

Assessing Awareness, Trust and Price Acceptance for Eco-Labeled Palmyrah Products Among Consumers in Jaffna

S. Dilogini^{1*}, T. Kamshanaa¹

*¹Department of Marketing, Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce,
University of Jaffna.*

The palmyrah tree has various environmental advantages such as drought tolerance, soil conservation, and conservation of biodiversity. Eco-labels are forms of sustainability certification that influence consumer behavior, with labeling having a positive effect on purchasing intentions. Factors affecting consumer perceptions about eco-labels include label visibility, institutional support, credibility and consumer knowledge, and the probability of buying eco-labeled products is high among consumers who are aware of and trust eco-labeling, while price also plays an important role. In Sri Lanka, there is limited information on consumer awareness, trust and willingness to pay higher prices for eco-labeled palmyrah products, so this study explores these factors to provide insights for promoting sustainable palmyrah products. For the qualitative exploratory study, purposive sampling was used to obtain 22 consumers from *Jaffna* district, ensuring representation across age groups (6 aged 20-29, 7 aged 30-39, 4 aged 40-49, 3 aged 50-59 and 2 aged 60-69) and gender (15 females and 7 males). Semi-structured interviews of 25-45 minutes, guided by green marketing theories and the Theory of

Planned Behavior (TPB), focused on consumer knowledge of eco-labeling, awareness of environmental benefits, ability to pay premium prices, trust in certification organizations, and label design preferences. Interviews were conducted in *Tamil* and analyzed thematically. Only the data management and coding functions of QDA Miner Lite were used in this study. Four themes addressed the research objective. ‘Traditional knowledge and environmental awareness’ indicated that consumers had awareness of the environmental benefits of palmyrah products, such as the ability to survive drought and thrive without much irrigation, due to traditional knowledge passed down over generations rather than environmental education, with palmyrah considered naturally sustainable in Northern Sri Lanka’s arid environment. ‘Eco-label awareness and trust’ indicated that younger consumers were more aware of eco-labels through supermarket experiences and social media, whereas older consumers knew little about certifications but generally saw eco-labels as indicating sustainable production, and inadequate label information weakened trust. ‘Willingness to pay premium prices’ showed that most people were ready to pay a premium of 10-15% if there was proper communication about environmental advantages, with willingness decreasing under income restrictions and lack of explanation. ‘Cultural-ecological labeling approach’ suggests that combining protection of cultural heritage with sustainability is more effective than usual eco-labeling for traditional indigenous crops, with consumers favoring specific claims like “it grows without irrigation”. The use of cultural-

ecological labels incorporating heritage and ecological sustainability is more effective for traditional crops than regular eco-labeling. Certification bodies should create clear labels like “climate-smart, no irrigation needed” rather than just leaf logos, as effective communication and trust building are extremely important. This study presents an index of cultural ecology for traditional indigenous food sources, providing preliminary evidence that this concept is worth exploring further, with future research requiring larger samples and statistical comparisons.

Keywords: Consumer awareness, Eco-labeling, Palmyrah sustainability, Sri Lanka, Willingness to pay

*Corresponding Author**: dilo.kuru@univ.jfn.ac.lk