Unveiling Brand Affinity through Sustainable Packaging: Understanding Societal, Environmental, and Regulatory Influences in Urban India

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Abstract

This research delves into the intricate dynamics governing brand affinity within the realm of sustainable packaging, examining the interplay of social pressure, environmental concern, and regulatory pressure as independent variables influencing brand affinity. The study investigates their impact on brand affinity and, subsequently, how brand affinity shapes brand advocacy and loyalty. The research, conducted among 400 respondents in urban India, focuses on individuals who are regular buyers of products from brands renowned for their sustainable packaging practices across segments including personal care, food & beverages, fashion, and household items. The purposeful sampling method was employed to select participants with specific engagement with sustainability-focused brands in these sectors.

Using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) through the AMOS software, the study aimed to unravel the relationships between key variables. The findings unveil a nuanced web of influences on brand affinity within the context of sustainable packaging. Surprisingly, regulatory pressure emerged as lacking a significant positive influence on brand affinity among the surveyed consumers. However, the paths from environmental concern to brand affinity and social pressure to brand affinity exhibited robust and positive associations, both found to be statistically significant.

Moreover, the research identifies that brand affinity significantly correlates with both brand advocacy and brand loyalty, indicating its pivotal role in driving consumer behaviour and commitment towards sustainable brands. The positive and significant paths from brand affinity to advocacy and loyalty highlight the instrumental role of cultivating strong brand connections in nurturing brand advocates and fostering enduring customer loyalty within sustainable packaging contexts.

Keywords: Sustainable Packaging, Brand Affinity, Environmental Concern Brand Advocacy, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

Introduction

In an era characterized by growing environmental concerns and a growing emphasis on sustainable consumption, the adoption of sustainable packaging has become a central part of consumer behavior. This

study examines the complex web of factors that influence consumers and decisions to adopt environmentally friendly packaging, focusing mainly on the mediating role of brand affinity w.r.t sustainable packaging. In this context, three main independent variables, environmental concern ,regulatory pressure and social influence have been chosen, while the dependent variable is the customer advocacy and loyalty with brand affinity w.r.t sustainable packaging as the catalyst.This study uses a quantitative research method and surveys using structural equation modeling to analyze the data collected. The results of this study shed light on the complex relationships between these variables. In particular, environmental issues have been shown to have a positive effect on perceived product quality, and both independent variables have a significant effect on the use of sustainable packaging. In addition, perceived value was shown to be an important mediator between environmental management and sustainable packaging adoption, further highlighting the complex dynamics. It should be noted that perceived product quality also partially mediates the relationship between environmental concern and perceived value

This study highlights the central role of loyalty and advocacy in consumers' decisions on the adoption of sustainable packaging and emphasizes the importance of environmental issues, the regulatory issues and social influences in forming consumer perceptions and behavior. The implications of these findings extend to companies and policy makers seeking to promote sustainable packaging practices by informing effective marketing strategies and consumer environmental education initiatives, and the perceived value of sustainable packaging, which ultimately drives its widespread adoption.

Literature Review

Environmental concerns,green packaging and customer loyalty

Kim, M. J., & Hall, C. M. (2020) mentioned that there are connections between environmentally conscious diners, hedonistic and utilitarian consumer values, and sustainable restaurant practices. It reveals how hedonistic and utilitarian values are positively influenced by sustainable restaurant operations, enhancing diners' participation in waste-reduction efforts and restaurant loyalty as a result. This association is moderated by environmental concern, suggesting that diners who care more about the environment are more likely to be impacted by sustainable practices. The study highlights the necessity of catering to various customer categories based on their levels of environmental concern and offers theoretical insights into how sustainable practices affect consumer behavior. It also offers practical recommendations for restaurant operators. Future studies might examine social aspects of restaurant sustainability and the difficulties in implementing sustainable practices, though.Even **Prakash, G., & Pathak, P. (2017)** demonstrated that how Indian customers are becoming more environmentally conscious and how their purchasing decisions are influenced by things like personal conventions, a willingness to pay more for ecologically friendly goods, and a favorable attitude toward sustainable packaging. The report highlights the necessity for marketers to comprehend and take advantage of these elements in order to push sustainable packaging strategies in India's expanding market. Although the research offers insightful information on young Indian consumers, it recommends that future research take a bigger sample into account and analyze actual customer behavior in addition to intentions.

Gustavo, J. U., Pereira, G. M., Bond, A. J., Viegas, C. V., & Borchardt, M. (2018) emphasized the significance of rethinking product packaging to lessen its environmental impact.Though the case majorly focuses on the shortcomings faced by retailers, the evaluation points out that in order to achieve sustainable goals through packaging redesign, merchants must work in conjunction with suppliers and customers.Hence role of customer ,most importantly the indulgence of customer resulting from his loyalty is very significant in shaping the business for sustainable packaging.

In the study made by **Coelho, P. M., Corona, B., Ten Klooster, R., & Worrell, E. (2020),** the potential for reusable packaging to lessen these effects on the environment and economy is highlighted. The effectiveness of reusable packaging solutions is shaped by policy (adding the regulatory aspects), customer behavior, and logistics, as the essay emphasizes. It draws attention to the paucity of studies on the economic and environmental impacts of business-to-consumer (B2C) packaging. In order to better understand and encourage the adoption of reusable packaging in various market groups, the study's conclusion calls for additional research as well as decision support tools.

Hao, Y., Liu, H., Chen, H., Sha, Y., Ji, H., & Fan, J. (2019) highlighted that in China's burgeoning logistics and e-commerce industries, this study explores consumers' awareness of and willingness to pay for sustainable packaging. It analyzes important variables that affect consumers' willingness to pay and identifies four main variables: the environment, the quality of sustainable packaging, the commodity, and the price of the packaging. Although there is little consumer knowledge about sustainable packaging, there is a strong willingness to support eco-friendly choices, especially when they are in line with useful criteria like simplicity and re-usability.This study offers useful recommendations for companies and decision-makers in the fields of sustainable development and sustainable packaging.**Priyanshi Jain , Dr. Manoj Hudnurkar (2022)** talks about how consumer behavior is affected by sustainability and how it is becoming more and more important in the Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector. It suggests that companies inform customers about how their decisions affect the environment and looks at possible topics for additional study on sustainable packaging materials and how customers respond to changes in packaging.

Impact of consumer advocacy on purchase intention

Rahadian, B., Fadly Prayogo, R., Sodikin, A., & Saribanon, E. (2020) the study examines the impact of consumer advocacy on purchase intention and emphasizes that eco-friendly packaging plays a crucial role in cutting waste and assisting sectors like logistics and the food and beverage industry. The results highlight the potential expansion of sustainable packaging companies in response to customers' growing environmental consciousness. The study provides insights into the shifting environment of sustainable packaging solutions by examining various types of green packaging, including edible packaging, bio-farm packaging, and packaging made of seaweed.**Wandosell, G., Parra-Meroño, M. C., Alcayde, A., & Baños, R. (2021)** in there study focus on sustainable growth and what is means to both businesses and environmentally conscientious customers.It further states that there are several factors that interact and affect customer's decisions which shapes their attitude towards buying eco-friendly packaged product ,there by advocating the sustainable packaging concept.

Green Packaging and Brand affinity

J. Shrum, John A. McCarty and Tina M. Lowrey (1995) The research under consideration examines the psychographic characteristics of green consumers and their perspectives on environmental advertising with reference to Americans.The study identifies critical consumer characteristics like price awareness, brand loyalty, and information-seeking behavior connected with green purchasing. It also emphasizes how crucial it is to stay away from deceptive advertising in order to keep the trust of environmentally conscious customers. The research emphasizes the necessity for careful and open communication while offering insightful information on how to comprehend and sell to green consumers.With brand loyalty the customer is amicably going to develop brand affinity towards the green packaging aspect.Nai-Jen Chang and Cher-Min Fong 2010 introduced two new constructs in the study: "green customer satisfaction" and "green customer loyalty." It looks into the connections between green consumer pleasure, green company image, green product quality, and green customer loyalty. The literature study emphasizes the significance of green management, CSR, and environmental concerns in the contemporary business scene. It also

highlights the importance of consumer loyalty and satisfaction in earlier studies, but it also draws attention to the dearth of studies on these subjects in relation to environmental or green issues.Martinho, G., Pires, A., Portela, G., & Fonseca, M. (2015) reviewed how consumer behavior—specifically, product purchasing decisions and recycling behavior—relating to sustainable packaging. It draws attention to the distinctions that exist between consumers who prioritize environmentally friendly packaging and those who do not, including aspects like gender, environmental awareness, societal viewpoints, green purchasing attitudes, and perceived control. The study highlights how important price is in determining what consumers choose as well as how environmental information shapes pro-environmental behavior. Amy Wong (2023) findings demonstrate the benefits of green sustainability initiatives on brand perception, customer experience, and brand trust. While brand trust influences brand satisfaction and purchase intention, brand experience influences brand satisfaction, brand affinity, and purchase intention. Furthermore, it is confirmed that brand trust and brand experience play mediating roles.These all further leads to brand affinity.

Sustainable packaging and regulatory concerns

Schwepker, C. H., & Cornwell, T. B. (1991) distinguish between consumers who are prepared to buy products packed sustainably and those who are not, addressing the growing problem of packaging contributing to solid waste. The study highlights the significance of socio-psychological variables as significant discriminators, such as attitudes toward environmentally conscious living, attitudes toward littering, locus of control, and perceptions of pollution. The results show that instead of depending on strict legislation, policymakers should support voluntary waste reduction techniques in order to reach the environmentally conscious customer. This study emphasizes the possible influence of customer awareness and attitude shifts on consumption patterns for ecological packaging.

Social influence on Sustainable packaging

Wang, S.-T. (2014) investigated how social and consumer aspects affect consumers' inclinations to make green purchases. The study sheds insight on the factors that influence customers' propensity to buy environmentally friendly items by examining variables like collectivism, external locus of control, subjective standards, and environmental visibility. The results indicate that whilst an external locus of control has a detrimental impact on green purchase intentions, collectivism ideals, subjective standards, and environmental visibility have a favorable effect.**Shodiq W.M.,Relawati R.,Bakhtiara.,**(2020) ,in their study examine the consumer attitudes and behavior about food packaging in Indonesian cities and rural regions, with an emphasis on the influence of education on these attitudes and behaviors. The study highlights the value of education in encouraging environmentally friendly behavior by revealing notable differences in attitudes, packaging preferences, and disposal practices between higher and lower educated groups in rural regions. On the other hand, no appreciable variations were seen in urban areas with more evenly distributed educational levels.Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior,**Beibei Zhang and Xiuyu Guo,(2019)** explores the variables influencing customers' intention to use green packaging. It concludes that customers' propensity to utilize green packaging is most significantly influenced by subjective standards, with behavioral attitudes and perceived behavior control coming in second and third. The study makes three recommendations: enhancing consumer accessibility to green packaging, bolstering green packaging education, and promoting green packaging through media and marketing tactics.

Conceptual Model

A review of literature and further analysis of the gaps in the existing literature leads us to a conceptual model as depicted in figure 1. The suggested model for the current study envisages validating the relationships as depicted below.
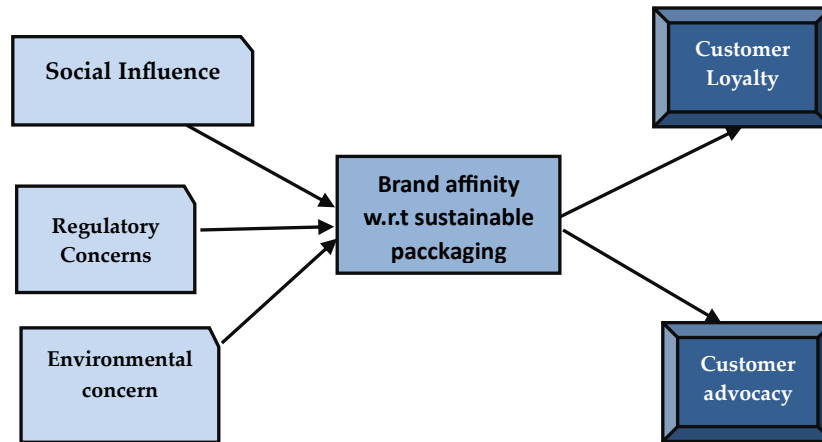
Figure 1:
Conceptual Model

Research Methodology

This study aims to investigate the interplay between various factors influencing consumer behavior towards sustainably packaged brands. The research examines six key constructs: environmental concern, social influence, regulatory pressure, brand affinity, loyalty, and brand advocacy among a sample of 400 respondents who regularly purchase sustainably packaged products. The research employs judgmental sampling to select participants. To evaluate the proposed model, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using AMOS is applied. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) are performed to assess discriminant and convergent validity.

Sampling Method: The study utilizes a judgmental sampling technique to select a sample size of 400 respondents who are frequent consumers of sustainably packaged brands. Participants are selected based on their consistent purchases of products known for their sustainable packaging attributes.

Measurement: Scale items for the six constructs (environmental concern, social influence, regulatory pressure, brand affinity, loyalty, and brand advocacy) are formulated based on established measures from the literature. These scales were carefully crafted and adapted to fit the context of sustainable packaging adoption and consumer behavior.

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Table:1

Measurement Scale and Items

Scale	Items
Environmental Concern (EC) Dunlap, Van Liere, Mertig, and Jones (2000)	I am deeply concerned about environmental issues.
	The earth's resources are finite, and we must reduce our consumption.
	Preserving the environment is a top priority for me.
	Human beings are severely abusing the environment.
	I feel a strong sense of responsibility to protect nature.
Social Pressure (SP) Ward and Wackman (1971)	My family's preferences influence my decision to choose products with sustainable packaging.
	Peer pressure has an impact on my selection of environmentally friendly packaging.
	I am influenced by societal norms and values in my choice of sustainable packaging products
Regulatory Pressure (RP) Zhang et al. (2015)	Government regulations significantly impact my decision to choose products with sustainable packaging.
	I am influenced by environmental laws and regulations when making choices about sustainable packaging products.
	My purchasing decisions are guided by the legal requirements related to eco-friendly packaging.
	The government's efforts to promote sustainable packaging influence my product choices.
	Regulatory pressure encourages me to opt for products with sustainable packaging options
Brand Affinity (BA) (Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011)	I feel a strong emotional bond with this brand
	I'm captivated by this brand
	I love this brand
	I feel attached to this brand
	I have a feeling of sympathy toward this brand
	I have a feeling of sympathy toward this brand
Loyalty Beatty et al., 1988 Pascale Quester Ai Lin Lin (2003)	I consider myself highly loyal to this brand (Beatty et al., 1988)
	If my preferred brand is not available, I go to another store
	I paid a lot of attention to this brand over other brands
	I always thought of this brand over other brands whenever I was buying a FMCG product.
Brand Advocacy Joo, S.; Miller, E.G.; Fink, J.S. (2019) Bhattacharya, C.B.; Sen, S. (2003)	I actively recommend this brand to my friends and family.
	I often share positive experiences with this brand on social media.
	I would go out of my way to support this brand.
	I would like to try new products introduced by this brand
	I talk favourably about this brand to my friends and family

Data Collection: Data collection involves administering a structured questionnaire to the selected 400 participants. The questionnaire includes items related to the six constructs, gauging respondents' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors towards sustainably packaged brands. The Likert scale is used to measure responses, ensuring a standardized evaluation across constructs.

Data Analysis: The collected data was subjected to Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) through AMOS software. SEM allows for the examination of complex relationships between the constructs in the proposed model. Additionally, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) is conducted to explore underlying factor structures, while Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is employed to confirm the validity and reliability of the measurement model. Discriminant validity and convergent validity are assessed through these analyses.

Data Analysis

This study utilized structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze the impact of various factors on purchase intention. SEM allows for the simultaneous estimation of relationships between dependent and independent variables. Following the approach recommended by Hair et al. (1998), a two-step model-building process was adopted, involving evaluating constructs and establishing the path model. Initially, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted, and subsequently, the model was evaluated structurally according to the proposed hypotheses using   AMOS (version 20). SEM presents several advantages, such as assessing the influence of one construct on another, especially when multiple constructs are involved, making it a more robust method compared to multiple regressions as highlighted by numerous researchers. This methodology serves as an effective means to comprehend and interpret complex relationships.

A 5-point Likert scale was utilized to evaluate the items representing these constructs. To ensure accuracy, reliability, and validity of the measurement model, thorough assessments were conducted. The scale for measuring all the constructs was drafted using the literature review.

Figure 2: Confirmatory Factor Model

Six constructs were outlined for the study and integrated into the measurement model, encompassing distinct latent variables: Regulatory pressure (4-item scale), Environmental concern (4-item scale), social influence (3-item scale), Brand Affinity (5-item scale), Loyalty (5-item scale), and Brand Advocacy (5-item scale). The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results demonstrated a satisfactory fit to the data: $\chi2$ = 591.134, degrees of freedom (df) = 291, normed $\chi2$ = 2.031, adjusted goodness-of-fit index, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.957, goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = 0.901, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.051, all within the acceptable range. Additionally, the respective t-values of all items were significant ($p < 0.001$). Prior studies (Byrne, 2001; Hair et al., 2010) supported the adequacy of these metric values obtained in the CFA.
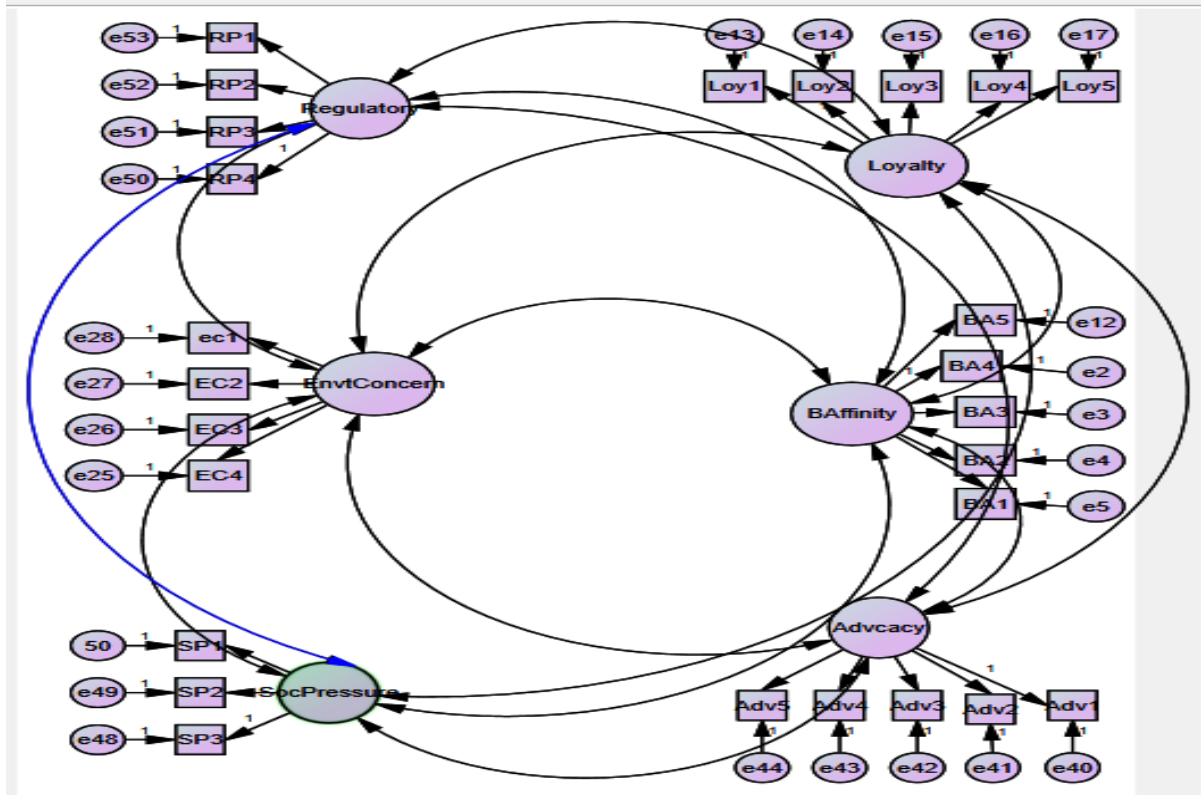
Table 2

Model Fit Measures

Measure	Estimate	Threshold	Interpretation
CMIN	591.134	--	--
DF	291	--	--
CMIN/DF	2.031	Between 1 and 3	Excellent
CFI	0.957	>0.95	Excellent
SRMR	0.090	<0.08	Acceptable
RMSEA	0.051	<0.06	Excellent
PClose	0.399	>0.05	Excellent

The research delved into evaluating the reliability and validity of the constructs. Reliability was examined using composite reliability, a measure assessing the consistency of items measuring a construct. Similarly, assessments of convergent and discriminant validity were conducted. Composite reliability, assessing the uni-dimensionality among items linked to a latent construct, showed good convergent validity for values above 0.6 (Bagozzi, 1988).

Convergent validity, evaluating whether theoretically related measures indeed correspond to the latent variable, was examined through factor loadings and average variance explained, as suggested (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The factor loadings exceeded .6 for all indicators in the study, signifying a strong connection between the variable and the latent construct. Higher factor loadings indicated a stronger association between the variable and the underlying construct.

Table 3:

	Item	Factor Loadings	CR Composite Reliability	AVE Average Variance Extracted	MSV
Social Influence	SP1		0.892	0.735	
	SP2				0.048
	SP3				
Brand Affinity	BA1			0.726	
	BA2				
	BA3		0.888		0.171
	BA4				
	BA5				
Environmental Concern	EC1		0.920	0.746	
	EC2				0.093
	EC3				
	EC4				
Regulatory Pressure	RP1			0.851	
	RP2		0.958		0.103
	RP3				
	RP4				
Brand Advocacy	Adv1		0.980		
	Adv2			0.942	0.171
	Adv3				
	Adv4				
	Adv5				
Loyalty	Loyalty1		0.776	0.539	0.048
	Loyalty2				
	Loyalty3				
	Loyalty4				
	Loyalty5				

Discriminant Validity

The next stage of validation for the constructs is the assessment of discriminant validity, which confirms the distinctiveness of each construct. Discriminant validity ensures the individuality of each construct, ensuring that the measures within each construct do not overlap with those of any other construct (Schwab, 2005). This validity check evaluates the variance explained by a latent construct compared to the shared variance among other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

In accordance with Fornell and Larcker's (1981) approach, Table 4 presents the correlations among the constructs in the model, displaying the square roots of the average variance explained (AVE) on the table's diagonal. Each diagonal value exceeds the non-diagonal values, indicating successful fulfillment of the discriminant validity test (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table No: 4
Discriminant Validity

|	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	Social Pressure	Brand Affinity	Loyalty	EC	Advocacy	Regulatory
Social Pressure	0.957	0.880	0.021	0.957	**0.938**					
Brand Affinity	0.817	0.577	0.123	0.854	0.145	**0.691**				
Loyalty	0.812	0.560	0.364	0.837	0.021	0.350	**0.685**			
Env Concern	0.911	0.720	0.044	0.912	-0.047	0.209	0.022	**0.849**		
Advocacy	0.892	0.624	0.364	0.899	-0.019	0.309	0.603	0.090	**0.790**	
Regulatory	0.961	0.861	0.034	0.965	0.065	0.003	-0.015	0.184	-0.106	**0.928**

The evaluation of discriminant validity involves comparing the AVE of each latent construct with the squared correlations between other latent constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As demonstrated in Table 4, the analysis confirms discriminant validity for all latent constructs. The AVE for each construct surpasses its shared variance with any other construct. Based on these findings, it can be asserted that each construct maintains its uniqueness without substantial linkage to other latent constructs (Lings, 2005).

Results of the Structural Model

After the measurement model was tested for reliability and validity, the structural model was tested using SEM, which is an effective method for testing reflective models. An underlying assumption of SEM is that the items or indicators used to measure latent variables are reflective in nature. In this study, CB-SEM was used to measure the path relationships in the model. Path analysis is a statistical tool that can be used to test and confirm the structural model and assess the hypotheses that represent the relationship between variables of interest. It is an important tool for assessing the linkage among variables because its main goal is to make an approximation of the degree of association among the variables in order to investigate the causal relationships. Path analysis measures the relative importance of different direct and indirect causal paths leading to the dependent variable. The structural model fits the data acceptably. The measurement model also fits the data acceptably. H1 states that Regulatory Pressure (RP) has no significant relationship between regulatory pressure and brand affinity (table4). The findings show that the path relationship between Environmental Concern (EC) and Brand Affinity (BA) is positive and significant (Hypothesis 2 is accepted). Similarly, hypothesis 3 is also accepted as it is observed in table 5 that Social Pressure (SP) is significantly influencing Brand Affinity (BA). Further Brand Affinity (BA) is significantly influencing Loyalty and Brand Advocacy (Hypothesis 4 & 5).

Table No.5

Structural Path Relations

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Test Results
Brand Affinity	<---	Regulatory	-.050	.052	-.971	.331	Rejected
Brand Affinity	<---	Environmental Concern	.191	.051	3.768	***	Accepted
Brand Affinity	<---	Social Pressure	.136	.048	2.825	.005	Accepted
Loyalty	<---	Brand Affinity	.246	.042	5.795	***	Accepted
Advocacy	<---	Brand Affinity	.336	.057	5.876	***	Accepted
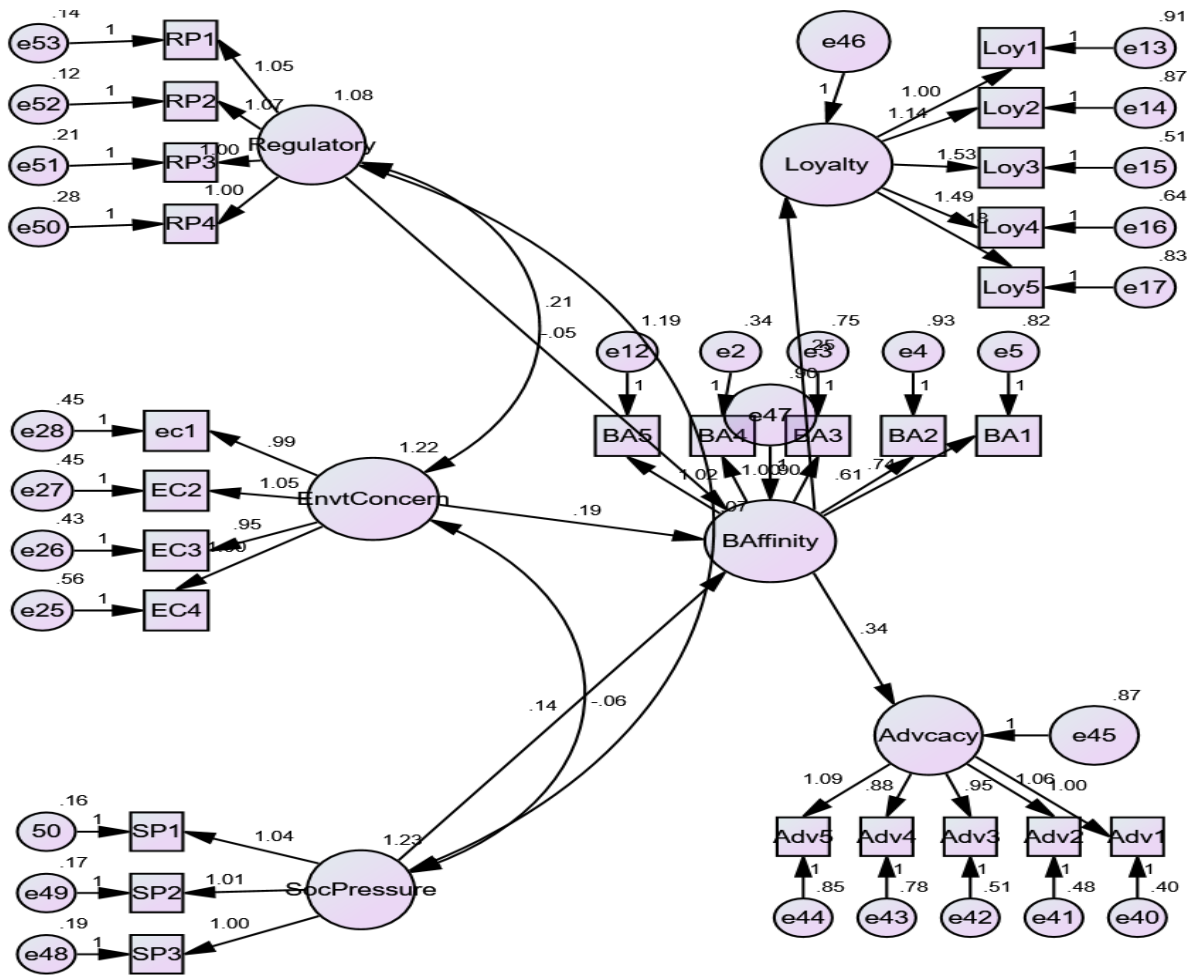
Figure 3:

Structural Path Model

Discussion and Conclusion

It is noticed from the path analysis that **Environmental Concern and Social Influence on Brand Affinity:** The research paper highlights that environmental concern and social influence have a substantial impact on brand affinity. This implies that consumers who are more environmentally conscious or influenced by social factors are more likely to develop a stronger affinity towards certain brands. It suggests that companies that actively engage in environmentally friendly practices or align with social causes tend to resonate more positively with such consumers. This finding underscores the importance for businesses to integrate sustainability initiatives and social responsibility into their brand strategies to enhance consumer affinity.

Regulatory Pressure and Brand Affinity: Contrary to the expectations, the research indicates that regulatory pressure did not have a significant influence on brand affinity. This outcome might suggest that consumers' brand perceptions and affinities might not be solely driven by compliance with regulations or legal mandates. While regulatory compliance is important for ethical and legal reasons, it might not be a major driver in shaping consumers' emotional connections or preferences towards brands.

Brand Affinity's Relationship with Brand Advocacy and Loyalty: The study reveals a positive and significant relationship between brand affinity, brand advocacy, and loyalty. This implies that consumers who have a strong affinity for a brand are more likely to become advocates for that brand. They are not only willing to promote the brand to others but also exhibit higher levels of loyalty. This finding reinforces the idea that building strong brand affinity can be a crucial factor in fostering brand advocacy and long-term customer loyalty, contributing to sustained business success.

Implications

Strategic Brand Building: Businesses can leverage these findings to focus on strategies that prioritize environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and fostering emotional connections with consumers. By aligning their brand values with causes that resonate with their target audience, companies can strengthen brand affinity.

Importance of Consumer Engagement: Brands should invest in engaging consumers beyond product features and prices. Engaging in meaningful conversations about environmental issues or supporting social causes can create a deeper emotional connection, leading to higher brand affinity.

Overall, these findings emphasize the significance of understanding and nurturing brand affinity through proactive engagement with environmental and social concerns, rather than merely relying on regulatory compliance, in driving brand advocacy and loyalty among consumers.

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