

Green Retail and Consumer Preferences for Sustainable Products

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Article Information:

Received: November 06, 2025 Accepted: November 20, 2025, Published: January 13, 2025

Abstract

This study aims to examine consumers' knowledge, awareness, and behavior regarding green retail and sustainable products in Bone Regency. Using a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews with consumers in rural areas, the study found that consumer literacy regarding sustainable products remains very limited, and many do not even understand the specific meaning of environmentally friendly products. Consumer choices are generally based on price, practicality, and availability, whereas sustainability considerations or green labels are secondary. The influence of social factors, such as family, friends, and the media, on green consumption behavior remains weak. Additionally, access to environmentally friendly labeled products in local markets remains very limited, and higher prices often constitute the primary barrier to adopting sustainable consumption behavior. These findings highlight the need for more practical environmental education, the expansion of the distribution of green products to rural areas, and tangible incentives from the government and businesses to enhance the competitiveness of green products in the local market. This study also recommends collaboration among the government, producers, retailers, and local communities to accelerate changes in consumer behavior and strengthen the green retail ecosystem in rural Indonesia.

Keywords: Green Retail, Sustainable Products, Consumer Behavior, Environmental Literacy, Rural Markets

1. Introduction

The changing consumption patterns of the global community, which are increasingly aware of the importance of sustainability, have given rise to green retail ([Pedersen, 2000](#)). It integrates environmentally friendly principles throughout the entire retail business value chain, from operations, products, to marketing strategies ([Lai et al., 2010](#); [Sinha & Chaudhuri, 2014](#); [Thompson, 2007](#)). Today's consumers demand quality and competitive prices and consider the environmental impact of their products ([Sharma et al., 2023](#); [Testa et al., 2021](#)). Globally, a [TotalRetail \(2024\)](#) survey reported that 78% of consumers are willing to change their consumption behavior to reduce negative environmental impacts. However, the gap between intentions and actual behavior remains significant, particularly in Indonesia, where only around 34% of consumers consistently purchase environmentally friendly products, despite 68% expressing interest in such products ([Katadata Media Network, 2024](#)).

Published by:

This situation presents both an opportunity and a challenge for retail industry players, especially in semi-urban areas like Bone Regency, South Sulawesi, which has experienced rapid growth in the modern retail sector over the past five years. While green retail trends are gaining traction in major cities, studies on how consumers in semi-urban areas choose and perceive sustainable products remain limited ([Phalke, 2016](#); [Velayudhan, 2024](#)). Previous studies have focused on general consumer awareness or perceptions, without delving into the psychological, social, and environmental factors that influence actual purchasing preferences at the point of sale ([Gomes et al., 2023](#); [Laroche et al., 2001](#); [Testa et al., 2021](#); [Wei et al., 2018](#)).

This study explores modern retail consumers in Indonesia using an exploratory qualitative approach based on in-depth interviews and participatory observation at retail locations. Previous studies by [Joshi & Rahman \(2017\)](#), [Yadav & Pathak \(2017\)](#), and [Zhang & Dong \(2020\)](#) tend to be global in scope and lack contextual relevance to developing countries. On the other hand, studies by [Biswas & Roy \(2016\)](#) and [Gomes et al. \(2023\)](#) highlight willingness to pay, without delving deeper into consumers' values and norms in real retail environments.

This study addresses this gap by providing an in-depth, contextual account of the dynamics of local consumer preferences. This study adopts two main theoretical frameworks, namely the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) ([Ajzen, 1991](#)) and the Value-Belief-Norm Theory (VBN) ([Stren, 2000](#)), which have been widely used in explaining sustainable purchasing behavior. TPB emphasizes the importance of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control in shaping the intention to purchase environmentally friendly products. At the same time, VBN highlights the role of personal values, environmental beliefs, and moral norms as drivers of pro-environmental actions. These two theories are integrated into the Green Consumer Behavior model ([Peattie, 2010](#)), which holistically maps the interaction between psychological, social, and environmental factors in consumer preferences for sustainable products.

Therefore, the research questions addressed in this study are: how do consumers prefer sustainable products in the context of green retail in modern retail, and what factors influence these consumer preferences? The urgency of this study lies in the need for a deeper understanding of consumer behavior in supporting sustainable practices in the retail sector, enabling businesses to design more targeted and adaptive strategies to local market dynamics. Additionally, the findings are expected to enrich retail marketing policies and enhance consumer literacy to support sustainable economic transformation in Indonesia. Overall, this study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to promoting the development of green retail in Indonesia, while supporting efforts to achieve sustainable development targets and strengthen the green economy at the local level.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Green Retail and Modern Retail Transformation

Green retail is a strategy that prioritizes integrating sustainability values in all operational lines, from product selection and waste management to promotion strategies and customer service ([Lai et al., 2010](#); [Sinha & Chaudhuri, 2014](#)). Previous studies have shown that the success of green retail is significantly influenced by management commitment, green product innovation, and the retailer's ability to build an image aligned with sustainability values ([Ali, 2023](#); [Testa et al., 2021](#); [Thompson, 2007](#)). Furthermore, the adoption of green retail is believed to not only enhance customer loyalty but also strengthen local economic competitiveness and support the

achievement of sustainable development goals (SDGs).

2.2 Consumer Preferences for Sustainable Products

International literature reveals that consumer preferences for sustainable products are influenced by personal values, environmental awareness, social norms, and perceptions of benefits and risks ([Barbu et al., 2022](#); [Čapienė et al., 2022](#); [Hein, 2022](#)). [Ajzen \(1991\)](#), through the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), explains that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control greatly influence the intention to purchase green products. Meanwhile, the Value-Belief-Norm Theory ([Stren, 2000](#)) highlights the role of personal values and moral norms as the primary drivers of pro-environmental behavior. Integrating these two theories in the Green Consumer Behavior Model ([Peattie, 2010](#)) demonstrates that consumer behavior is not solely determined by psychological factors but also by social and contextual influences in the surrounding environment.

Studies by [Hameed & Waris \(2018\)](#), [Hossain et al. \(2022\)](#), and [Saini \(2023\)](#) emphasize the importance of trust in green claims, perceived product benefits, and clarity of eco-friendly labels as key determinants of consumer preferences. However, most of these studies still focus on developed countries or metropolitan cities, so understanding consumer behavior in developing regions like Indonesia is still very limited ([Wijekoon & Sabri, 2021](#)).

2.3 Research Gap and Contribution of the Study

The novelty of this study lies in its exploration of consumer preferences in the context of local modern retail in Indonesia by integrating the TPB and VBN approaches qualitatively. By delving into consumers' actual experiences and comparing the perceptions, values, and norms that shape purchasing decisions, this study is expected to provide substantial contributions to the green retail literature while supporting green economic transformation at the local level ([Joshi & Rahman, 2017](#); [Schlegelmilch et al., 1996](#); [Zameer & Yasmeen, 2022](#)).

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative, exploratory design, which is most appropriate for uncovering in-depth consumers' experiences, perceptions, and preferences in choosing sustainable products within a green retail environment. This exploratory approach was chosen because consumer behavior toward environmentally friendly products in Indonesia, particularly in the modern retail sector in developing areas, has been rarely explored contextually, necessitating a method that allows for narrative and reflective exploration ([Creswell & Creswell, 2018](#)).

The research informants consisted of 25 consumers selected purposively based on the following criteria: aged 20–50 years, have shopped at modern retail outlets (supermarkets, minimarkets, self-service stores) either occasionally or regularly, possess knowledge or at least awareness of environmentally friendly products (such as green labels, recyclable packaging, or sustainable local products), and willing to be interviewed in-depth about their perceptions and preferences toward sustainable products. The composition of informants considered gender, age, occupation, and educational background to obtain a more holistic and representative picture of the consumer population in Bone Regency, South Sulawesi. This area was chosen because it has experienced rapid growth in modern retail and exhibits socio-cultural diversity, making it a relevant location for studying sustainable consumer behavior outside major cities.

The sample size of 25 informants was determined through purposive sampling to ensure variation across demographic groups. In qualitative exploratory research, a range of 20–30

participants is considered adequate because the goal is not statistical generalization but thematic depth and data saturation. In this study, data saturation was reached after approximately 20 interviews, yet additional participants were included to enhance representativeness. Accordingly, the findings are not intended to generalize the entire Bone population but provide an in-depth contextual understanding of consumer behavior within a rural–semi urban retail setting.

Although 25 participants were interviewed, not all interview excerpts can be presented in the Findings section due to journal space limitations. Therefore, 5–7 representative quotations were selected for each thematic dimension to illustrate the range of views found during analysis. These quotations serve as illustrative evidence, while the full interpretation is based on the complete dataset of 25 transcripts. All participants received the same core questions, but the depth of responses varied, and each interview lasted approximately 30–60 minutes depending on participants' availability and willingness to elaborate.

Data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, allowing for open-ended narrative exploration while remaining guided by a theoretical framework. The interview guidelines were designed by integrating three main frameworks, namely the Theory of Planned Behavior ([Ajzen, 1991](#)), Value-Belief-Norm Theory ([Stern, 2000](#)), and the Green Consumer Behavior model ([Peattie, 2010](#)), so that the exploration covers the dimensions of attitudes, norms, perceived control, personal values, environmental awareness, moral standards, and consumers' actual experiences in choosing or avoiding sustainable products. The focus of the questions includes: consumers' understanding of the concept of green retail and sustainable products, attitudes and personal values toward environmental issues, social influence and norms in the consumer environment, actual experiences when choosing sustainable products in retail stores, and evaluations of packaging, labels, promotions, and the availability of green products in stores.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face at retail locations or online if necessary, with an average duration of 30–60 minutes, and informed consent from informants and digitally recorded for transcription and analysis. In addition to interviews, limited participatory observation was conducted at retail locations frequently visited by informants to record patterns of green product placement, promotional strategies, labels, and the actual decision-making context in stores. This observation aimed to compare the narratives presented in the interviews with actual behavior and conditions in the field.

All interview and observation data were analyzed using thematic analysis ([Braun & Clarke, 2006](#)). The analysis process included: transcription of interviews, repeated reading to understand meaning, open coding to identify initial codes, grouping codes into main themes, and interpretation of findings within the framework of green consumer behavior theory. Data validity was ensured through technical and source triangulation—combining interviews, observations, and documentation of green product promotions in retail outlets, and by comparing perspectives among informants from different backgrounds. Member checking was conducted by returning initial findings to some informants for confirmation, while peer debriefing was conducted through regular discussions among the research team to avoid interpretive bias.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 Findings

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4.1.1 Knowledge & Awareness of Sustainable Products

4.1.1.1 Definition of Sustainable Products

Public knowledge about sustainable products in Bone Regency varies greatly. Only a small percentage of respondents truly understand the concept of sustainable products as environmentally friendly products. In contrast, others show confusion, partial understanding, or have never heard of the term. Many associate sustainable products with “durable products” or “products that do not spoil quickly,” while others only guess based on TV advertisements. The following are quotes from various informants:

“Sustainable products? I don't know, maybe they mean products that are durable?” (SN)

“I heard on TV that green products are recyclable, but I've never seen them in stores here.” (RI)

“In my opinion, sustainable products are cheap and durable, not necessarily environmentally friendly.” (JI)

“I think sustainable products are those that don't use a lot of plastic, right?” (MS)

“I've never heard that term before. I usually just buy whatever is available in stores.” (FI)

“Environmentally friendly is good, but I don't understand the difference between those and regular products.” (EW)

The findings in this sub-theme indicate that rural consumers' knowledge of sustainable products remains very limited, with even the definition often misunderstood or vague. Few associate it with environmental or sustainability aspects, while most still view sustainable products as cheap, durable, or merely a marketing trend. These findings highlight a gap in understanding the concept of sustainable products among rural communities. The lack of socialization, access to information, and the absence of real green products in the local market have prevented this concept from becoming a priority for the community. In the future, environmental literacy programs and green product promotion must be tailored to the local context, using language and examples that are easy to understand and relevant to the daily needs of rural communities.

4.1.1.2 The Importance of Sustainable Products

Public awareness of the importance of choosing sustainable products also varies greatly. Some respondents agreed that environmentally friendly products are good, but many others do not consider environmental issues when shopping. Some also consider price and availability more important than the “sustainability” of a product. The following quotes illustrate the variety of attitudes:

“If the price is the same, I'll choose the environmentally friendly one. But usually those products are expensive and hard to find here.” (HL)

“I've never deliberately looked for green products. The important thing is that they are cheap and easy to find.” (WI)

“It's good to care about the environment, but I rarely think about it. I just look for promotions or discounts.” (RS)

“I agree that environmentally friendly products are important, but they are rare here.” (SY)

“For me, quality and price are important. Environmental issues are usually the government's

business.” (JS)

“If you ask me whether it's important or not, yes, it is, but in reality, I still buy regular products.” (NH)

“I know that sustainable products are good, but it's more of a desire than a practice.” (FA)

This sub-theme shows no consensus or strong commitment regarding the importance of sustainable products. Many people in Bone village are still pragmatic, prioritizing price, quality, and accessibility of products over environmental issues. These results reflect that awareness and motivation to choose sustainable products are still theoretical or idealistic, not yet reaching the stage of practical implementation in daily life. Consumer choices in rural areas are primarily determined by economic factors and long-standing habits, not environmental awareness. Efforts to promote green retail and sustainable product consumption must be implemented gradually and contextually, emphasizing practical benefits and accessibility, while increasing grassroots-level socialization and education tailored to the local culture.

4.1.2 Green Retail & Individual Attitudes

4.1.2.1 Understanding Green Retail

The rural community's knowledge of green retail is still very diverse and tends to be minimal. Only a handful of respondents have heard the term green retail and associate it specifically with environmentally friendly business practices. Most informants are still unfamiliar with this term, or only guess based on everyday logic. Many think green retail is just a store with green paint, organic products, or a big city trend. The following are quotes from informants:

“I've just heard the term green retail. I think it's a store with green paint, right?” (SN)

“Maybe it means a store that sells organic vegetables or environmentally friendly products? But as far as I know, there isn't one here.” (FA)

“I don't understand, I've never seen a store specifically for green retail in this market.” (RI)

“What is green retail? If it's a store that saves electricity, then maybe it can be called that.” (JI)

“As far as I know, stores in villages sell everything. I don't pay attention to whether they are environmentally friendly or not.” (IS)

“I've only heard about it on TV; I don't understand the difference from a regular store.” (RS)

This finding shows that green retail is not yet a significant topic of discussion among residents of small villages/districts. Many residents are still guessing and cannot fully connect green retail with environmentally friendly business principles. Some also believe green retail only suits large cities, not rural areas. These results indicate that the understanding of green retail among rural/small county residents needs to be improved. Limited awareness campaigns, lack of real-world examples, and the distance from urban retail practices make green retail neither a priority nor a necessity. A relevant and contextual educational approach is needed to make this concept more grounded, easier to understand, and adoptable by local communities.

4.1.2.2 Personal Responsibility for the Environment

Attitudes toward personal responsibility for the environment also vary greatly. Some informants feel that environmental issues are the government's or large companies' responsibility, not an individual priority. Only a few admit to actively sorting waste or choosing environmentally

friendly products daily, while others prefer practical aspects such as price, convenience, and old traditions. The following are examples of responses from villagers:

"To be honest, I rarely think about the environment. I'm more focused on prices and daily needs." (JU)

"If there is a government program about the environment, I participate, but my daily life is normal." (LI)

"Cleaning the village is important, but I don't understand environmentally friendly products." (MA)

"I know protecting the environment is important, but I don't always practice it. Sometimes I forget." (SL)

"If it's easy and cheap, I'd be willing to buy environmentally friendly products, but they're usually hard to find here." (TI)

This finding indicates that values and commitment to environmental responsibility are not yet part of the daily lives of most rural communities. Most people are more focused on economic needs, old habits, and following what is easily accessible. This sub-theme indicates that hopes for a collective green retail movement must be accompanied by gradual education tailored to the realities of life in rural communities/small districts. Environmental responsibility is not a priority unless direct incentives or support from government programs exist. Individual involvement in green consumption practices needs to be cultivated gradually through real-life examples, easy access to products, and community-based education to prevent it from becoming mere jargon or idealism.

4.1.3 Social & Media Influence

4.1.3.1 Support from Family/Friends

Social support from family or friends in encouraging environmentally friendly consumption behavior in Bone Regency varies greatly and tends to be minimal. A few respondents have been encouraged by family or friends to buy products "said to be" environmentally friendly. Still, more respondents claim they have never noticed this issue in their social circle. Some even say that consumption decisions depend entirely on themselves and economic considerations, not the influence of those around them. The following are various responses from people in villages/small districts:

"In my family, no one has ever talked about environmentally friendly products. We usually just buy whatever is cheap." (HM)

"My friends also rarely care about the environment. The important thing is to get a discount." (FR)

"I was once invited to buy green products at a bazaar in the city, but that was only once." (TI)

"In the village, we usually just follow what our neighbors say, but I have never been invited to buy environmentally friendly products." (SL)

"It's more my own choice; my family or friends have never influenced me." (SU)

"If there is a promotion at the store, my friends will buy it, but if not, then I won't." (MS)

"There's no support, just looking at each other if there's a new product in the store." (DL)

This description indicates minimal social support from the immediate environment when choosing sustainable products. Most people prioritize price, habits, and availability over the influence of friends or family in green retail issues. These findings clarify that community-based campaigns or group education must be more intensive in rural areas. Social impact remains weak; therefore, changes in sustainable consumption behavior must begin with concrete examples from community leaders or with easily accessible incentives. Without that, environmental issues tend to be seen as just talk from outside the village.

4.1.3.2 Positive Social Perceptions

Social perceptions of consumers of sustainable products have not yet formed strong norms in the Bone society. Some respondents reported no difference or special attention from their social environment in purchasing environmentally friendly products. Others felt that choosing green products was not considered cool or special, but rather a trend from the city. The following are some of the informants' views:

"Here, buying environmentally friendly products is normal; no one says anything." (SU)

"I think people around me are confused when I buy organic products; they think they are expensive and unnecessary." (WI)

"In villages, what matters is price and usefulness, not green issues." (JI)

"I have never heard anyone say they are proud to buy environmentally friendly products." (RI)

"In the city, it may be considered cool, but here it's the same." (RN)

"My parents even say, 'Why buy something expensive when the regular stuff is good enough?'" (FA)

This description shows no social incentives or collective rewards for green consumption behavior at the grassroots level. Many see sustainable consumption as a trend "far from everyday life" or merely a fad among city dwellers. This sub-theme emphasizes the importance of a local approach in promoting green retail. There must be a framing of tangible benefits and emotional connection, not just environmental appeals. Without strengthening social norms and examples from local figures, changes in consumption patterns in rural villages/small districts will be very slow and partial.

4.1.3.3 The Influence of Media & Advertising

Media and advertising, especially television and social media, play a role in introducing sustainable products, but their influence does not always lead to fundamental behavioral changes. Many respondents are skeptical about green advertising, viewing it as merely a marketing strategy or a temporary trend in cities. Only a few are influenced to try products because they frequently see ads, while others remain focused on their needs and what is available in the local market. The following are various quotes:

"I often see advertisements for environmentally friendly products on TV, but they are usually expensive and not available in stores here." (IS)

"There are many advertisements for green products on social media, but I have never tried them. I think they are only for people in cities." (SL)

"Sometimes the advertisements on TV are too exaggerated. In reality, these products are not necessarily available in village stores." (RA)

“Advertisements for green products are attractive, but I rarely believe them. It’s better to buy the usual products.” (JU)

“I trust my neighbors’ recommendations more than advertisements on the internet.” (DL)

“I once bought a product because I saw an advertisement, but it turned out to be just like any other product.” (WI)

This finding shows that while media and advertising can increase awareness, their effects are still limited to perceptions and have not yet translated into actual consumption practices. The main barriers are skepticism toward the media and the limited availability of products in local markets. The influence of mass media and advertising needs to be accompanied by real access to products at the regional level and grounded education. Without these, promotional messages remain at the knowledge level and do not drive changes in consumption behavior. Collaborative programs between producers, local merchants, and the government could serve as a middle ground to amplify the impact of sustainable product campaigns in small cities and districts.

4.1.4 Purchasing Behavior & Preferences

4.1.4.1 Purchasing Sustainable Products

The purchasing behavior of sustainable products among the people of Bone is diverse and largely negative. A small percentage of respondents reported purchasing environmentally friendly products, typically because they were following a trend, seeing a promotion, or finding the product in a store. However, most people still rarely purchase such products, mainly due to price, limited information, limited availability in local stores, or indifference to eco-friendly labels. The following are some of the responses that emerged:

“To be honest, I have never bought eco-friendly products because they are rarely available in stores near my house.” (SN)

“I tried buying soap that was said to be organic, but it was expensive and the results were the same.” (DL)

“I prefer discounted products; I don't care whether they are environmentally friendly or not.” (WI)

“If there are plastic-free products at the supermarket, I sometimes buy them, but only if there is a promotion.” (SY)

“I usually just buy regular products, as long as they are cheap and easy to find.” (HL)

“I once bought a green product on a marketplace out of curiosity, but now I’m back to regular products.” (HM)

This sub-theme indicates that the adoption of green products remains very limited in small districts/cities. The main barriers are price, restricted access, and low awareness or literacy regarding labels and the benefits of sustainable products. These findings emphasize the need for education and the gradual expansion of green product distribution in rural areas. As long as perceptions of high prices, limited access, and distrust of “eco-friendly” claims remain unaddressed, consumption of green products will remain sporadic and opportunistic rather than driven by a mindset shift.

4.1.4.2 Purchase Frequency & Motivation

The frequency of sustainable product purchases is very low and often only incidental. Only a few informants admitted to buying green products “occasionally” if available or on promotion. Most said they ‘rarely’ buy them, “only if available,” or have never purchased them. The primary motivations are also more pragmatic: following discounts, trying something new, or simply because of recommendations. Here are some examples:

“I buy environmentally friendly products if the price is the same, but they are usually more expensive, so I rarely do.” (RI)

“Often, but more for soap or detergent, and only if they are in stock.” (MS)

“Very rarely, unless there is a campaign in the city or from the government.” (RA)

“I have never intentionally looked for green products; I only try them if they are free or samples.” (FA)

“I prefer green products if there is information on social media, but that is rare.” (HM)

“My motivation to buy is only when there’s a big promotion; otherwise, I buy regular products.” (FI)

This sub-theme indicates that the decision to purchase green products is still more driven by availability and price incentives rather than environmental ideals. The desire to try green products often does not translate into a regular habit due to price and accessibility factors. Green consumption behavior in rural/small urban communities is still heavily influenced by external variables such as price, promotions, and store stock. Environmental education and campaigns must be supported by competitive pricing policies and expanded distribution to make green products a rational choice rather than merely a concept.

4.1.4.3 Avoiding Environmentally Harmful Products

The attitude of avoiding products considered harmful to the environment has not yet become a strong norm in the Bone society. While some respondents have tried to reduce their use of plastic or specific products, most choose products based on need, price, or habit, without considering their environmental impact. Only a few cited environmental reasons as their primary motivation. Here are some responses:

“I still often use single-use plastic because it’s more practical.” (JU)

“I choose products that are cheap and easy to find. I have never thought about the environmental impact.” (WI)

“Sometimes I avoid products with complicated packaging, but not because of the environment, just because I am too lazy to throw away the trash.” (RS)

“If there is a choice, I try to avoid plastic, but sometimes it is difficult because stores rarely have alternatives.” (HL)

“I have seen anti-plastic campaigns, but haven’t changed my shopping habits.” (RA)

“If there are local products with good packaging and reasonable prices, then I will buy them, but not because of environmental concerns.” (SU)

This sub-theme clarifies that the motivation to avoid environmentally harmful products is still weak and more incidental, rather than a principle of consumption. Behavioral changes in consumption patterns in rural areas must begin with improved environmental literacy, practical,

tangible incentives, and easier access to alternative products. If economic factors and old habits remain dominant, avoiding environmentally unfriendly products will only occur among a small population segment, and more due to chance or other factors unrelated to ecological issues.

4.1.5 Packaging, Labeling, and Promotion

4.1.5.1 Attention to Packaging

People in small villages/districts pay close attention to packaging based on practical needs, safety, and labels considered necessary for religious or health reasons.

Only a small portion of consumers pay attention to “green” labels or eco-friendly indicators, while the majority focus on expiration dates, halal labels, or information related to product authenticity. Some also admit to rarely reading packaging details. Here are some quotes:

“I always check the expiration date, especially for food and drinks.” (SY)

“The halal label is the most important thing for me; I rarely pay attention to green labels.” (DL)

“To be honest, I rarely read packaging information unless the product is new.” (JU)

“I usually just glance at the packaging, mostly looking at the expiration date.” (RA)

“If there are complete labels or certificates, I feel more confident, but environmental friendliness is not a priority.” (HL)

“Sometimes there are many labels, but I still choose the cheapest one.” (WI)

This sub-theme indicates that although some consumers are becoming more selective and critical, the primary focus remains on practicality, safety, and daily needs rather than on environmental labels. “Green” labels are only considered an added value, not a primary consideration. Economic, religious, and safety considerations still dominate the importance of labels or packaging information in rural communities. Education about the benefits and meaning of environmentally friendly labels needs to be more closely linked to the real needs of consumers so that they are readily accepted and adopted.

4.1.5.2 The influence of “green” labels

The presence of green labels on products elicits diverse reactions among consumers of Bone. A small minority feel more confident purchasing environmentally friendly labeled products, but many remain skeptical or indifferent, viewing labels as mere marketing strategies or “city fads.” Here are some varied opinions:

“Green labels can be reassuring, but they’ve never been the main reason I buy something.” (FA)

“Sometimes I see eco labels, but I don’t necessarily believe them because I don’t know the difference.” (SU)

“I think green labels are just a way to raise prices; they’re not necessarily environmentally friendly.” (RI)

“I believe it more after trying the product myself, not because of the label.” (NH)

“If the product is well-known, I believe it. If it’s new and has a green label, I’m sometimes even more skeptical.” (HM)

"Green labels are rarely seen here, so they don't have much influence." (WI)

This sub-theme indicates that the influence of "green" labels in society remains low and is subject to considerable doubt. The lack of education and concrete examples of green products makes it difficult for many consumers to distinguish genuine labels from mere marketing strategies. For green labels to be effective, there must be in-depth education and transparency from producers and government supervision. Without this, labels will only be "decorations" that are easily ignored or cause skepticism in small villages/districts.

4.1.5.3 Availability of Green Products

The lack of green products in conventional stores is a major consumer complaint. Many report that they have never found environmentally friendly products in traditional markets or local minimarkets, so they cannot fulfill their intention to purchase. The following are various complaints from informants:

"I rarely see green products in stores near my house, and if I do, they are expensive." (RI)

"They are usually only available in supermarkets, but they are far from here." (JS)

"I've never seen products with eco-friendly labels at the village minimarket." (FI)

"I want to buy eco-friendly products, but they're rarely in stock." (IS)

"I could buy them online, but I prefer shopping at the nearby store." (EW)

"Sometimes I want to buy them, but I don't know where to look." (LI)

This sub-theme reinforces that green products struggle to compete and gain acceptance among rural consumers without equitable distribution and local-level promotion. Education and promotion of green products must be balanced with availability in local markets. Producers and retailers must expand distribution channels to rural areas and make green products part of everyday necessities, rather than luxury items that are difficult to access.

4.1.5.4 Green Product Promotion

Green product promotion has been shown to attract consumer attention, but this interest often does not translate into actual purchases due to limited availability, price, or distrust of promotional claims. Some consumers are interested only when discounts, events, or special promotions reduce prices. Here are some variations of opinions:

"I'm interested in whether there's a green product promotion, but they're rarely available in stores." (JI)

"I once bought green products because of a discount at a supermarket in the city, but now I'm back to regular products." (MA)

"Green product promotions are attractive, but I still look at the price and stock in the store." (TI)

"If the promotion is only online, I'm not very interested because I prefer to shop in person." (RN)

"Special events or campaigns can indeed make people curious, but sometimes after the event, the products are no longer available." (IS)

"I tried environmentally friendly products because of a promotion, but only once." (HM)

This sub-theme confirms that promotion is only effective if it is supported by sustainable stock and prices adjusted to local purchasing power. Rural consumers are more responsive to tangible incentives than fleeting campaigns. Green product promotion strategies should focus on sustainable events, competitive pricing, and local store availability. Concrete incentives and testimonials from local consumers will more effectively foster interest and green consumption behavior than large-scale campaigns without follow-up distribution efforts.

4.2 Discussion

This study examines the dynamics, barriers, and potential for adopting green retail and sustainable consumption behaviors among residents of Bone Regency, a rural area with modern retail growth outside Indonesia's metropolitan areas. These findings enrich the academic discussion of green consumer behavior in Indonesia, showing how social, economic, cultural, and product-availability contexts strongly influence the adoption of green retail practices at the grassroots level. Using a qualitative approach, an in-depth analysis was conducted on five main themes that emerged from the interviews and observations, namely: knowledge and awareness of sustainable products, understanding and attitudes toward green retail, social and media influences, purchasing behavior and preferences, and factors related to packaging, labeling, and promotion of green products.

The results of this study confirm a significant knowledge gap in rural communities regarding the definition and understanding of sustainable products. Most respondents could not define sustainable products comprehensively, with many equating them with “durable products,” “cheap products,” or simply a marketing trend. These findings align with the results of [Lin & Niu \(2018\)](#) and [Rezai et al. \(2012\)](#), which indicates that consumers' knowledge about green products in developing countries remains limited, often mixed with common misconceptions and influenced by media promotions without in-depth education. This lack of consumer literacy was also found in studies by [Johnstone & Tan \(2015\)](#) in Malaysia and [Pandey et al. \(2021\)](#) in India, where terms such as “eco-friendly” or “green product” are more often understood narrowly or even incorrectly. Additionally, as highlighted by [Peattie \(2010\)](#). Limited access to information and the absence of “role models” for green products in the local environment further confuse definitions and slow the adoption of sustainable concepts.

A similar pattern is observed regarding awareness of the importance of sustainable products. Many rural consumers in Bone stated that environmental issues are essential. Still, they are not a priority when shopping—price and ease of access are far more decisive factors in purchasing decisions. These results confirm the findings of [Saini \(2023\)](#) and [Zameer & Yasmeen \(2022\)](#), which highlight that, in developing countries, preferences for green products are still influenced by pragmatic factors such as affordability, availability, and trusted brands, rather than by awareness of or commitment to environmental issues. These findings reinforce the arguments of the Theory of Planned Behavior ([Ajzen, 1991](#)), which states that “perceived behavioral control” (perceived ease/availability) and “subjective norms” (social norms) have a more substantial influence on actual behavior than attitude alone. This means that, although attitudes toward green products are becoming more positive, actual behavior remains limited when environmental, price, and access barriers are present.

In addition, green retail has not yet become a significant discourse in consumers' daily lives in Bone Regency. Only a few are familiar with the term and understand environmentally friendly business practices in the retail sector. Most consider green retail a store with “green paint,” selling organic products, or a big city trend that is difficult to find in small villages/regencies.

This phenomenon was also observed in studies by [Lai et al. \(2010\)](#) and [Thompson \(2007\)](#), in which the concept of green retail was first developed in large cities, whereas in rural areas it was limited to appeals or showcase events that did not persist.

Individual attitudes toward environmental responsibility are also typically pragmatic and collective: most consider ecological issues the responsibility of the government rather than individuals. Only a few need to sort waste or consciously purchase green products. This pattern indicates the weak internalization of sustainability norms and values as part of consumer identity. As [Stren \(2000\)](#) stated in the Value-Belief-Norm Theory, without the internalization of environmental values into personal norms, green behavior will always remain at the “intent” or “discourse” level, not yet becoming practice. Studies in various developing countries, such as Indonesia ([Iqbal et al., 2024](#); [Widyastuti et al., 2024](#)) and Nigeria ([Damian-Okoro, 2025](#); [Gbadegesin et al., 2025](#)), have shown that green consumerism remains vulnerable to incentives, campaigns, and external pressure. The implications of these findings are crucial for policy design—green retail education and campaigns must be rooted in local contexts, grounding concepts through simple practices, tangible incentives, and strengthening practical literacy to ensure green retail is not perceived as an “urban luxury” or elitist discourse detached from daily needs.

Additionally, social support from family, friends, and communities in promoting green product consumption in Bone Regency remains limited. Consumption choices are based on personal considerations, price, and practical needs—not because of peer influence or group norms. This phenomenon differs significantly from findings in developed countries, where peer influence and group norms are crucial in driving green behavioral change ([Hameed & Waris, 2018](#)). In a rural context, social impact is more of a “follow-the-leader if there is an incentive” phenomenon, rather than a collective drive based on norms or pride.

A study by [Barbu et al. \(2022\)](#) emphasizes that green behavioral change will be very slow without local communities or influencers. This is especially true in rural areas, where opinion leaders are more trusted than the mass media. Positive social perceptions of green products have not yet been established. Consumers who purchase environmentally friendly products are sometimes seen as “following urban trends” rather than something to be proud of. This reinforces the conclusion of [Hein \(2022\)](#) that social norms in rural areas often hinder the adoption of green behavior, unless driven by successful local figures or initiators who serve as role models.

Media and advertising have indeed succeeded in increasing awareness of green products, but their effects are limited to increased knowledge; they have not yet led to actual behavioral change. Most people remain skeptical of green advertising, viewing it as merely a marketing strategy, and prioritize recommendations from their social circles (peer recommendations) over messages from the media. This confirms the findings of [Phalke \(2016\)](#) and [Widyastuti et al. \(2024\)](#) that green advertising often only fosters “green skepticism” if it is not supported by real education and access to local products.

Moreover, the purchase behavior of green products in Bone Regency remains highly sporadic and incidental. A small proportion have purchased green-labeled products, but generally only due to promotional factors, discounts, or trying something new—not out of ideological commitment to the environment. Most respondents admitted they had never purchased sustainable products because they were expensive, difficult to obtain, or they were unaware of their benefits. These findings are in line with the research of [Čapienė et al. \(2022\)](#) and [Lin &](#)

[Niu \(2018\)](#), which found that the adoption of green products in developing countries is greatly influenced by price sensitivity, perceived value, and convenience, rather than environmental idealism. The frequency of sustainable product purchases in rural communities/small districts is also very low, generally occurring only during large promotions or special events (e.g., city bazaars). The primary motivation remains pragmatic: low prices, discounts, and ease of access. This reinforces [Ajzen's \(1991\)](#) argument that perceived behavioral control and situational factors are stronger than attitudes in driving actual behavior, especially in rural communities.

Avoiding products harmful to the environment has not yet become a strong social norm. Some informants admitted to still using single-use plastics, choosing products based on price and convenience rather than environmental impact. These findings are consistent with studies by [Čapienė et al. \(2022\)](#) and [Hossain et al. \(2022\)](#), highlighting that avoiding environmentally unfriendly products requires gradual changes in values and norms, supported by tangible economic incentives.

Consumer attention to product packaging is more driven by practical needs—expiration dates, halal labels, safety—rather than “green” or environmentally friendly labels. Most consumers still prioritize information related to immediate needs and tangible added value (e.g., halal labels, BPOM certification) over environmentally friendly labels. These findings reinforce the findings of [Hameed & Waris \(2018\)](#) and [Hossain et al. \(2022\)](#) that green labels only become a secondary consideration once factors such as price, trust, and practical needs have been met. “Green” labels or eco-labels are not yet fully trusted as primary indicators—many are skeptical, viewing labels as mere marketing strategies or even as a reason for higher prices. This lack of trust is also fueled by insufficient education, oversight, and real-world examples of green products in the local environment.

Studies by [Peattie \(2010\)](#) and [Testa et al. \(2021\)](#) remind us that eco-labels' effectiveness highly depends on credibility, transparency, and access to products in local markets. The issue of green product availability is a major complaint—products with green or environmentally friendly labels are rarely found in local stores, minimarkets, or traditional markets. Even if they are available, they are more expensive and in limited supply, so the intention to purchase is often not realized. This situation validates the findings of [Lin & Niu \(2018\)](#) and [Widyastuti et al. \(2024\)](#), who emphasize the importance of product distribution and competitive pricing policies to ensure that green products are accessible and can be chosen rationally by rural consumers.

One-off events, discounts, or promotions in urban supermarkets still dominate green product promotion strategies. However, the sustainability of promotions and product availability in local stores remains limited, so the interest generated through events often does not translate into consumption habits. [Biswas & Roy \(2016\)](#) and [Gomes et al. \(2023\)](#) emphasize the need for synergy between promotion, distribution, and education to ensure that green product promotion builds awareness and effectively changes consumer behavior and preferences sustainably.

4.2.1 Implications and Policy Recommendations

This study reinforces that efforts to promote green retail in rural/developing areas in Indonesia must be carried out gradually, adaptively, and contextually. Education and promotion must be tailored to local needs, utilizing accessible language, media, and community figures. Socialization is not sufficient at the literacy level alone. Still, it must also strengthen real-life examples and local testimonials and be supported by easy access to products at competitive prices. Community-based approaches and collaboration between producers, retailers,

government, and local leaders are crucial for green consumption to become a social norm rather than an incidental choice.

Theoretically, these findings confirm the limitations of green consumer behavior models in developing societies, where external factors—access, price, social norms—play a larger role than internal motivations or personal attitudes. Integrating the Theory of Planned Behavior ([Ajzen, 1991](#)) and the Value-Belief-Norm Theory ([Stern, 2000](#)) remains highly relevant. Still, it requires adaptation to the rural context, where perceived control, economic incentives, and peer examples are more effective than mere attitude interventions.

In term of policy recommendation, green retail policies need to focus on: (1) expanding the distribution and availability of green products in rural areas at competitive prices; (2) strengthening community-based education, involving local leaders, and promoting through relevant media; (3) encouraging producers and retailers to be transparent in their green product claims, and involving the government as a supervisor and promoter of eco-labels; (4) providing tangible incentives—such as discounts, price subsidies, or sustainable events—to give rural consumers rational reasons to switch to green products; and (5) establishing green retail pilot projects in regions as role models, thereby serving as a starting point for broader changes in consumer behavior.

5. Conclusion

This study confirms that the knowledge and awareness of the people of Bone Regency regarding the concept of green retail and sustainable products are still minimal and varied. The definition of sustainable products is often misunderstood or partially understood. At the same time, the concept of green retail itself is still considered a big city discourse, far from the reality of retail in small villages/regencies. Most consumers prioritize price, practicality, and product availability when choosing goods, while sustainability or eco-friendly labels are only secondary considerations, often ignored. The social influence of family, friends, and media in encouraging green consumption is also minimal and sporadic; behavioral changes are more triggered by promotions, discounts, or short-term events than by long-term environmental commitments.

Meanwhile, limited access and distribution of green products in local stores are significant obstacles for consumers to change their behavior consistently. Factors such as low environmental literacy, low internalization of individual responsibility towards the environment, and the absence of tangible incentives from the government and local businesses are significant challenges in adopting green retail in rural areas.

A more contextual approach is needed to shift consumption behavior toward more environmentally friendly practices, including community-based education, expanded access to green products at competitive prices, and collaboration between producers, retailers, the government, and local communities. Without systemic changes in distribution, education, and incentives, green consumption behavior in rural villages/small districts will remain sporadic and incidental.

This study has several limitations. First, the scope of the study is limited to one district, so the findings and conclusions cannot be generalized to all rural areas in Indonesia, which may have different social, economic, and cultural characteristics. Second, the data obtained is qualitative and highly influenced by the perceptions, narratives, and experiences of individual informants, so it has the potential to contain subjective bias. Third, this study has not explored in depth the role of retailers, distributors, and the influence of local government policies in supporting green

retail. Fourth, external variables such as the influence of globalization, e-commerce, or national market dynamics have not been explored in depth.

Future research should be conducted comparatively in several districts/cities to obtain a broader picture of green retail adoption in various rural contexts in Indonesia. A mixed-method approach, involving quantitative data and large-scale surveys, is needed to more objectively measure the influence of price, access, incentives, and environmental literacy on green consumption behavior. Longitudinal studies are also essential to monitor changes in consumer perceptions and behavior over the long term and the effectiveness of green retail intervention programs in local communities. Additionally, in-depth research on collaborative promotional strategies between producers, retailers, and local governments, along with exploring the role of digital technology and social media in accelerating green retail adoption in rural areas, is highly recommended to enrich understanding and inform the formulation of more effective policies.

Acknowledgments

This research was funded by the Directorate of Research and Community Service (DPPM), Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology (Kemdiktisaintek), Republic of Indonesia, as part of the 2025 BIMA Grant Program under the Early-Career Lecturer Research Scheme (PDP). The authors sincerely express their gratitude for the support and funding provided by DPPM and Kemdiktisaintek, whose commitment to advancing research and community service in higher Education has made this study possible.

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