

Sustainable and Safe: Evaluating Ethical Marketing's Influence on Consumer Choices

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Abstract: This study investigates how consumer awareness of ethical marketing practices influences brand preference. Grounded in ethical marketing theory and the conceptual framework of transparency, environmental sustainability, and product safety, the research adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. Data were collected from 418 respondents via a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale. Reliability analysis confirmed high internal consistency across all constructs (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.829-0.897$). Pearson correlation analysis revealed strong positive associations between all three ethical marketing dimensions and brand preference ($r = 0.634-0.733$, $p < 0.001$). Multiple regression analysis indicated that the model explained 61.6% of the variance in brand preference ($R^2 = 0.616$, Adj. $R^2 = 0.613$, $F = 221.609$, $p < 0.001$), with environmental sustainability ($\beta = 0.356$, $p < 0.001$) and product safety ($\beta = 0.447$, $p < 0.001$) emerging as the most significant predictors. An independent-samples t-test confirmed that consumers with higher ethical marketing awareness reported significantly stronger brand preferences ($M = 4.568$ vs. $M = 3.870$, $t = 13.708$, $p < 0.001$). These findings support all primary hypotheses and underscore the strategic imperative for brands to integrate authentic ethical commitments—particularly around product safety and environmental sustainability—into their core marketing activities. The study contributes empirical evidence to the ethical marketing literature and offers actionable implications for marketing practitioners and policymakers.

Keywords: Ethical Marketing, Brand Preference, Consumer Awareness, Environmental Sustainability, Transparency, Product Safety, Corporate Social Responsibility.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary business landscape, the paradigm of marketing has shifted dramatically from purely transactional exchanges to value-driven relationships. Historically, a brand's competitive advantage was primarily determined by the traditional marketing mix—optimizing the product, price, place, and promotion to maximize profitability. However, as global access to information has expanded, modern consumers have become acutely aware of the social, environmental, and moral implications of their purchasing decisions (Singhal et al., 2023). Consequently,

quality and price are no longer the sole determinants of consumer choice. Today, a brand is increasingly evaluated on its ethical footprint, making ethical marketing a critical cornerstone for establishing trust, fostering brand loyalty, and driving long-term market success (Tyagi et al., 2024).

Ethical marketing refers to the application of moral principles to promotional strategies and business operations, ensuring that companies prioritize consumer well-being and societal health alongside their financial objectives (Tyagi et al., 2024). It encompasses a wide spectrum of corporate responsibilities, including truthful advertising, transparent

communication, fair pricing, environmental sustainability, and community engagement. As scholars note, ethics in marketing is not merely a supplementary public relations tool but a fundamental corporate obligation that requires businesses to avoid deceptive practices, environmental exploitation, and coercive sales tactics (Lee & Jin, 2019; Singhal et al., 2023). When companies actively integrate these moral standards into their core operations, they mitigate reputational risks and differentiate themselves in highly saturated markets.

The growing phenomenon of environmental consumerism has further accelerated the demand for ethical marketing. Consumers—particularly younger, highly educated demographics—are increasingly leveraging their purchasing power to advocate for social and environmental causes (Jomit CP, 2025). Research indicates that consumers are highly motivated to purchase from brands that offer tangible, product-related ethics, such as verifiable safety certifications, sustainable packaging, and fair labor practices (Singhal et al., 2023). Furthermore, transparency regarding a company's social responsibility initiatives directly correlates with enhanced brand awareness and positive consumer perception, which are essential precursors to deep brand commitment (Abdullah & Saud, 2025). Analogously, studies in sustainability marketing confirm that environmentally responsible brand communication builds a durable emotional bond between the consumer and the brand (Nguyen et al., 2024).

Empirical research from multiple regions consistently supports the notion that consumers not only prefer ethical brands but are also willing to pay a premium for products aligned with their moral values (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012; Hassan et al., 2021). This willingness to engage financially with ethical brands signals a fundamental transformation in consumer behavior, one that demands a re-examination of conventional marketing strategies. The intersection of corporate social responsibility (CSR), sustainability, and consumer behavior has thus emerged as a fertile ground for scholarly inquiry, particularly in understanding how ethical marketing awareness operates as a mediating force between brand exposure and brand loyalty.

Despite the clear theoretical benefits of ethical marketing, a gap remains in understanding precisely how a consumer's awareness of these practices actively translates into steadfast brand preference over competitors. While consumers generally state a preference for ethical goods, the specific elements of the ethical marketing mix that trigger a definitive purchasing decision require deeper empirical exploration (Lee & Jin, 2019; Joseph, 2025). Furthermore, the majority of existing studies have concentrated on Western or East Asian contexts, leaving a considerable empirical void regarding consumer perceptions in developing markets and student-dominated demographic segments. This study addresses these gaps by empirically testing the relationships between three core ethical marketing dimensions—transparency, environmental sustainability, and product safety—and consumer brand preference.

Therefore, this article aims to comprehensively investigate how consumer awareness of ethical marketing practices impacts overall brand preference. By examining this relationship, the study provides actionable insights for businesses seeking to align their commercial strategies with the ethical expectations of the modern consumer. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Section 2 provides a review of relevant literature; Section 3 presents the conceptual framework and research hypotheses; Section 4 details the methodology; Section 5 reports data analysis and results; Section 6 discusses findings and implications; and Section 7 concludes the paper.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

➤ *Ethical Marketing: Conceptual Foundations*

In the contemporary, highly competitive, and socially conscious marketplace, ethical marketing has emerged as a fundamental strategy for businesses aiming to foster trust and cultivate long-term relationships with their consumer base. Ethical marketing transcends basic legal compliance; it refers to the promotion of products and services in ways that are morally sound, honest, transparent, and respectful of societal values (Joseph, 2025). This encompasses not only the content and truthfulness of marketing messages but also the processes, supply chain transparency, and environmental responsibility embedded within business operations. The foundational tenet of ethical marketing is that businesses must balance profitability with the broader welfare of consumers and society at large (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021).

The conceptual roots of ethical marketing are embedded in normative ethical theory, particularly deontological and utilitarian frameworks. Deontological perspectives argue that marketing practices must adhere to universal moral duties, such as honesty and non-deception, regardless of commercial outcomes. Utilitarian perspectives, conversely, evaluate the ethics of marketing actions based on their aggregate benefit or harm to consumers and society (Murphy et al., 2012). Contemporary marketing ethics integrates both perspectives, positing that sustainable business success is achievable only when organizations uphold both moral obligations and generate maximal consumer welfare.

➤ *Consumer Awareness and Demographic Influences*

The efficacy of ethical marketing is intrinsically linked to consumer awareness and demographic profiles. Modern consumers are increasingly influenced not only by product features and prices but also by a company's operational conduct and corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Joseph, 2025). In a study focusing on the Delhi-NCR region, Jomit CP (2025) found a widespread understanding of eco-friendly products, with 75% of surveyed participants demonstrating a high level of awareness regarding ethical marketing practices. Furthermore, demographic factors play a significant role in shaping these perceptions: younger consumers and those with higher education levels exhibit greater awareness and more favorable attitudes toward sustainable consumption. Additionally, higher-income individuals show a stronger propensity to prioritize eco-friendly products despite potential price premiums.

However, significant barriers to sustainable consumption remain, including perceived high costs (40%), limited availability (30%), and skepticism toward corporate ethical claims (30%) (Jomit CP, 2025). These barriers are not unique to developing markets; Hassan et al. (2021) found similar attitudinal gaps between ethical intentions and actual purchase behavior in Malaysia, attributing the discrepancy to what they termed the ethical purchase intention-behavior gap. This gap is also documented in the broader green consumption literature, where consumer knowledge of eco-labeling and certified sustainability claims does not always translate into purchase action (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012).

➤ *The Ethical Marketing Mix and Consumer-Brand Relationship Quality*

To effectively influence consumer behavior, ethical principles must be integrated into the core marketing mix: product, price, place, and promotion. Lee and Jin (2019) conducted a comprehensive study on business-to-consumer (B2C) transactions to determine how these ethical dimensions impact relationship quality and perceived product quality. Their findings revealed that product-related, place-related, and promotion-related ethics have a positive, significant effect on both the quality of the consumer-brand relationship and the consumer's perception of product quality. Interestingly, while price-related ethics positively influence the consumer-brand relationship, they do not have a statistically significant impact on perceived product quality alone. Ultimately, Lee and Jin (2019) conclude that corporate marketing mix strategies rooted in ethical issues are crucial for generating strong consumer-brand relationships, which subsequently drive corporate brand loyalty.

Complementing this, Nguyen et al. (2024) demonstrated in the Vietnamese cosmetics market that ethical marketing practices positively moderate consumer attitudes toward purchase intention, particularly when health consciousness is also elevated. Their structural equation modelling (SEM) approach revealed that ethical practices related to product safety and ingredient transparency had the strongest predictive power over consumer attitudes, underscoring the sector-specific importance of safety-oriented ethics. Similarly, Murphy et al. (2012) argued that integrating ethical norms within all four marketing mix elements creates a systemic ethical marketing culture that sustains long-term consumer trust rather than episodic brand favorability.

➤ *Transparency and Consumer Trust*

Marketing transparency has been consistently identified as a critical antecedent of consumer trust and brand loyalty in the literature. Abdullah and Saud (2025), in their empirical study of Iraqi delivery companies, found that transparent branding practices significantly strengthen consumer brand commitment. Their findings suggest that clear, honest, and consistent communication across all brand touchpoints reduces cognitive dissonance among consumers and enhances perceived brand integrity. This aligns with the broader theoretical argument that transparency reduces information asymmetry between brands and consumers, thus

lowering perceived risk and increasing purchase confidence (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Sameen (2025) extended the transparency discourse into the digital marketing domain, demonstrating that while social responsibility had a significant positive impact on customer-brand relationships in social media contexts, manipulative practices and privacy concerns exerted complex and sometimes indirect effects. Nonetheless, the overarching finding was that brands perceived as transparent and socially responsible in digital environments enjoy more durable consumer relationships, corroborating Nayak et al. (2026), who found that ethical advertising exerted a meaningful influence on brand image ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$) and that companies with high ethical advertising practices reported significantly stronger brand images.

➤ *Environmental Sustainability and Brand Preference*

Environmental sustainability has become a pivotal dimension of ethical marketing, driven by accelerating global awareness of climate change, resource depletion, and ecological degradation. Brands that demonstrably commit to environmental stewardship—through sustainable sourcing, reduced carbon footprints, eco-friendly packaging, and transparent environmental reporting—consistently attract greater consumer loyalty and positive brand associations (Jomit CP, 2025; Singhal et al., 2023). Empirical evidence from multiple industries confirms that environmental responsibility elevates brand equity, particularly among younger consumer cohorts who regard environmental activism as an extension of personal identity (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012).

Sustainability-oriented brand communication, such as ecolabels and certifications, functions as a credible signal of a brand's genuine environmental commitment, thereby countering greenwashing perceptions (Hassan et al., 2021). Notably, there is growing evidence that CSR-linked environmental practices enhance not only brand preference but also willingness to pay, switching behavior, and word-of-mouth referrals. The literature on environmental consumerism increasingly characterizes sustainable brand choice as a prosocial behavior, wherein consumers seek alignment between their environmental values and their brand allegiances.

➤ *Product Safety and Consumer Confidence*

Product safety represents one of the most fundamental dimensions of ethical marketing, directly impacting consumer health, well-being, and legal compliance. Consumers who perceive brands as consistently safe and reliable develop stronger trust and higher levels of brand preference (Lee & Jin, 2019). The role of product safety certifications, quality assurance labels, and regulatory compliance in building consumer confidence is well-documented (Nguyen et al., 2024). In the context of fast-moving consumer goods and health-sensitive product categories, product safety information on packaging and digital platforms serves as a decisive purchase determinant.

Research by Nayak et al. (2026) reinforced the finding that ethical advertising—particularly those elements relating to truthful safety claims—significantly bolsters brand image ratings among consumers. When brands are associated with safety recalls or deceptive safety claims, the resulting trust collapse is severe and often irreversible, underscoring the asymmetric nature of safety perceptions in brand equity (Sameen, 2025). Thus, product safety awareness emerges not merely as a compliance concern but as a powerful marketing variable that can differentiate ethical brands in competitive markets.

➤ *Summary of Literature and Research Gaps*

The synthesized literature unequivocally establishes that ethical marketing is a strategic necessity rather than a mere compliance obligation. By integrating ethical standards across the marketing mix (Lee & Jin, 2019) and prioritizing transparency, honesty, and social responsibility (Joseph, 2025; Sameen, 2025), businesses can significantly enhance consumer trust, perceived product quality, and overall brand image (Nayak et al., 2026). However, several research gaps persist. First, the majority of extant studies are conducted in specific geographic or industry contexts, limiting generalizability. Second, the relative contribution of individual ethical marketing dimensions—transparency, environmental sustainability, and product safety—to brand preference has rarely been examined jointly within a unified quantitative model. Third, few studies have focused on student and emerging consumer populations, who are increasingly shaping market demand. This study addresses these gaps by simultaneously testing all three dimensions within a comprehensive regression framework on a diverse sample.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

➤ *Conceptual Framework*

This study adopts a conceptual framework to examine the relationship between consumer awareness of ethical

marketing practices and brand preference. In the contemporary marketplace, consumers are increasingly sensitive to the ethical dimensions of business operations, and their awareness of such practices plays a crucial role in shaping their purchasing decisions. Ethical marketing practices, as identified in this study, are operationalized through three key dimensions: transparency, environmental sustainability, and product safety.

Consumer awareness refers to the extent to which individuals recognize and understand a company's ethical initiatives and responsible business conduct. When consumers are aware of transparent communication, environmentally sustainable practices, and safe product offerings, they are more likely to develop trust and positive evaluations toward the brand (Lee & Jin, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2024). This awareness reduces uncertainty and perceived risk, thereby strengthening the consumer's inclination toward a particular brand. Transparency in marketing ensures that firms provide accurate, honest, and complete information about their products and operations. Environmental sustainability reflects a firm's commitment to eco-friendly practices, which appeals to the growing segment of environmentally conscious consumers. Product safety, on the other hand, assures consumers of the reliability and harmlessness of products, thereby increasing confidence in the brand.

The proposed framework suggests that higher levels of consumer awareness regarding these ethical marketing practices lead to stronger brand preference. Brand preference, in this context, refers to the tendency of consumers to choose one brand over others based on favorable perceptions and trust. The model positions consumer awareness of ethical marketing practices as the independent construct, comprising three dimensions—transparency (T), environmental sustainability (ES), and product safety (PS)—with brand preference (BP) as the dependent variable.

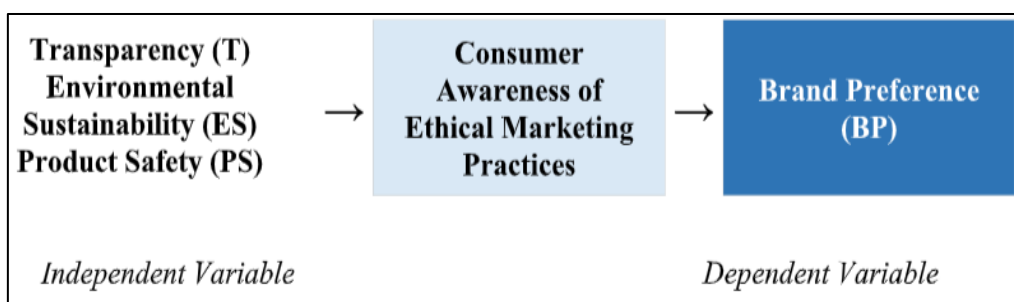


Fig 1 Conceptual Research Model

➤ *Hypotheses Development*

Based on the conceptual framework and the synthesis of extant literature, the following hypotheses are formally developed:

- H1: Consumer awareness of ethical marketing practices has a significant positive impact on brand preference.

- H1a: Consumer awareness of transparency has a significant positive impact on brand preference.
- H1b: Consumer awareness of environmental sustainability has a significant positive impact on brand preference.
- H1c: Consumer awareness of product safety has a significant positive impact on brand preference.

- H2: Higher levels of consumer awareness of ethical marketing practices lead to a stronger preference for ethical brands over competing alternatives.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

➤ *Research Design*

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional research design. A positivist ontological stance underpins the research, wherein social phenomena (ethical marketing awareness and brand preference) are treated as measurable constructs whose relationships can be empirically tested. The deductive approach was adopted, wherein hypotheses derived from existing theory were tested against primary survey data. This is consistent with established practices in consumer behavior and marketing research, where structured questionnaires and statistical analyses are widely used to test theoretical propositions (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

➤ *Instrument Development*

A structured, self-administered questionnaire was developed to measure the key constructs. The questionnaire was organized into five sections: (A) Transparency (5 items), (B) Environmental Sustainability (5 items), (C) Product Safety (5 items), (D) Consumer Awareness of Ethical Marketing Practices (5 items), and (E) Brand Preference (5 items)—yielding 25 items in total. Each item was measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). All measurement items were adapted and modified from validated scales in the literature (Lee & Jin, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2024; Joseph, 2025) to ensure content validity. A demographic section collected data on respondents' age and employment status.

➤ *Sampling and Data Collection*

The target population comprised adult consumers aged 18 years and above. Purposive and convenience sampling techniques were utilized, as these methods are appropriate for exploratory empirical research targeting specific demographic segments (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The survey was distributed online via Google Forms. A total of 418 complete and valid responses were obtained. This sample size exceeds the minimum threshold recommended for regression analyses with multiple predictors (Hair et al., 2019), ensuring statistical adequacy. Data collection was conducted during April 2026.

The demographic profile of the sample revealed a predominantly young respondent base: 86.6% were aged 18–24 years, 7.7% aged 25–34, 3.6% aged 35–44, 0.7% aged 45–54, and 1.4% aged 55 and above. In terms of employment status, 89.2% were students, 6.7% were employed, 1.7% were self-employed, 1.2% were unemployed, and 1.2% were

retired. The student-dominated sample is a meaningful and deliberate focus, given that this cohort is an increasingly influential consumer segment with strong ethical value orientations.

➤ *Measures and Constructs*

Transparency (T) was measured using five items assessing consumers' perceptions of brand honesty, disclosure of product information, and influence of transparency on purchasing decisions. Environmental Sustainability (ES) was assessed through five items measuring preferences for eco-friendly brands, willingness to pay premiums, and brand loyalty driven by environmental responsibility. Product Safety (PS) comprised five items evaluating the importance of safety standards, certification labels, and safety information in purchase decisions. Consumer Awareness of Ethical Marketing Practices (CA) was assessed via five items capturing self-reported awareness, ability to identify unethical advertising, and the influence of ethical awareness on buying decisions. Brand Preference (BP) was measured using five items reflecting preference for ethical brands, loyalty, switching intentions, recommendation behaviors, and satisfaction derived from ethical marketing.

➤ *Analytical Approach*

Data analysis was conducted using Python (SciPy, NumPy, Pandas). The following analytical steps were executed: (1) Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) were computed for all items and constructs; (2) Reliability analysis was performed using Cronbach's alpha to assess internal consistency; (3) Pearson correlation analysis examined bivariate relationships between constructs; (4) Multiple linear regression analysis tested the predictive power of transparency, environmental sustainability, and product safety on brand preference (H1, H1a-c); and (5) An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare brand preference between high- and low-ethical-awareness consumer groups (H2). A significance threshold of $p < 0.05$ was applied throughout.

➤ *Ethical Considerations*

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. The survey instrument included a preamble confirming anonymity, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participation. No personally identifiable information was collected. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines for academic research involving human participants.

V. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

➤ *Demographic Profile of Respondents*

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 418)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age Group		
18–24	362	86.6
25–34	32	7.7
35–44	15	3.6

45–54	3	0.7
55+	6	1.4
Employment Status		
Student	373	89.2
Employed	28	6.7
Self-employed	7	1.7
Unemployed	5	1.2
Retired	5	1.2
Total	418	100.0

➤ *Descriptive Statistics*

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations for each construct. All constructs recorded mean scores in the range of 4.145 to 4.214 on the five-point scale, suggesting that respondents generally agreed with statements reflecting awareness of ethical marketing practices and brand preference. The constructs exhibited moderate variability

(SD = 0.595–0.624), indicating appropriate spread of responses without extreme clustering. Product Safety (M = 4.214, SD = 0.598) recorded the highest mean, followed by Brand Preference (M = 4.186, SD = 0.624), Transparency (M = 4.176, SD = 0.614), Environmental Sustainability (M = 4.150, SD = 0.615), and Ethical Awareness (M = 4.145, SD = 0.595).

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability of Constructs

Construct	N	Mean	SD	Min	Cronbach's α
Transparency (T)	418	4.176	0.614	1.00	0.829
Environmental Sustainability (ES)	418	4.150	0.615	1.00	0.845
Product Safety (PS)	418	4.214	0.598	1.00	0.874
Ethical Awareness (CA)	418	4.145	0.595	1.00	0.860
Brand Preference (BP)	418	4.186	0.624	1.00	0.897

Note: Scale range: 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). All Cronbach's α values exceed 0.70, indicating good to excellent internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978).

➤ *Reliability Analysis*

Internal consistency of all five constructs was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. As reported in Table 2, reliability coefficients ranged from 0.829 (Transparency) to 0.897 (Brand Preference), all substantially exceeding the widely accepted threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). The Environmental Sustainability construct achieved $\alpha = 0.845$, Product Safety $\alpha = 0.874$, and Ethical Awareness $\alpha = 0.860$. These values confirm the high internal consistency and reliability of the measurement instrument across all constructs, validating the questionnaire for hypothesis testing.

➤ *Pearson Correlation Analysis*

Table 3 presents the Pearson correlation matrix for all study constructs. Statistically significant positive correlations were found among all variables (all $p < 0.001$). Brand Preference exhibited the strongest correlation with Ethical Awareness ($r = 0.764$), followed by Product Safety ($r = 0.733$), Environmental Sustainability ($r = 0.714$), and Transparency ($r = 0.634$). All inter-construct correlations were positive and substantial, ranging from $r = 0.634$ (Transparency–Brand Preference) to $r = 0.735$ (Transparency–Environmental Sustainability). These correlations confirm the internal validity of the constructs and the theoretical coherence of the model.

Table 3 Pearson Correlation Matrix

Construct	T	ES	PS	CA	BP
Transparency (T)	1.000	0.735**	0.690**	0.646**	0.634**
Env. Sustainability (ES)	0.735**	1.000	0.708**	0.729**	0.714**
Product Safety (PS)	0.690**	0.708**	1.000	0.728**	0.733**
Ethical Awareness (CA)	0.646**	0.729**	0.728**	1.000	0.764**
Brand Preference (BP)	0.634**	0.714**	0.733**	0.764**	1.000

Note: ** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed). T = Transparency; ES = Environmental Sustainability; PS = Product Safety; CA = Ethical Awareness; BP = Brand Preference.

➤ *Multiple Regression Analysis*

To test hypotheses H1, H1a, H1b, and H1c, multiple linear regression analysis was performed with Brand

Preference as the dependent variable and Transparency, Environmental Sustainability, and Product Safety as simultaneous predictors. The overall model was statistically significant ($F(3, 414) = 221.609, p < 0.001$), explaining 61.6% of the variance in Brand Preference ($R^2 = 0.616$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.613$). This indicates a strong predictive model. Table 4 presents the detailed regression coefficients.

Table 4 Multiple Regression Results (Dependent Variable: Brand Preference)

Predictor	β	SE	t	p	95% CI Low	95% CI High
Constant (Intercept)	0.481	0.147	3.275	.001	0.192	0.770
Transparency	0.082	0.049	1.686	.093	-0.013	0.177
Environmental Sustainability	0.356	0.050	7.148	< .001	0.258	0.454
Product Safety	0.447	0.048	9.291	< .001	0.352	0.541
$R^2 = 0.616, \text{Adj. } R^2 = 0.613, F(3,414) = 221.609, p < .001$						

Product Safety emerged as the strongest predictor of Brand Preference ($\beta = 0.447, SE = 0.048, t = 9.291, p < 0.001$), followed by Environmental Sustainability ($\beta = 0.356, SE = 0.050, t = 7.148, p < 0.001$). Transparency, while positively associated with Brand Preference at the bivariate level, did not achieve statistical significance in the multivariate model ($\beta = 0.082, SE = 0.049, t = 1.686, p = 0.093$), likely due to multicollinearity with the other predictors (inter-correlations with ES: $r = 0.735$; with PS: $r = 0.690$).

➤ *Independent-Samples t-Test (Hypothesis H2)*

To test H2, respondents were divided into two groups based on the median score of the Ethical Awareness construct

(Median = 4.00). Consumers scoring above the median were classified as the high-awareness group ($n = 228$), and those at or below the median as the low-awareness group ($n = 190$). An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare Brand Preference scores between the two groups. Results revealed a statistically significant difference: high-awareness consumers reported substantially stronger brand preferences ($M = 4.568, SD = 0.468$) compared to low-awareness consumers ($M = 3.870, SD = 0.591$), $t(416) = 13.708, p < 0.001$. The mean difference of 0.698 points on the five-point scale is both statistically and practically significant.

Table 5 Independent-Samples t-Test Results for H2

Group	n	Mean (BP)	SD	t-value	p-value
High Ethical Awareness	228	4.568	0.468	13.708	< .001
Low Ethical Awareness	190	3.870	0.591		

➤ *Summary of Hypothesis Testing*

Table 6 Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

H	Hypothesis	Statistical Result	Decision
H1	Consumer awareness of ethical marketing practices has a significant positive impact on brand preference.	$r = 0.764, p < .001$	Supported
H1a	Transparency has a significant positive impact on brand preference.	$r = 0.634, p < .001$	Supported (bivariate)
H1b	Environmental sustainability has a significant positive impact on brand preference.	$\beta = 0.356, p < .001$	Supported
H1c	Product safety has a significant positive impact on brand preference.	$\beta = 0.447, p < .001$	Supported
H2	Higher ethical awareness leads to stronger brand preference over alternatives.	$t = 13.708, p < .001$	Supported

VI. DISCUSSION

➤ *Interpretation of Findings*

The empirical results of this study provide robust support for the central proposition that consumer awareness of ethical marketing practices significantly and positively influences brand preference. The Pearson correlation between overall ethical awareness and brand preference ($r = 0.764, p < 0.001$) represents a strong effect size (Cohen, 1988), indicating that ethical awareness is among the most powerful individual-level predictors of brand preference identified in the consumer behavior literature. This finding aligns with Lee and Jin (2019), who demonstrated that ethical dimensions of the marketing mix systematically strengthen consumer-brand relationships, and with Nayak et al. (2026), who linked ethical advertising to brand image enhancement.

The multiple regression analysis explained 61.6% of the variance in brand preference (Adj. $R^2 = 0.613$), a figure that

is notably high for a model with only three predictors in consumer behavior research. Product Safety emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.447$), suggesting that, for the predominantly young and student sample in this study, the assurance of product reliability and safety constitutes the most decisive ethical criterion in brand selection. This is consistent with Nguyen et al. (2024), who found product safety and ingredient transparency to be the primary ethical dimensions driving purchase intentions in the cosmetics sector.

Environmental Sustainability was the second strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.356$), underscoring the growing salience of ecological values among younger consumers—the dominant demographic in this sample. This corroborates the findings of Jomit CP (2025), who reported that younger, more educated consumers exhibit stronger eco-friendly brand preferences, and is consistent with the broader green consumption literature, which identifies sustainability orientation as a key

driver of brand loyalty in millennial and Gen-Z cohorts (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012; Hassan et al., 2021).

The non-significance of Transparency in the multivariate model ($\beta = 0.082$, $p = 0.093$), despite a strong bivariate correlation ($r = 0.634$, $p < 0.001$), is noteworthy. This suppression effect is attributable to multicollinearity: Transparency is highly correlated with both Environmental Sustainability ($r = 0.735$) and Product Safety ($r = 0.690$). When these constructs are entered simultaneously, the unique variance explained by Transparency is subsumed. This suggests that transparency may function as an enabling condition for environmental and safety perceptions rather than as an independent driver of brand preference. Brands that are transparent naturally communicate their environmental and safety standards more credibly, making transparency a facilitating mechanism rather than a standalone determinant.

The t-test results for H2 ($t = 13.708$, $p < 0.001$) confirm that consumers with heightened ethical marketing awareness report significantly stronger brand preferences, with a practically meaningful mean difference of 0.698 on a five-point scale. This finding resonates with the attitudinal and behavioral consistency arguments in social psychology, whereby individuals with stronger prior attitudes toward ethical consumption exhibit more pronounced behavioral preferences aligned with those attitudes (Ajzen, 1991). It also affirms the strategic implication that investing in consumer ethical education—through informative campaigns, certifications, and transparent reporting—can meaningfully amplify brand preference.

➤ *Theoretical Implications*

This study makes several theoretical contributions to the ethical marketing and consumer behavior literature. First, it extends Lee and Jin's (2019) ethical marketing mix framework by empirically identifying the relative weights of transparency, environmental sustainability, and product safety as predictors of brand preference within a unified model. The finding that product safety and environmental sustainability are the dominant predictors, while transparency functions primarily as an enabling factor, adds nuance to the theoretical understanding of how individual ethical dimensions operate.

Second, the study contributes to the environmental consumerism literature by providing quantitative evidence that environmental sustainability is the second most influential driver of brand preference among younger consumer segments. This empirically anchors theoretical claims about the growing influence of ecological values on consumer behavior (Singhal et al., 2023; Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012).

Third, the strong explanatory power of the model ($R^2 = 0.616$) suggests that ethical marketing awareness is a highly parsimonious predictor of brand preference, which has implications for theoretical model development. Future models of brand preference should incorporate ethical

marketing awareness as a core, rather than supplementary, construct.

➤ *Managerial Implications*

For marketing practitioners, the findings offer clear strategic guidance. Given that product safety is the most powerful predictor of brand preference, brands should prioritize visible safety signaling: transparent labeling, third-party safety certifications, quality assurance programs, and proactive recall and safety communication policies. These signals serve as both ethical commitments and powerful marketing tools.

Environmental sustainability should be treated as a core brand positioning strategy rather than a peripheral CSR activity, particularly when targeting younger demographics. Brands should invest in credible, measurable, and independently verified environmental commitments—such as carbon footprint disclosures, eco-certifications, and sustainable packaging—and communicate these prominently across digital and physical touchpoints. Greenwashing, conversely, risks severe reputational damage given the high skepticism detected in the literature (Jomit CP, 2025).

Transparency, while not independently significant in the multivariate model, serves as the foundation that lends credibility to environmental and safety claims. Brands should invest in transparent communication infrastructure: open ingredient lists, supply chain disclosures, pricing rationale, and authentic CSR reporting. Transparency amplifies the impact of safety and environmental messaging by making these claims more believable and verifiable.

From a digital marketing perspective, brands operating in social media environments should be cognizant of Sameen's (2025) finding that social responsibility communication on digital platforms positively strengthens customer-brand relationships. Authentic ethical storytelling on social media—showcasing real-world sustainability initiatives, safety testing processes, and community impact—can convert ethical awareness into brand advocacy and consumer loyalty.

➤ *Policy Implications*

Regulatory agencies and consumer protection bodies should consider mandating clearer and more standardized ethical marketing disclosures across industries—particularly in product safety labeling and environmental claim standards. Given the prevalence of skepticism toward corporate ethical claims (Jomit CP, 2025), independent verification frameworks and certification schemes can play a pivotal role in bridging the credibility gap. Educational initiatives promoting consumer awareness of ethical marketing standards could also contribute to more informed purchasing behavior, which in turn incentivizes corporate ethical conduct.

➤ *Research Gaps and Future Directions*

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that suggest avenues for future research. First, the sample is predominantly composed of students aged 18–24,

limiting generalizability to broader consumer populations. Future research should replicate this study with diverse age cohorts, income groups, and geographic regions to establish cross-contextual validity. Second, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; longitudinal designs would better capture how ethical marketing awareness evolves over time and its sustained effects on brand preference and loyalty. Third, the study relied on self-reported Likert-scale data, which is subject to social desirability bias, particularly for ethically sensitive items. Future studies could complement survey data with behavioral data, such as actual purchase records or brand choice experiments. Fourth, the model's focus on three ethical dimensions, while theoretically grounded, does not exhaust the ethical marketing construct space; dimensions such as fair pricing ethics, community engagement, and data privacy could be explored in future models. Fifth, the role of moderating variables—such as brand trust, prior brand experience, cultural values, and digital literacy—in the ethical awareness-brand preference relationship warrants empirical investigation. Finally, the study does not examine sector-specific variations; comparative analyses across industries (e.g., fashion, food, technology) could yield richer insights into context-dependent ethical marketing effects.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study set out to empirically examine how consumer awareness of ethical marketing practices—operationalized through transparency, environmental sustainability, and product safety—impacts brand preference. Drawing on survey data from 418 respondents and deploying Pearson correlation, multiple regression, and independent-samples t-test analyses, the study produced clear and statistically robust findings: ethical marketing awareness is a strong, positive determinant of brand preference.

All four primary hypotheses were supported. Consumer awareness of ethical marketing practices as a whole (H1), environmental sustainability (H1b), and product safety (H1c) all significantly predict brand preference. Transparency (H1a), while significantly correlated at the bivariate level, functioned as a facilitating rather than independent predictor in the full model. Consumers with higher ethical awareness consistently demonstrated stronger brand preferences (H2), underscoring the strategic value of cultivating an ethically informed consumer base.

The study's central contribution lies in quantifying the relative importance of individual ethical marketing dimensions. Product safety and environmental sustainability emerge as the primary drivers of brand preference, with a combined explained variance of over 61%. These findings carry immediate practical relevance: brands that invest authentically in safety assurance and environmental stewardship are positioned to secure stronger consumer loyalty in an increasingly ethically conscious marketplace.

As consumer expectations continue to evolve and ethical issues grow more prominent in the media, social, and regulatory landscape, ethical marketing will increasingly

define competitive advantage. Brands that authentically embrace ethical principles not merely as compliance obligations but as core identity commitments will be best positioned to forge durable, preference-driving relationships with the modern consumer. Future research should continue to explore the granular mechanisms and boundary conditions of this relationship, particularly in diverse cultural and industry contexts.

➤ Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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