

## **The Influence of Sustainability Messaging on Consumer Willingness to Pay a Premium for Eco-Friendly Sports Footwear with the Moderating Role of Environmental Concern in Sri Lanka**

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The footwear industry is shifting towards sustainability due to increasing consumer awareness of ecological issues, particularly in sports footwear. This trend has led to higher prices for sustainable products. In Sri Lanka, sustainability is still in its early stages. Sri Lanka's sports footwear industry is transitioning toward sustainability, but challenges remain. Consumers are unaware of the environmental impacts of their choices, and there is a discrepancy between attitude and behavior. Price sensitivity also exists among Sri Lankan consumers, with high prices for eco-friendly products due to higher production costs. The local industry's infrastructure and supply chain cannot be maintained for mass production of eco-friendly sports shoes, requiring high capital investments. The Sri Lanka Export Development Board Industry Capability Report emphasizes the need for modernization and capacity building to achieve international standards. The association between sustainability messaging and consumers' premium purchase of eco-friendly sports footwear has been investigated, but there is a deviation in empirical studies on the moderation effects of environmental concern in the Sri Lankan context. Previous studies have shown that if sustainability messaging is properly articulated, consumers are likely to show positive behavioral changes. However, the Sri Lankan market is under-investigated, and the studies on the role of environmental awareness and ethical consumption awareness are limited. Furthermore, studies on sustainable messaging and environmental issues are limited as well. Therefore, it is necessary to fill this available deviation to design effective marketing campaigns and facilitate sustainable consumption in the Sri Lankan sports-shoes market.

Previous studies show that sustainability messaging and environmental concerns have a strong influence on consumer willingness to pay a premium. Customers are more likely to support eco-friendly items when they hear clear, reliable messaging, but brand trust, cost, and usefulness are all crucial. The impact in Sri Lanka is limited by low awareness and high expenses, highlighting the necessity of accessible pricing and smart messages. This study uses a quantitative methodological approach to investigate the impact of sustainability messaging on consumers' willingness to pay a premium for eco-sports footwear. Furthermore, a deductive approach is used, with a positive philosophy applied. A cross-sectional research strategy is employed, using a postal questionnaire to collect primary data on eco-friendly behavior, sustainability messaging, willingness to pay a premium, environmental concern, and demographics. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 408 persons in Sri Lanka who were chosen by convenient sampling. Descriptive statistics, reliability and validity testing, correlation analysis, and regression modelling were used in the study's data analysis, which was conducted using SPSS software.

These are the major key findings of the study. Sustainability messaging positively influences consumers' willingness to pay a premium for eco-friendly sports footwear while moderating the effect of environmental concern. However, its moderation effect is not significantly strong. Consequently, this study explores the impact of sustainability messaging on consumer willingness to pay a premium for eco-friendly sports footwear in Sri Lanka. Despite global research, Sri Lanka has not yet adopted this approach due to unique cultural practices and economic factors. The research aims to understand how environmental sensitivity influences consumers' sensitivity to price and how businesses and policymakers can create effective environmental sustainability programs in this unique market environment. The study highlights the importance of sustainability messages in eco-friendly sports footwear, indicating that consumers are willing to pay more for green products. Firms can expand their scope by designing marketing campaigns aimed at the public, stressing the environmental and social impacts of the products. Focusing on recycled materials, carbon footprint reduction, vegan certifications, and cruelty-free certifications can reach a wider audience and exploit the positive relationship between sustainable messages and premium pricing. However, eco-speaking out should not increase the impact of sustainable messages. This research explores

consumers' willingness to pay a premium for eco-friendly sports footwear in Sri Lanka.

However, the findings may not apply to other eco-friendly products or customer attitudes. The quantitative approach of the study does not fully understand customer perceptions or emotions. Qualitative approaches like interviews or focus groups could provide more detailed insights. The sample size of 408 participants may not be sufficient to generalize the findings to the entire population of Sri Lanka. To have more credible results, a larger sample with diverse views and experiences could be used. Further studies should explore eco-friendly products beyond sports shoes, using qualitative techniques such as interviews or focus groups to understand consumer beliefs and attitudes. A broader sample of Sri Lankans from different regions, cultures, and income brackets could also be considered. The extent to which geography and culture influence sustainable consumption is also a concern. Unifying qualitative and quantitative approaches could enhance the understanding of consumer behavior and attitudes towards eco-friendly products.

**Keywords:** *Sustainability Messaging; Willingness to Pay a Premium; Eco Friendly Sports Footwear; Environmental Concern; Green Consumer Behavior*