are better for the environment.	3.461	99	.001	.460	.20	.72
People important to me support buying sustainable groceries.	2.611	99	.010	.330	.08	.58
I can easily find sustainable products when shopping at Co-op.	2.236	99	.028	.290	.03	.55

The results indicate that all four mean scores are statistically significantly higher than the neutral midpoint ($p < .05$). The strongest deviation from neutrality is observed for environmental benefit perceptions ($t = 3.461, p = .001$), suggesting a particularly robust agreement among respondents. Social support and perceived personal importance also demonstrate statistically significant positive differences ($p = .010$ and $p = .049$ respectively). Perceived ease of finding sustainable products, while significant ($p = .028$), shows the smallest mean difference, indicating comparatively weaker agreement.

Overall, these findings show that respondents hold **consistently positive views** regarding sustainable grocery products and related influences, although the strength of agreement varies across dimensions. Attitudinal and belief-based measures exhibit stronger endorsement than practical considerations, highlighting observable differences in how consumers evaluate sustainability-related aspects of their shopping experience.

4.3 Barriers Preventing the Purchase of Sustainable Products

This section examines key barriers that may discourage consumers from purchasing sustainable products at Co-op. Using descriptive statistics and one-sample *t*-tests, the analysis evaluates perceptions of price and product availability to determine whether these factors represent significant obstacles relative to a neutral position.

Descriptive Analysis

Table 6 presents the descriptive statistics that summarise the perceptions of the respondents about price sensitivity and constraints associated with availability (Table 6). The overall average of the statement Sustainable products at Co-op are too expensive to me is 3.37 which is a moderate tendency towards agreeing. This is an indication that price is an overall consideration by the respondents as a possible concern when it comes to sustainable alternatives. The standard deviation of 1.32 indicates the level of variation in price perceptions which can be considered as noticeable, meaning that cost sensitivity will vary significantly across different people.

The mean of 3.58 in the statement Sustainable products are conveniently available in my local Co-op store implies that the statement is more likely to be observed by the respondents as true. The smaller standard deviation (1.20) represents a higher degree of consistency in the responses. Combined, these results indicate that availability has a relatively positive perception, but price issues are more controversial, which indicates that both enabling and limiting factors are present in one shopping setting.

Table 6 One-Sample Statistics.

	N	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
Sustainable products at Co-op are too expensive for me.	100	3.37	.132	1.323
Sustainable products are conveniently available in my local Co-op store.	100	3.58	.120	1.199

One-Sample t-Test Analysis

To assess whether perceptions of these barriers differed significantly from neutrality, one-sample *t*-tests were conducted using a test value of 3, representing the midpoint of the five-point Likert scale.

Table 7 One-Sample Test.

	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Sustainable products at Co-op are too expensive for me.	2.796	99	.006	.370	.11	.63
Sustainable products are conveniently available in my local Co-op store.	4.837	99	.000	.580	.34	.82

Both statements show mean values **significantly higher than neutral** ($p < .01$). Perceived availability exhibits the strongest deviation ($t = 4.837$, $p < .001$), while price sensitivity also demonstrates a statistically significant positive deviation ($t = 2.796$, $p = .006$).

Interpretively, these results indicate that respondents simultaneously recognise the availability of sustainable products and perceive them as relatively expensive. This suggests that while physical access is not a dominant barrier, price remains a salient deterrent for a substantial proportion of consumers. The coexistence of these findings highlights that improving availability alone may be insufficient to overcome adoption resistance without addressing perceived cost concerns.

4.4 Consumer Perceptions of Co-op's Sustainability Communication and Credibility

This section explores consumer perceptions of Co-op's sustainability communication and credibility. Descriptive statistics and one-sample *t*-tests are used to assess levels of trust and clarity

in sustainability messaging, determining whether these perceptions differ significantly from a neutral position.

Descriptive Analysis

Table 8 presents the descriptive statistics of trust and the clarity of communication. The sentence I trust Co-op sustainability and ethical assertions is marked with an average rating of 3.44, which means that the respondents tend to agree in most cases. This implies that there is a positive attitude towards the ethical stance of Co-op among the sampled consumers. A standard deviation of 1.25 suggests average variability in responses, and this means that though overall trust is moderately high it is not an equally experienced phenomenon in all respondents.

In comparison, the phrase Co-op widely informs about the products that are sustainable has a smaller mean of 3.20 which is slightly higher than the neutral point. This shows lower consensus over what sustainability communication entails as opposed to trust in ethical claims. The standard deviation is relatively large and measures 1.44, which implies that there is a huge variation in the responses, and this indicates inconsistency in the level of clarity of sustainability information to consumers. It seems that some of the respondents are without any doubts about the communication practices of Co-op, whereas the rest are unsure or less confident. In sum, the descriptive findings point to a difference between the general trust in Co-op as an ethical retailer and attitude towards the effectiveness and continuity of its sustainability communication at the point of sale.

Table 8 Descriptive Statistics.

	N	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
I trust Co-op's sustainability and ethical claims.	100	3.44	.125	1.250
Co-op clearly communicates which products are sustainable.	100	3.20	.144	1.435

One-Sample t-Test Analysis

One-sample *t*-tests were conducted using a test value of 3 to determine whether respondents' perceptions differed significantly from a neutral stance.

Table 9 One-Sample Test.

	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
I trust Co-op's sustainability and ethical claims.	3.521	99	.001	.440	.19	.69
Co-op clearly communicates which products are sustainable.	1.393	99	.167	.200	-.08	.48

The results show that trust in Co-op's sustainability and ethical claims is **statistically significantly higher than neutral** ($t = 3.521$, $p = .001$), indicating a clear positive perception among respondents. The mean difference of 0.44 further reinforces that trust levels exceed neutrality by a meaningful margin. In contrast, perceptions of communication clarity do not differ significantly from neutral ($t = 1.393$, $p = .167$), suggesting that respondents neither clearly agree nor disagree that Co-op communicates sustainability information effectively.

Interpretation of these findings indicates a divergence between credibility and communication clarity. While respondents generally trust Co-op's ethical claims, the absence of statistical significance for communication clarity implies uncertainty or inconsistency in how sustainability information is conveyed. This suggests that consumers may believe in Co-op's intentions and

values but experience variability in recognising or understanding which products are sustainable during their shopping journey. The wide confidence interval for communication clarity further supports this variability, indicating mixed perceptions across the sample. Overall, the results highlight that trust alone does not guarantee clarity, and that effective sustainability communication may require greater consistency to be uniformly recognised by consumers.

4.5 Consumer Willingness to Purchase Sustainable Products in the Future

This section examines consumers’ willingness to purchase sustainable products from Co-op in the future. Using descriptive statistics and one-sample *t*-tests, the analysis evaluates respondents’ stated intentions and self-reported purchasing tendencies to determine whether these outcomes differ significantly from a neutral position.

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive statistics for purchase intention and self-reported behaviour are presented in Table 10. The statement “I intend to buy sustainable products from Co-op in the future” records a mean score of 3.35, indicating a moderate tendency toward agreement. This suggests that respondents are generally inclined toward future sustainable purchasing, though the strength of this intention is not particularly strong. The standard deviation of 1.38 indicates notable variation, reflecting differences in commitment levels across respondents.

The statement “I often choose sustainable options when shopping at Co-op” shows a higher mean score of 3.58, suggesting that respondents more frequently perceive themselves as engaging in sustainable purchasing behaviour. The lower standard deviation (1.22) indicates slightly greater consistency in responses compared to future intention. Collectively, these descriptive results suggest that self-reported current behaviour is somewhat stronger than stated future intention, implying that while sustainable purchasing is already occurring for some consumers, commitment levels vary across the sample.

Table 10 Descriptive Statistics.

	N	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic

I intend to buy sustainable products from Co-op in the future.	100	3.35	.138	1.381
I often choose sustainable options when shopping at Co-op.	100	3.58	.122	1.224

One-Sample t-Test Analysis

To assess whether purchase intention and behaviour differ significantly from a neutral stance, one-sample *t*-tests were conducted using a test value of 3, representing the midpoint of the five-point Likert scale.

Table 11 One-Sample Test.

	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
I intend to buy sustainable products from Co-op in the future.	2.535	99	.013	.350	.08	.62
I often choose sustainable options when shopping at Co-op.	4.738	99	.000	.580	.34	.82

The results indicate that both purchase intention and self-reported behaviour are **statistically significantly higher than neutral** ($p < .05$). Self-reported behaviour demonstrates the strongest deviation ($t = 4.738$, $p < .001$), while future intention also shows a significant positive difference ($t = 2.535$, $p = .013$).

These findings may be interpreted to mean that the respondents are not merely willing to buy sustainable products in the future, but they also state that they are already buying sustainable products to a significant degree. The statistical impact which is stronger on the current behaviour implies that sustainable purchasing has become a part of the shopping habits of a certain group of consumers, but future intention seems more diversified. The greater confidence range on intention indicates a higher degree of uncertainty on long term commitment that respondents had. The whole findings indicate a positive yet weakly uneven intentions to participate in sustainable purchasing, and also shows that there are differences in strength between the future intention and the current behaviour of all those sampled.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter puts into context the results of the empirical study discussed in Chapter 4 with respect to the research aim and questions of the study. It does not only describe statistically but analyzes the importance of the findings and how and why the drivers and barriers of consumer adoption of sustainable products are influenced by specific drivers and barriers at Co-op. The discussion places the findings in the context of the larger literature on sustainability and consumer behaviour research and determines areas where the discussed findings agreed and opposed current literature. Through a critical assessment of the implication of consumer attitudes, perceived obstacles and those relating to the retailer, this chapter illustrates how the research would be useful in the comprehension of sustainable consumption in the UK grocery retail sector.

5.1 Discussion of Findings

This part interprets the results of the survey regarding the adoption of sustainable grocery products by the UK consumers at Co-op, which relates to the four research questions and the larger issue of unequal application of sustainable buying when making daily grocery decisions. It describes the implication of the patterns on consumer behaviour for the sustainability strategy of Co-op by relating findings to existing evidence on the importance of environmental concern, social influence, perceived control, price premiums, trust and scepticism of green claims.

Drivers shaping adoption at Co-op

The initial question was: what factors have the strongest impact on adoption of sustainable products at Co-op. Chapter 4 demonstrates the positive underlying trend in all items of the attitudinal and social-influence scale: all the means exceed the neutral mid-point and all the one sample tests are significantly higher than the three-point level. This implies that the weak-adoption in this sample is not likely to occur due to the lack of pro-sustainability sentiment. The drivers, instead, are represented as reinforcing factors whose influence relies on the conditions of the retail. The greatest consensus was on the idea that sustainable products are more environmentally friendly, which means that the primary justification of consumers is considered to be seen in the environmental impact and not in novelty. This is consistent with broader findings that perceived green value and environmental concern are useful antecedents of green purchase intentions (Joshi and Rahman, 2015; Kamalanon et al., 2022).

Simultaneously, the mean scores are in the mid-threes, which imply a favourable but not very strong conviction. Practically, sustainability can be perceived by the respondents as a desirable but not necessarily decisive factor, which contributes to the explanation of why sustainable sales might be behind the development of the entire sector even during the period of a high overall awareness (British Retail Consortium, 2024). This subtlety aligns with the ethical intention-behaviour disparity: the positive attitudes can be compromised by time constraints, conflicting interests, and routine practices when people go to the shops (Carrington et al., 2014). Shopping in Co-op convenience formats can be very quick and purposeful, and therefore limits the time one has to focus on the label comparison or finding alternatives.

A social influence was also a strong positive factor. Respondents were more likely to agree that important others endorse sustainable grocery purchase which is in line with prior evidence that demonstrates that norms can be used to a legitimate switching brands or incurring small premiums much so with younger consumers (White et al., 2019). The sample, consisting of young people, provides a possible contextual reason, because the younger generations tend to have a stronger climate concern and pro-sustainability identity (Deloitte, 2023). In the case of Co-op this suggests that community positioning and local approval which is already a component of its ethical story can be used to normalise ethical decisions at the point of purchase.

Ease of finding sustainable products operationalised as perceived behavioural control was significant but not as strong as environmental belief. This implies that consumers are potentially driven but not empowered in-store. Since the process of buying groceries is habitual and low involvement, even minor inconveniences like unclear shelf markings or the lack of consistency in their location can significantly decrease uptake. Synthesised behavioural evidence in SHIFT highlights that sustainability cues can be made tangible with the help of simple and consistent signposting to facilitate intention-action conversion (White et al., 2019). Parallel to this, it has been shown in the TPB research that the perceived control proves to be particularly significant in situations when the constraints are not imaginary but practical (Ajzen, 1991; Armitage and Conner, 2001).

In general, the mutually reinforcing set of drivers of Research Question 1 is environmental benefit beliefs and personal importance, which are a motivator, social reinforcement, which is made by supportive norms, and enabling which is made by perceived ease of finding sustainable options.

The results suggest that the opportunity involved in Co-op is not as much about raising the concern as it is about stimulating it at the point of decision, where a lack of attention and habit could spread the influence of favourable attitudes (Carrington et al., 2014; White et al., 2019).

Another implication is that motivation profile indicates that there is an opportunity of low-cost reinforcement as opposed to heavy campaigns of persuasion. In case consumers are already convinced by the environmental case, the generic messaging can produce decreasing returns. Rather, Co-op will need to focus on particular, grocery-relevant advantages like a decreased plastic, local sourcing, or legitimate certification, since concrete cues alleviate uncertainty in quick judgments (Young et al., 2010). The findings also suggest a segmentation of a few respondents, through pro-sustainability identities, and others are close to the neutral and might be affected primarily when sustainable choices are cross-salient and similar to one with respect to price and quality. This is in line with the dispersion that is witnessed among items.

Barriers preventing purchase of sustainable products

Research Question 2 was concerned with the obstacles that discourage customers to buy sustainable alternatives at Co-op. The pattern in Chapter 4 is bold as it isolates two commonly interrelated constraints, the availability and the price. The respondents understood that sustainable products are easily accessible in their local Co-op and the perception was highly above the neutral and price sensitivity was highly above the neutral showing that many consumers either can still view sustainable products as expensive. The combination of this indicates that Co-op assortment and placement might have become better such that the perceived availability does not represent the dominant factor, but the perceived economic trade-off is still pertinent.

The salience of price issues is in line with historical findings that a price premium is among the most persistent obstacles to green purchasing, especially in the fast-moving consumer goods where it is easy to switch products and where the budgets of the basket are tightly controlled (Young et al., 2010; Joshi and Rahman, 2015). The UK conditions after the pandemic enhance this barrier. High prices of food and inflation requirements have propelled numerous households into value-seeking behaviour and indicators of poverty and insecurity demonstrate that affordability is a genuine hindrance to many shoppers (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2024). In this regard, consumers who harbor good sustainability attitudes might regard sustainable options as discretionary. That too expensive is positioned above the neutrality thus contributes to the

explanation why sustainable sales growth may be behind the growth of retail in general, even when interest is very high (British Retail Consortium, 2024). In the case of Co-op, this implies that the affordability perceptions can supersede the ethical motivation when carrying out regular top-up shopping activities in most shops.

Simultaneously, the availability of convenience is strongly agreed upon which is also a significant counterpoint. Previous research tends to emphasize difficulties in access and visibility as some of the main frictions of ethical consumption (Carrington et al., 2014). According to the Co-op case, the scarcity of the products can be not so intense, at least when it comes to the product categories that consumers perceive as sustainable. This may be the ethical positioning of Co-op and the values it has in terms of fairtrade and responsible sourcing (Co-op, 2023). A respondent, however, can make inferences based on experiencing a few sustainable products instead of being able to experience a product selection across categories. The outcome therefore is an indication of perceived convenience, and not necessarily full choice.

A combination of the two findings indicates a less obvious barrier terrain. The barrier is not about the access but the justification of value, in case the consumers are able to find sustainable ones but still consider them costly. This corresponds with the research that has indicated that consumers have increased readiness to pay premiums when the benefits are credible and personally relevant yet recede when statements are abstract or when budgetary constraints occur (Deloitte, 2023). It further indicates that retailer strategies that only increase sustainable ranges can only have declining returns unless supported by price architecture, promotions or more obvious value signalling. More than that, convenience formats can interact with price sensitivity, where smaller stores of Co-op might experience more unit costs and a more limited promotional depth than larger supermarkets, and thus perceived gaps become less easily reduced.

A significant implication on the problem statement of the current study is that the barrier is not merely that price is high, but price is not reasonably justified at the shelf. In the case of perceived environmental value, consumers can continue to have affordability as the priority unless sustainability can be brought closer by credible certification and vivid comparisons with less frequent incentives that diminish the risk of alternative trial (Young et al., 2010). The fact that the sample was dominated by youth and significant price issues are observed also indicates that even in populations that are environmentally conscious, it is not possible to assume willingness to pay.

Comprehensively, Research Question 2 can be answered by establishing the price sensitivity as the main deterrent in this case, and the perceived availability as relatively enabling and not limiting as a refinement to recommendations.

Perceptions of Co-op's sustainability communication and credibility

Research Question 3 was on the perception of sustainability communication, credibility and ethical image of Co-op by the consumers. The Chapter 4 findings show a distinct division: the respondents had statistically significant trust in the sustainability and ethical statements of Co-op, and their perception of Co-op being explicit about the product that is sustainable did not significantly change compared to their neutrality. This deviation is significant in that it implies that brand credibility in general does not necessarily lead to clarity in point of decision.

The positive trust indicator aligns with the long-standing reputation that Co-op has as an ethical retailer, as well as its emphasis on reporting its responsible sourcing and community value (Co-op, 2023). In a broader sense, trust is several times determined to be a key enabling factor in green purchasing since it diminishes perceived risk and information-processing cost especially where the sustainability attributes are not easily verifiable in a direct manner (Chen, 2010). In a grocery situation where customers tend to make frequent, low involvement purchases, the reputation of retailers can serve as a shortcut: when the retailer is viewed to be credible, customers will feel free to adopt labelled options without undergoing research. The results of the survey thus point out that the ethical brand equity developed by Co-op is acting as a supportive state of sustainable adoption.

The lack of consensus on the clarity of communication, however, suggests that there are quite a number of respondents who are not certain as to whether sustainability information is always present and knowable in-store. This is in line with the broader issue of the complexity of labels and the overload of information in ethical markets where there may be a number of logos, claims, and category-specific criteria that may mislead consumers instead of informing them (Young et al., 2010). It is also related to the emergence of scepticism regarding the issue of environmental marketing and greenwashing. Under uncertainty of claims, consumers will discount the sustainability attribute or abide by price and familiarity especially when they are in a hurry (Delmas and Burbano, 2011). UK consumer research has observed the increasing lack of trust in sustainability labels following high-profile controversies, and this can increase the need to use transparent, standardised messages (GS1, 2024). The fact that this has been established does not

mean that people do not trust Co-op, but it does indicate that product level cues might not be so effective to enable sustainability to be considered easy to recognise in normal shopping trips.

There are some contextual issues assisting in understanding why the level of trust may be high, whereas the clarity of the communication is questionable. First, the convenience formats of Co-op have limited space to use on the shelf-edge education, and ranges can also differ by size of stores, thus making the messaging inconsistent among stores. Second, there are many dimensions of sustainability in grocery retail: recyclability of packaging, supply ethics, carbon footprint, and animal welfare can all be called by different titles. In the absence of a unifying visual system, consumers will imagine communication to be disjointed even in cases where information is there. Third, consumers can have a different understanding of sustainable, in the sense that even direct signals by the retailer can be deemed imprecise when it does not comply with the criteria held by the consumer. This interpretation flexibility can be observed in the reviews of green purchasing where consumers tend to alternate between definitions as a result of the salience and their own priorities (Joshi and Rahman, 2015).

Practically, the trust-clarity gap is significant as it presents where Co-op will benefit the most regarding relatively low-cost upgrades. When credibility is already given by the consumers, well-established signposting can transform such goodwill into the confidence level of choices at the product level. Synthesis Behavioural change focuses on tangibility as one of the paths to act: tangibilising the sustainability benefits makes them more concrete, similar, and noticeable, which leads to cognitive overload and a higher percentage of action (White et al., 2019). All in all, Research Question 3 is resolved because it concludes that Co-op is credible when it comes to sustainability, but its messaging about what products are sustainable is felt to be inconsistent or not clearly enough articulated, which can act as a barrier to the transfer of trust to a stable sustainable purchase. Simpler product tagging and standardised shelf cues may thus increase trust by making ethical decisions less scary and fast.

Strategies to enhance future willingness to purchase sustainable products

Research Question 4 posed the question of what can be done to make consumers more willing to purchase sustainable products in the future. Although Chapter 6 will build the recommendations in further detail, the results of Chapter 4 already suggest what levers will most likely drive up the willingness and stabilise sustainable purchasing at Co-op. Two findings are central. First, the

intention to purchase sustainable goods in the future at Co-op as reported by the respondents was considered to be considerably higher than the neutral one, which shows the positive forward-looking orientation. Second, self-reported behaviour- usually making the sustainable choice at Co-op was even higher above neutral. Combined, these results indicate that there is a solid foundation of current sustainable purchasing, and there is a larger portion which is willing, yet not entirely committed.

An important touch is the fact that, more than the future intention, current behaviour is in the signal. The second possible interpretation is that a possible group of consumers already make regular purchases of some sustainable choices, either because those choices fall within the default range, they possess a well-known certification, or they are simply noticeable. However, when probed concerning the future in a broad way, the interviewees might expect limitations especially in terms of affordability that might not allow them to maintain or enlarge these options. This meaning aligns with sources that intentions are unstable during changes in external conditions, particularly in markets that tend unstable economically in the grocery sector (British Retail Consortium, 2024). It is also similar to more comprehensive descriptions of intention-behaviour mismatch, in which ethical intentions are also present in combination with contextual pressures and trade-offs (Carrington et al., 2014).

Based on the above findings, methods of increasing willingness will presumably be those that will lessen perceived sacrifice and greater confidence at the shelf. The price sensitivity was considered a very big hindrance and readiness will be reinforced when the sustainable choices are positioned as worthwhile and not luxurious delights. Earlier research indicates that consumers will be more willing to accept a premium when the benefits are credible, personally relevant, but will react intensely to promotions, bundles, and try-me offers, which reduce the perceived risk of switching (Young et al., 2010; Deloitte, 2023). In the case of Co-op, this need not be systemic discounting; it may be a price-matching on key, entry-level sustainable products, periodic promotion which is paralleled with pay cycles or loyalty schemes which turn the moral will into tangible cash.

The willingness also depends on the clarity of communication since it determines whether the consumers believe that they can do what they want without extra effort. Chapter 4 demonstrated that consumers believe the claims of Co-op but are balanced on whether products are made communicated to be sustainable. Low level of clarity may not lead to action since consumers will

not be able to find the appropriate products easily. Green trust research reasons that the perceived risk of greenwashing is reduced when information is simple, consistent and verifiable enhancing credibility (Chen, 2010). Willingness can thus be reinforced by enhancing transparency by use of consistent shelf labels, a sustainable choice icon and short description.

Lastly, the willingness can be enhanced by the strengthening of the social and identity motivation that already seem to be positive in this sample. Social endorsement was greatly surpassing the neutral, and behavioural change synthesis shows that the local community cues, observable involvement and evaluation of overall impact can facilitate maintaining the pro-environmental decisions in the long-term (White et al., 2019). The community-oriented model of Co-op offers such messaging such as improving the connection between purchases and their consequences or displaying the achievement of national priorities in the form of packaging reduction (DEFRA, 2022). Comprehensively, Research Question 4 will be answered by proposing that the future willingness can be contributed to by a combination of the focus on affordability cues, better communication on the product level, and reinforcement of the existing normative support all of which will help to make sustainable choices easy, credible, and worth the perceived cost in a shopping situation.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

The results of this research can provide significant theoretical educational information regarding the interaction of consumer motivations and constraints to form sustainable purchasing behaviour in a typical grocery shopping setting. Viewed through the prism of the Social-Theoretical Model of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and the SHIFT model, the findings contribute to the current discussions about the intention behaviour gap in ethical purchases as they allow explaining why positive sustainability orientations do not necessarily result in a regular purchasing behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Carrington et al., 2014; White et al., 2019).

In terms of TPB, the results make a great contribution to the viability of the attitudinal and normative elements in sustainable consumption. Respondents also had very positive assessments of sustainable products, mainly regarding environmental benefits, and gave indications that personal significance of purchasing sustainably is important to them. The findings support the body of literature that positive views on environmental protection are still a central force behind

ethical consumption (Joshi and Rahman, 2015). Nevertheless, the moderate level of these mean scores implies that sustainability is perceived positively, yet it does not prevail in the decision-making process. This subtlety corresponds to TPB-based studies suggesting that attitudes are most powerful when highly salient and unambiguous, which might not always be the case in the grocery shopping situations characterized by a high amount of urgency (Ajzen, 1991; Armitage and Conner, 2001).

The concept of subjective norm also proved to be a influential factor as the respondents noted that those close to them endorse sustainable grocery buying. This result confirms theoretical hypotheses that ethical consumption is not an individualistic behavior, but instead it is socially-constructed, especially in a household and community context where people commonly decide on grocery choices or at least observe them (White et al., 2019). The existence of supportive norms enhances the motivational pressure to act in a sustainable way in the terms of TPB. This would mean that the adoption of the concept of sustainability in Co-op is not purely motivated by personal values, but also by the perceived societal expectations, which would support the applicability of normative influence in the context of every-day consumption.

Operationalised by ease of finding sustainable products, and perception of availability, perceived behavioural control was also found to be significant, although not as strongly so as attitudes and norms. It indicates that consumers tend to believe that they can take the action they prefer concerning their sustainability in Co-op stores, at least in the aspect of accessibility. Theoretically, this result makes TPB applications in grocery retail more precise as it suggests that physical unavailability does not have a major impact in undermining control beliefs. Rather, the control seems to be more economic and cognitive constraint sensitive, i.e. price premium, and effort to find sustainable options within a short time. This justifies the criticisms of very limited view of perceived behavioural control which is based on physical access alone, and not resource and capability limits (Young et al., 2010).

The SHIFT framework is an extension of TPB, that describes why perceived control and positive intentions can still not translate into consistent behaviour. One key lesson of the findings is the centrality of the perceived sacrifice especially price sensitivity. The respondents also showed significant consensus that sustainable products are prohibitively priced and this aspect is even after recognizing the availability and environmental advantages of sustainable products. This is a direct

result of the “Individual self, and Feelings and cognition dimension of SHIFT that prioritize the loss aversion and short-term cost factors as obstacles to sustainable decisions (White et al., 2019). In principle, this implies that moral motivation can be overridden by economic trade-offs in many cases of everyday purchasing, particularly when the situation is characterized by a constraint on the budget, which supports hypotheses that sustainability adoption is not value-based in isolation, but context-specific (Carrington et al., 2014).

The other important contribution is based on the difference between trust and clarity of communication. Whereas, the respondents thought that Co-op was highly trusted with its sustainability and ethical assertions, the views on the perception of effective communication of sustainability did not vary significantly between those of neutrality. This difference is consistent with the tangible focus of SHIFT: customers may not necessarily take a specific action based on trust in a retailer, unless they can notice sustainability cues when making a decision (White et al., 2019). Theoretically, these result contradict assumptions that credibility is an effective driver of ethical consumption, but emphasise the role of the operationalisation of sustainability information in-store. It further adds value to literature on green trust by showing that trust and understanding are related yet different processes that affect behaviour (Chen, 2010).

Lastly, the positive self-reported sustainable behaviour and more changeable future intention coexisting give additional knowledge on the intention-behaviour gap. The results indicate that sustainable purchasing can be already a habit of certain consumers, and some others are not convinced about the possibility to continue such behaviour in the long run. This substantiates theorized ideas that behaviour can precede stable intention in situations where the functions of default, availability or stable exposure influence choices and that long-term adoption requires reinforcing and not motivational conditions (Carrington et al., 2014; White et al., 2019).

Together, TPB can be used to understand the motivational bases of sustainability adoption in Co-op, and SHIFT can be used to explain why motivations need facilitating choice environments to become the regular action. The theoretical implication lies in the fact that sustainable grocery consumption must be perceived as a two-step process, where one forms intention guided by attitudes and norms, and then executes behaviour guided by perceived sacrifice, ease and clarity. The combined view contributes to the knowledge of ethical consumption in the retail setting.

5.3 Methodological Reflections and Limitations

Although this research offers some important information on the implementation of sustainable products by consumers at Co-op, a number of methodological issues have to be recognised in order to put the results into perspective. The study used a cross-sectional and quantitative survey design that allowed the systematic measurement of attitudes, influence perceptions, barriers and behavioural outcomes with standard Likert scale measures. This method was used to statistically compare with a neutral baseline and be able to interpret consumer sentiment in a clear manner. Nevertheless, it has some restrictions as well.

First, the sample size of 100 respondents, though suitable to the exploratory statistical analysis, limits the scope of the research to the overall population of consumers of UK grocery. The demographic sample favoured towards younger respondents and this can increase pro-sustainability attitudes as well as behavioural inclinations as compared to the older consumer groups. Since the purchasing habits and price sensitivity vary with age, the tendency can have affected the aggregate outcomes.

Second, everything was based on the self-reported perceptions and behaviours. This data is prone to social desirability bias, especially in studies that concentrate on sustainability whereby respondents are likely to exaggerate ethical intentions or behaviours in order to fit within the perceived social norms (Carrington et al., 2014). This has been particularly applicable to the measures of purchase behaviour, which might not be a complete measure of the decision that will actually be made in-store.

Third, the analysis method involved t-tests on Likert-scale data on a one-sample basis. Even though this is the general rule in consumer behaviour research, it assumes near-normality and ordinal responses are treated as interval-level, which can be overly simplistic in trying to model response distributions. Lastly, the cross-sectional design only captures the attitudes at a given moment and is unable to explain the changes caused by the changing economic or retailer programs. These limitations do not discredit the contributions of the study, it just shows that we should be careful in the interpretation of the results and this gives a proper rationale of why further research should be conducted with longitudinal or mixed-method.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

This dissertation was designed to analyse motivations and obstacles that affect the adoption of sustainable products among the UK consumers in the grocery retail industry, using Co-op as an example, and to come up with practical recommendations that can be applied to increase the adoption of the same. This research addressed an ongoing issue that exists in the literature: although it is widely acknowledged that sustainability exists and consumers have generally positive views on it, sustainable purchasing in the context of the daily grocery store is inconsistent (Young et al., 2010; Carrington et al., 2014). The study aimed to find out the operation of the consumer motivations and constraints in a realistic retail scenario by considering Co-op, a retailer that has a good ethical identity in the UK market.

The results prove that the consumer behaviour of the UK customers who make purchases at Co-op displays the tendency that is fairly favourable towards the sustainable products. The respondents were aware of the environmental advantages of sustainable groceries and tended to think that sustainable purchasing was personally significant. These results directly respond to the initial research objective and support the idea that deficiency in environmental concern/awareness is not the main factor that hinders adoption. Another driver that proved to be significant was social influence since consumers reported that the people who matter to them encourage sustainable grocery shopping. This shows how ethical consumption is socially embedded and argues that sustainability is not an individual choice but is influenced by perceived household and peer-group norms.

The study however found out some clear obstacles that still limit sustainable purchasing. The most interesting deterrent was price sensitivity where respondents viewed sustainable product at Co-op as rather high. The results of this study respond to the second research question as it substantiates that economic factors are still at the core of regular grocery choices even in the group of the consumers with positive sustainability attitudes. Product availability, on the contrary, was not viewed as a significant obstacle. The opinions of the respondents tended to indicate that sustainable products have become more physically accessible since they are readily located in their local Co-op stores. Combined, these observations indicate that structural impediments connected to the

availability are likely to decrease, but affordability still serves as one of the primary barriers to increased adoption.

The study has also tested the perception of sustainability communication and credibility of Co-op among the consumers. The confidence in Co-op sustainability and ethical statements was observed to be very positive, which indicates the sustainability of the retailer due to its already established ethical reputation. Nonetheless, the attitude towards the clarity of communication was not significantly different and neutral. This divergence is significant as this shows that, though consumers like Co-op as a moral organisation, they do not necessarily feel confident about what they see when they shop as to which of the products are sustainable. This result answers the question of the third research and presents a gap in organisational credibility and product-level communication.

Lastly, the research determined how willing consumers were to buy sustainable products in future. The intention to purchase sustainable products at Co-op was statistically significant and the degree of selecting sustainable products was already significant, according to the respondents. It is interesting to note that the self-reported current behaviour was stronger than future intention indicating that sustainable purchasing has already become an established part of the routine of certain consumers, but it might be susceptible to changing factors especially economic pressures. This result answers the fourth research question and shows that the future adoption is possible not only by motivation but also ensuring supportive conditions that mitigate on perceived sacrifice.

Addressing the literature gap that has been established above in the dissertation, the work is relevant to the literature on ethical consumption as it has typically centred on general attitudes as opposed to context-related decision making. The study contributes to existing knowledge about the intention-behaviour gap in the context of daily consumption by showing how positive attitudes do not exclude price sensitivity and communication uncertainty in one UK grocery retailer (Carrington et al., 2014; White et al., 2019). The results confirm that environmental concern is not the only factor that determines sustainable consumption but a combination of values, social influence, economic constraints and practices in retail.

Although these contributions have been made, there are limitations which the study has. The sample was not large and was biased towards younger consumers, and these factors could affect the level of pro-sustainability attitudes. There is also the risk of social desirability bias due to the

use of self-reported information. The cross-sectional design also does not allow the evaluation of the change in behaviour over a period of time. The awareness of such limitations gives the findings the right context and the importance of the further research in the field.

All in all, this dissertation shows that the adoption of sustainable products at Co-op has good motivational grounds but is limited by economic and informational influences. These limitations need to be tackled in order that sustainable purchasing becomes a matter of good intent rather than a continued action in the UK grocery market.

6.2 Self-Reflection

This research has been a useful academic and intellectual learning experience, both in terms of my knowledge on sustainable consumption and my overall research capabilities. Among the best learnings realized in the course of this dissertation is the inability to convert ethical intentions into real consumer behaviour. Although sustainability is viewed as an idealistic or normative concept, the research supported the notion of basing analysis on realistic decision-making realities, where price, convenience, and the clarity of information play a significant role.

On the methodological aspect, the survey was designed and administered in a way that carefully considered the construct measurement and the alignment to the research objectives, that is, the purpose of conducting the quantitative survey. The creation of Likert-scale items that best reflected the attitude, barriers and behavioural intentions enhanced my capacity to operationalise the abstract concepts into measurements. The use of SPSS to analyse the data enhanced my competence of employing descriptive statistic tools and methods of inferential statistics and interpreting results in a critical and not a mechanical manner.

It was also during the process that the significance of transparency and reflexivity in research was brought out. The recognition of such drawbacks associated with the sample size, demographic makeup, and self-reported information promoted a more humble and moderate view of the results. This strengthened my insight that a strong research does not lie in the assertion of certainty, but instead it is the body of research that acknowledges uncertainty and puts findings into perspective.

In theoretical terms, my intensive interest in theories like the Theory of Planned Behaviour and the SHIFT framework helped me to better incorporate theory with empirical evidence instead of seeing these two factors as distinct entities. This dissertation has enhanced my critical thinking,

academic writing and independent research abilities and made me more confident in undertaking applied research that is theory informed and practical.

6.3 Recommendations

The results of this research lead to a number of practical and evidence-based recommendations that can be used to assist Co-op in increasing the adoption of sustainable products by consumers.

To start with, Co-op needs to deal with price sensitivity that turned out to be the greatest obstacle to sustainable purchasing. Sustainable products were viewed as quite costly by the respondents, which serves as an indicator that affordability remains a limiting factor when it comes to the adoption of sustainable products even by consumers who are conscious of their sustainability. The result is in line with existing research indicating that price premiums are among the strongest ethical consumption deterrences in the grocery store (Young et al., 2010; Joshi and Rahman, 2015). Co-op would be able to overcome this obstacle by engaging in specific promotional efforts, which include regular discounts on the most important sustainable staples, loyalty perks, or temporary price matching campaigns. These actions lessen the perceived financial risk and have been demonstrated to promote trial and repurchase of sustainable alternatives, with no damage to brand credibility (White et al., 2019).

Second, Co-op needs to enhance the visibility and prevalence of sustainability communication during point of purchase. Whereas the consumers showed their trust in the ethical assertions of Co-op, the results showed that people were not certain about the clarity of sustainable products being communicated in the stores. This insensitivity indicates issues at a larger level within the literature on information overload and vague sustainability branding that may lead consumers to not do what they want to do with good intentions (Chen, 2010; Young et al., 2010). Sustainable choices would be more recognisable instantly by introducing more straightforward and uniform shelf tags, better sustainability indicators or similar visuals across product lines. This type of enhancing tangibility will lead to less cognitive effort in the daily shopping process and behavioural follow-through (White et al., 2019).

Third, Co-op ought to proactively utilize social influence and community involvement in an effort to strengthen sustainable purchasing norms. The authors have identified that social support has a

positive impact on the formation of sustainable consumption and support the results of other researchers who argue that the ethical behaviour is highly dependent on the perceived norms and the expectations of the group (Carrington et al., 2014; White et al., 2019). A solid basis of this strategy is Co-op with its cooperative model and community-oriented brand image. The normalising of sustainable options and the increased social approval can be communicated through conveying shared outcomes (like a plastic reduction, or endorsing ethical sourcing by customers buying their products), which can be communicated (Co-op, 2023).

Lastly, Co-op would need to have a more evaluative and adaptive approach to sustainability efforts by observing the responses of consumers in the long-run. Since the purchase intentions on sustainable purchasing were favourable yet imbalanced, continued evaluation would enable the determination of the most effective interventions that can be used to translate the intention into the consistent behaviour. Pricing and communication strategies would be tracked and pilot-tested longitudinally to provide evidence-based refinement or would be consistent with the literature demands to be more practical and circumstantially specific sustainability research (Carrington et al., 2014; White et al., 2019). Besides, the introduction of qualitative customer feedback might lead to a better understanding of perceived obstacles and improve the efficacy of the further sustainability strategies.

Collectively, these suggestions can provide Co-op with a viable and potentially attainable roadmap in enhancing the adoption of sustainable products by minimizing costs of acquiring products, enhancing the quality of communication, reinforcing social norms, and fostering the spirit of constant improvement based on consumer evidence.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire



Appendix B: Excel File



Appendix C: SPSS files

