

The purchase intention of domestic tourists toward green hotels

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Abstract

The global hospitality industry has enacted numerous sustainable measures to face the soaring green consumerism trend and entice consumer purchase intention. Sri Lanka has positioned itself as a top tourist destination in the recent past among international travellers amidst fierce competition from the region. Domestic tourists of Sri Lanka have proven to have contributed significantly to the industry during unprecedented times over the years. This study investigated the purchase intention of domestic tourists towards green hotels, using green marketing efforts applied by hotels in terms of green practices, green communications and pricing and examined these variables in the context of the theory of planned behaviour using the attitude and subjective norms as the precursors of purchase intention. The research used the quantitative method to collect data through a structured questionnaire administered online among a sample size of 100 green hotel patrons within Colombo 1 to 8 using the convenience sampling technique. The gathered data was analysed using statistical and descriptive analysis on Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings of this study confirmed the assertion of the theory of planned behaviour that attitude and subjective norms are significant precursors of purchase intention whilst the variables pricing and green communications were found to be more significant than green practices and subjective norms towards inciting purchase intention. Based on the findings, the author recommended that green hoteliers include community-inclusive practices and transparent communication with the target market through electronic media to instigate the purchase intention towards green hotels.

Keywords: Green Marketing Efforts, Purchase Intention, Theory of Planned Behaviour, Domestic Tourists

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Green marketing is an ethical approach followed throughout the entire value chain of a commercial enterprise to curtail its impact on communal, global and environmental ecosystems (Sharma, 2021; Tsai et al., 2020). The degradation of the environment and the public notion towards sustainability have compelled many businesses across the globe to align their processes to inflict minimal impact on the environment (Sharma, 2021). Similarly, the hotel industry strives to comply with the green trend by enforcing processes to minimise its footprint and waste aggregation (Choi, Jang & Kandampully, 2015). As per the Green Hotels Association [GHA] (2023a), lodging enterprises that practice green marketing initiatives and manage sustainable intake and output are classified as green hotels.

Purchase intention is referred as the psychological persistence of an individual to

experience a service or purchase a product to satisfy personal necessity based on subjective self-evaluation (Chanda, Isa & Ahmed, 2023). Similarly, green purchase intention is defined as an individual's mindful desire towards purchasing environmentally safe products and services (Amin & Tarun, 2020). Furthermore, Choi et al. (2015) claim that a strong intention is inclined to influence behaviour and is considered a vital tool in predicting consumer behaviour. The colossal marketing efforts enforced by green hotels in attracting first-time and repeat visitors have prompted many academics to research the drivers of purchase intention towards green hotels (Achchuthan, Prahalathan, Umanakenan & Kajenthiran, 2021; Nezakati et al., 2015; Wang, 2020). Although genuine green marketing efforts direct purchase intention towards green products, deceptive attempts may weaken the impression of the overall concept thus deliberate attention is vital to comprehend the

concept of green marketing (Juwaheer, Pudaruth & Noyaux, 2012).

1.2 Overview of the Tourism Industry in Sri Lanka

Tourism is a labour-intensive industry that is dependent heavily on destination resources and thus highly sensitive to macro-environmental changes (Nezakati et al., 2015). As a cardinal forex earner, the global tourism industry was valued at over 9,000 billion dollars with a contribution of 10.4 percent to the global gross domestic product (GDP) in 2019 (The World Bank, 2022). The tourism industry consists of lodging facilitators, destination management companies, food and beverage outlets, activities and recreation facilitators, host community, the government, international and domestic tourists (Amoako, Obuobisa-Darko & Marfo, 2021). Moreover, the industry is recognised for creating employment attributing by 10.6 percent to global employment with 330 million employees (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2022).

Sri Lankan tourism industry contributes to the nation's economy as the third highest foreign income producer with a workforce of over 450,000 which is 11 percent of the total nation's labour force (ILO, 2020). Further, Sri Lanka has been recognised as a top travel destination over the last few years by many leading global publications acknowledging the island's natural resources, affordability and unparalleled hospitality (Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau [SLTPB], 2023). In the year 2022, the industry had catered to 791,978 international tourists which is a 270 percent increment compared to 2021 with an earning of over 1.1 billion dollars (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority [SLTDA], 2022). Interestingly, domestic tourists in Sri Lanka spent close to 400 percent more compared to international tourists in the year 2021 (Statista, 2021a; 2021b). Studies have proven that a sustainable approach elevates a destination's competitive advantage and the responsibility of building a sustainable destination lies with all major tourism stakeholders (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003).

1.3 Rationale of the Study

Many studies have highlighted that Asian countries lag behind in terms of awareness and availability of sustainable facilities compared to Western countries (Achchuthan et al., 2021; Wang, 2020). Although international tourists' contribution to the Sri Lankan economy is significant as one of the top forex earners, the contribution of domestic tourists during the off-season and unforeseen calamities has not been evidently recognised (Perera, 2023; Sri Lanka Tourism Alliance, 2020). Subsequent to the green trend upswing, the Switch-Asia plan initiated awareness campaigns amongst the hoteliers emanating the upspring of green hotels in Sri Lanka to lower operational costs by adopting green measures such as green certification, waste management and low energy consumption (Switch-Asia, 2014). Although a few programs have been conducted to create awareness of green hotel practices amongst international tourists, there is scant evidence of any sensitisation programs among domestic tourists on sustainability and green marketing efforts at hotels (SLTDA, 2022; Switch-Asia, 2014). Ritchie and Crouch (2003) assert that for a destination to reach its highest prospects, an apprehension of its domestic travel demands is imperative. Further, the industry's survival is closely associated with the residents' understanding of the conservation of destination resources (United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2020). Therefore, it is crucial that locals are made aware of the green marketing efforts applied by the hotels to comprehend the contribution a local traveller could make towards the economy (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Furthermore, it is vital to understand the factors that influence the purchase intention of domestic tourists when sourcing lodging facilities and the effectiveness of the green marketing efforts employed by the hotels.

Although there are limited studies conducted on green hotels relating to green marketing, green certification, hotel designs, employee behaviour, challenges and consumer behaviour, none have studied the purchase intention of Sri Lankan domestic tourists towards green hotels or related to the awareness level of the residents (Gayathri, Perera & Sumanarathna, 2016; Lee, Lee & Gunarathne, 2019; Weerakoon, Sellar & Arulrajah, 2021). Therefore, this research

aspires to contribute to the literature on this novel topic of the purchase intention of Sri Lankan domestic travellers towards green hotels and the effectiveness of the marketing efforts deployed by green hotels to attract tourists.

1.4 Research Aim

This study aims to evaluate the impact of green marketing efforts undertaken by hotels on the purchase intention of domestic tourists in Sri Lanka.

1.5 Scope

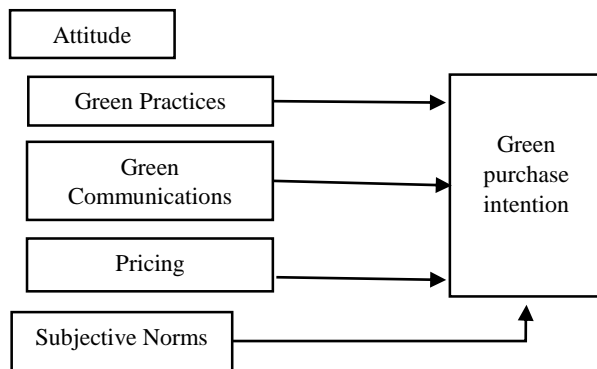
This study will employ a survey among 100 domestic tourists within the city limits of Colombo.

2. Methodology

This study employed the deductive approach along with a survey strategy through the mono-method quantitative choice and embarked on a cross-sectional time horizon. Quantitative primary data was collected via the Microsoft Forms online survey portal and the gathered data was analysed using SPSS software.

2.1 Conceptual framework

Figure 1 below outlines the conceptual framework of this study.



Independent Variables Dependent Variable

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

2.2 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formed for this study.

H1: There is a relationship between green practices and green purchase intention

H2: There is a relationship between green communications and green purchase intention

H3: There is a relationship between pricing and green purchase intention

H4: The influence of family and friends impact green purchase intention

2.3 Operationalisation Table

Table 1 below outlines how the study operationalised the variables into quantifiable aspects for measuring the causal connection between the variables in designing the data collection tool.

Table 1. Operationalisation Table

Variable	Measures
Green Practices	Attitude towards the 3R Concept (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle), willingness to participate in the hotel's green practices
Green Communications	Awareness, willingness to be informed
Pricing	Perceived value, Willingness to pay a premium
Subjective Norms	Peer influence
Purchase intention	Willingness to stay at green hotels

2.4 Population and Sampling

This study selected the green hotel patrons within Colombo city limits as the population. A representative sample of 100 green hotel guests was chosen employing the convenience sampling technique to yield a reasonable response rate within the stipulated timeframe.

2.5 Data Collection

A pilot survey was carried out with 10 respondents and the questionnaire was accepted for administration based on their affirmation. The study conducted an online survey on Microsoft Forms and the survey link was distributed through WhatsApp.

2.6 Data Analysis

This study analysed the gathered responses using the SPSS (version 29) for statistical and descriptive analysis.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Response Rate

This study received complete feedback from 95 respondents from the 100 questionnaires distributed among green patrons in the Colombo city limits.

3.2 Demographic Data

Table 2 below summarises the demographic findings of this study.

Table 2. Demographic Analysis

Variable	Response options	Number of respondents	Response %
Gender	Male	49	51.6%
	Female	46	48.4%
Age Group	21-30 Years	18	18.9%
	31-40 Years	36	37.9%
	41-50 Years	30	31.6%
	Above 50 Years	11	11.6%
Educational qualification	G.C.E O/L	4	4.2%
	G.C.E A/L or equivalent	13	13.7%
	Diploma	21	22.1%
	Undergraduate	15	15.8%
	Postgraduate	42	44.2%
Monthly income	Below 50,000	13	13.7%
	Between 50,000 - 200,000	47	49.5%
	Above 200,000	35	36.8%

Based on the above findings, 51.6 percent were males out of 95 respondents which highlights that males are concerned about environmental issues compared to females. Further, 37.9 percent of the respondents belonged to the age category of 31 – 40 years which signifies that millennials make the most sustainable choices compared to the other age groups influenced by technological advancement and social media. The majority of the respondents (44.2%) are postgraduates which implied that educational level has a significant influence on green

purchase intention and the monthly income of the majority (49.5%) was between 50,000 to 200,000 Sri Lankan rupees which reveals that the green hotel patrons have a decent income to afford staying at green hotels.

3.3 Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the validity of the data collected for this study.

Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test

Variable	No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Green Practices	4	0.903
Green Communication	4	0.831
Pricing	3	0.814
Subjective Norm	4	0.880
Purchase Intention	4	0.918

As per Table 3, all the variables of this study depict higher Cronbach's alpha values than the highest threshold of 0.7. Therefore, the questionnaire employed in this study satisfies the criterion and thereby confirms internal consistency and validates the research to be carried forward while anticipated to yield highly reliable results (Dwivedi, Pandey, Vashist, Pandey & Kumar, 2022).

3.4 Correlation Analysis

Table 4 depicts the correlation analysis results of this study.

Table 4. Correlation Analysis

Dependent variable – Purchase intention

Independent variable	Pearson Correlation Coefficient	Sig.
Green Practices	0.474	<0.001
Green Communications	0.537	<0.001
Pricing	0.583	<0.001
Subjective Norms	0.437	<0.001

As per Table 4, all four independent variables depict a significance value of less than 0.001 which satisfies the threshold value of 0.05 and thereby depicts that green practices, green communications, pricing and subjective norms exhibit a significant correlation with purchase intention. Further, the relationship between green practices and purchase intention is positively moderate with a coefficient of 0.474 while the correlation between green communications and purchase intention is positively strong with a coefficient of 0.537. Similarly, the correlation between pricing and purchase intention is positively strong with a coefficient of 0.583 while the correlation between subjective norms and purchase intention is positively moderate with a coefficient of 0.437.

3.5 Hypotheses Validation

This study aimed to establish the relationship between green practices, green communications, pricing, subjective norms and purchase intention. The theory of planned behaviour was applied with a focus on attitude through green pricing, green communications and pricing, and subjective norms to develop hypotheses according to the research objectives that are mentioned in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Hypothesis Validation

Hypothesis		Validation
H1	There is a relationship between green practices and green purchase intention	Accepted
H2	There is a relationship between green communications and green purchase intention	Accepted
H3	There is a relationship between pricing and green purchase intention	Accepted
H4	The influence of family and friends (Subjective norms) impact green purchase intention	Accepted

Green practices are deemed as one of the primary green marketing efforts that portray green hotels' contribution towards preserving the environment and the community (Liu, 2022). The effectiveness of green practices on customer purchase intention was measured using consumer attitude towards the 3R concept as it is regarded as a fundamental green marketing practice at hotels in order to manage resources and costs while enhancing the environmental well-being (Wickramasinghe, 2016). Further, consumers who are environmentally conscious expect and prefer to stay at hotels that practice the 3R concept, value the practices that cause less harm to the environment and are willing to take part in these practices to support sustainable measures (Choi et al., 2015; Jiang & Kim, 2015; Moise, Gil-Saura & Molina, 2021; Torres-Moraga, Alonso-Don-Santos & Carvajal-Trujillo, 2021). This study's findings validate these assertions as majority of consumers prefer hotels with green practices, inclusion of 3R concepts and consented to their willingness to participate in the measures to support the environment and the community. The acknowledgement of consumer preference and their willingness to participate in hotel green practices displays a positive attitude towards purchase intention (Jiang & Kim, 2015). Further, as per the correlation results shown in Table 4, green practices depict a correlation coefficient of 0.474 with a p-value of less than 0.001 which indicates that green practices have

a significant moderate-positive relationship with purchase intention. Thereby H1 is validated based on the previous research findings and this study's correlation analysis findings.

Green communications are a vital marketing tool in transmitting the green marketing efforts of the hotels to their clientele thereby creating awareness although the receptiveness is subject to individual perception (Sharma, 2021; Vinay & Rudresh, 2018). While direct liaisons with the hotel staff are preferred by consumers due to the personalisation, training the staff on the hotels' greening efforts is what makes it lucrative (Chan, 2014; Kim & Choi, 2013). Further, past hotel experiences are impactful in making future decisions through the knowledge gained (Wang & Wu, 2016). Moreover, whilst factual green advertisements are regarded effective than pictorial skits, they also have the potential to elicit choosing green hotels despite sacrificing a few comforts to promote a healthy environment (Butt, Mukerji & Shareef, 2017; Chen, Hu, He, Lin & Matilla, 2022). The findings of this study confirm these claims as the majority are aware of their environmental responsibilities and are open to being informed about green hotel practices. Environmental awareness promotes a positive attitude toward green hotels and has the potency to influence ecological consumer behaviour and thereby instigate purchase intention of green hotels (Teng, Lu & Huang, 2018). Further as depicted in Table 4, the correlation coefficient value of 0.537 and the p-value of less than 0.001 confirm that there is a positive strong significant relationship between green communications and purchase intention. Therefore, based on the previous study findings and statistical correlation analysis, H2 is proven to be true.

Pricing of green hotels is considered the most dominating factor that leads to purchase intention and thereby influences the actual behaviour (Chan, 2014). The consumers evaluate the pricing of green hotels against their personal gains which highlights the importance of adding value-enhancing measures to justify the pricing (Jiang & Kim, 2015). Eco-conscious consumers who value environment-friendly initiatives willingly choose to stay at green hotels despite the premium pricing (Gonzalez-

Rodriguez, Diaz-Fernandez & Font, 2020). Additionally, as stated in Table 4, pricing depicts a correlation coefficient value of 0.583 and a p-value of less than 0.001 which confirms a positively strong significant relationship between pricing and purchase intention. The study findings corroborate previous theoretical assertions with a majority agreeing that green hotels offer value for the price and are willing to pay a premium thereby validating the H3. However, the popular belief is that green hotels must offer discounts for the sacrifice in the level of luxury against staying at a conventional hotel in terms of reducing, reusing and recycling measures (Sharma, 2021). Alternatively, this study's findings suggest that incremental pricing creates a presupposition for an elevated value among consumers, 'more the price more value' which reemphasises the importance of the value offering (Jiang & Kim, 2015).

Prior research revealed mixed views on the impact of subjective norms on purchase intention as it is a reflection of the social influence on an individual's behaviour (Han & Yoon, 2015; Patwary, Aziz & Hashim, 2022; Wang, Wong, Narayanan, 2019). Patwary et al. (2022) asserted that subjective norms have a direct significant correlation with purchase intention and it is one of the most influential factors. As per the correlation analysis presented in Table 4, subjective norms depict a correlation coefficient value of 0.437 with a significance of less than 0.001 indicating a moderately significant relationship with purchase intention. Therefore, H4 is validated based on previous study findings and statistical findings derived from the correlation analysis of this study. However, these findings contrast Wang et al.'s (2019) findings which yielded negative results on the relationship between subjective norms and purchase intention.

Analysing the above findings in the context of the theory of planned behaviour, this study confirms that attitude plays a key role in instigating an intention which eventually leads towards a behaviour as affirmed by many researchers (Achchuthan et al., 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2019; Yarimoglu & Gunay, 2019). Further, subjective norms which are influenced by societal views portray a significant relationship towards instituting an

intention which has produced mixed findings in the previous research (Patwary et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2019). Thereby, this study conforms to the assertion of the theory of planned behaviour based on the tested two constructs that attitude and subjective norms initiate an intention through the prospects of individual and social perception (Ajzen, 1991).

3.6 Multiple Linear Regression

As per the regression analysis results of this study shown in Table 6, the R Square value was 0.436, which highlights that 43.6 percent of the changes in the purchase intention could be explained through the combination of the independent variables of green practices, green communications, pricing and subjective norms while pricing and green communication being constant predictors of purchase intention.

Table 6. Multiple Linear Regression

Independent variable	Significance (<0.05)
Pricing	<0.001
Green Communications	<0.001
Green Practices	0.281
Subjective Norms	0.151

The findings portrayed in Table 6 reiterate the significance of pricing and green communications towards purchase intention with a significance level of below 0.001 satisfying the criterion. However, green practices and subjective norms depict a significance of 0.281 and 0.151 respectively which is above the threshold level of 0.05, therefore both these variables are less significant towards instigating purchase intention towards green hotels compared to pricing and green communications. The lower significance of green practices could be due to the gap that has been identified by many researchers between the positive attitude towards recycling measures, willingness to participate and the actual behaviour which appears to be a challenge for green hotels (Lunde, 2018; Sharma, 2021). Alternatively, it could also be due to the lack of awareness or ineffective communication of green hotels in educating the consumers about their green

practices (Wheeler, Sharp & Nenycz-Thiel, 2013). Similarly, the low significance of subjective norms could be due to the reluctance of the consumers to admit the influence of their friends and family in a survey setting or maybe due to consumers' increased activity on social media resulting in a lack of interaction with peers depicting less significance of the influence of family and friends (Mishra & Maity, 2021).

3.7 Descriptive Analysis

A descriptive analysis was performed to determine the mean value and thereby measure the central tendency of the tested variables green practices, green communications, pricing, subjective norms and purchase intention which show the average of the responses received on each variable as depicted in Table 7.

Table 7. Degree of satisfaction

Variable	Mean value
Green practices	4.38
Green communication	4.15
Pricing	3.84
Subjective norms	3.31
Purchase intention	4.15

Based on Table 7, green practices depict a mean value of 4.38 which demonstrates that the majority of consumers agree that green practices are vital in selecting green hotels for their stay. This implies that the consumers acknowledge their preference and willingness to participate in hotel green practices which in turn emphasises the importance of instigating consumer purchase intention (Jiang & Kim, 2015). Further, green communications show a mean value of 4.15 highlighting that the majority of the consumers agree that green communications help in creating awareness about environmental concerns and are willing to receive information about eco-friendly practices of green hotels. Similarly, pricing displays a mean value of 3.84 which implies that majority of consumers perceive that green hotels offer great value for their money, and are willing to pay a premium to stay at green hotels with the expectation of added value compared

to orthodox hotels. Thus, confirming that pricing and value influence green hotel selection (Verma & Chandra, 2017). However, the mean value of subjective norms of 3.31 refers that most of the consumers had a neutral view towards conforming to societal pressure in making the green hotel choice which reconfirms the mixed views of the previous research on the influence of subjective norms towards purchase intention (Wang et al., 2019). Purchase intention on the other hand depicts a mean value of 4.15 which highlights that most consumers intend to stay at green hotels and would recommend them to others.

4. Conclusion

The study findings revealed that the attitude towards green practices, green communications, pricing and subjective norms have a significant influence on the purchase intention of green hotels among domestic tourists of Sri Lanka whilst green practices and subjective norms are less significant compared to pricing and green communication. Considering the findings, the study suggested the following recommendations that would help green hoteliers enhance their product offerings based on each variable that was analysed in this study.

5. Recommendations

Green Practices

Green practices depicted less significance in initiating purchase intention in the regression analysis, although the mean value indicates that the majority of consumers depict a positive attitude towards the 3R concept and are willing to participate in green practices. These results draw attention towards implementing sensible and inclusive green marketing campaigns that promote environmental and community well-being that differentiate green hotels from the rest. While there are common green practices that would benefit the hotels, a few community-uplifting philanthropic initiatives such as donating pre-used linen, towels and napkins that are in an admissible state to village hospitals, elderly homes and children's homes, training youth on industry-specific skills, women and child welfare and an inclusive and diverse workforce would build a positive green image which is known to incite purchase intention and brand loyalty (Chung, 2019). These measures would increase employee

engagement and thus reduce turnover in addition to improving the constitutionality of the organisation, increasing shareholder value and thereby inducing the purchase intention among domestic tourists to patronise a responsible brand (Kasim et al., 2022).

Green Communications

Green communications were proven a significant factor in instituting purchase intention towards green hotels through correlation and regression analysis. Therefore, it is imperative that hotels analyse their clientele based on demographics such as age group, gender, income and educational level and develop advertisements and other communications to suit the targeted consumer segment (Wang et al., 2019). Furthermore, since generations Y and Z have been identified as the most travelled segments on a global scale, social media communications are vital in communicating the hotel's green practices through these electronic mediums which have a wide reach and huge potential to influence purchase intention (Sharma, Fadahunsi, Abbas & Pathak, 2021). Moreover, Sri Lanka's internet users' percentage depicts a growing trend which emphasises the importance of designing a solid digital marketing plan including e-booking facilities (Statista, 2023). Furthermore, the social media sites, corporate websites and e-booking sites must have detailed information on the hotel's green practices, green certifications, corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, community-related programs and special features along with pricing to be highlighted in order to captivate the target group (Erkan & Evans, 2018).

Pricing

The findings of this study, exhibit that the expectation of increased value corresponds with the price increase. Therefore, it is crucial that hotels set pricing models that include added value propositions that satisfy the consumers' sense of responsibility by promoting emotional benefits and the holistic outlook of the green hotel setting. Green hotels must align their communication strategies to focus on the green benefits with facts and information on the negative impacts of non-green practices to capture consumer interest and provoke environmental concern to impart effective

environmental knowledge through captivating visuals combined with facts (Gonzalez-Rodriguez et al., 2020; Jiang & Kim, 2015). These could convey an increased value to the consumers and comprehend them as their personal gain against the pricing of the hotel in inducing purchase intention (Jiang & Kim, 2015). As current Sri Lankan disposable income is affected due to various reasons, it is imperative to communicate the values built into the overall offering to convince domestic tourists of the worthiness of green hotels amidst increased price sensitivity (Athukorala, 2023).

Subjective Norms

Although subjective norms depicted a low significance towards purchase intention on the regression analysis, peer pressure is a significant factor in influencing purchase intention of premium products (Sharma, 2021). Green hotels must build an effective customer relationship management strategy to build a loyal customer base that would influence their peers and social groups towards purchasing green hotels. This could be done through periodical newsletters to patrons, targeted paid ads on social media and transparency in sharing the green practices, achievements, certifications and testimonials from guests that would evoke engagement with the brand (Wang, 2020; Wang & Wu, 2016). Additionally, green hoteliers could adopt the crowdsourcing strategy by administering surveys to obtain feedback from the targeted consumer groups to improve concerned areas by making them feel valued and advocate the brand thereby instigating purchase intention through subjective norms (Sharma, Chen, Ramos & Sharma, 2023).

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