

Exploring the Drivers of Sustainable Consumption Behaviour: A Path towards a Greener Future

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Abstract

The overconsumption of products and services has increased tremendously worldwide, leading to the depletion of natural resources and other climate crises such as air pollution, water pollution, food and water shortages, and others. There has been a noticeable increase in the concern over climate crises, leading to the correspondence change in the consumption patterns of people. Consumers are exhibiting a favourable attitude towards “green” or environmentally friendly products and started converting their unsustainable consumption behaviour into more responsible and sustainable consumption. To extend the conceptual understanding of sustainable consumption behaviour, this study aims to postulate a conceptual framework on antecedents of sustainable consumption behaviour. The study examines the role of external, economic, and environment-related variables in influencing purchase intention and sustainable consumption behaviour toward green products. Extant literature reveals the positive influence of environmental awareness, environmental attitude, income, NGO initiatives, and governmental initiatives on the sustainable purchase intention of people and a favourable relation between the purchase intention and sustainable consumption behaviour. However, it should be noted that the price of products and the intent to purchase them have a weaker foundational relation. The study provides valuable insight for marketers and policymakers to determine sustainable business practices to attract environmentally conscious consumers.

Keywords: Sustainable Consumption Behaviour, Green Products, Purchase Intention, Environmental Factors, External Factors, Economic Factors

INTRODUCTION

As the decades wore on, marketing went through different periods of refinement driven by the advancement of technologies, shifts in consumer preferences, market dynamics, and the overall evolution of the business landscape (Kumar et al., 2012). The focus of marketing has become consumer-oriented marketing. As customers become the king of modern marketing, the whole marketing approach is evolved around the customers. Organisations competing to win a large segment of customers tend to produce and market more products and services at an immense pace. The increase in the production of products and services due to the rise in demand of consumers has given birth to the problem of overproduction and consumption of goods (Schor, 2005). Cristaldi et al. (2019) demonstrated that human activities are considered the primary cause of endangering the natural resources of the environment. The unsustainable consumption pattern of individuals puts pressure on natural resources and majorly depletes the resources in the worst way (Pereira Heath & Chatzidakis, 2012). Thus, the major responsibility for environmental degradation lies with the consumers (Pereira Heath & Chatzidakis, 2012).

The degradation of the environment has become a pressing issue for many developing nations due to its damaging impact on the Earth. One of the strategies suggested to address these climate crises is to adopt sustainable alternatives (Chaudhary, 2018). Therefore, government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and local environmentalists are making subsequent

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efforts to increase awareness of the societal impact on the environment and to combat these environmental issues by adopting sustainable choices. Biswas and Roy (2015) observed that this continuous increase in climate crises has started gaining much concern not only from the government and companies but the consumers are also coming forth to understand and fulfil their environmental responsibilities, and now they are shifting towards adopting sustainable consumption patterns.

Indeed, as evidenced in the environmental literature, the modern time has witnessed a shift in the paradigm toward the consciousness of the environment (Paul et al., 2016).

Consumers are increasingly aware of the environmental consequences of their consumption habits and are actively seeking out eco-friendly products that will positively impact future generations (Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008; Laroche et al., 2001).

Likewise, (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2008) demonstrated that there had been an increasing demand for sustainable alternatives considering the contamination of the environment. While fulfilling personal demands continues to be central to consumer behaviour, protecting the environment has also emerged as a top priority (Verbeke et al., 2007).

Sustainable Consumption Behaviour

Sustainable consumption behaviour is gaining momentum these days due to increasing environmental consciousness. Sustainable consumption is the practice that considers the consumer's social responsibility while satisfying the consumer's personal needs (Meulenberg, 2003). The term sustainability is widely used to demonstrate the commitment to protecting the environment (Arora et al., 2023). To ensure the preservation of future resources, it is crucial to adopt such practices that significantly reduce material usage. It should be noted that such measures do not equate to decreased monetary consumption, which could result in a slowdown in economic growth. Instead, it can lead to a shift toward responsible and environmentally-friendly consumption patterns (Jackson, 2005).

In recent times, sustainable consumption has garnered significant interest from corporate decision-makers due to the heightened enforcement of environmental regulations and increased pressure from stakeholders to

ensure that businesses prioritise environmental protection (Banerjee et al., 2003; Hult, 2011). Studies like (Arora et al., 2023; Chan & Yam, 1995; Chaudhary, 2018) revealed a positive relationship between the intention and behaviour of consumers. Yadav and Pathak (2017), in a study on consumer behaviour for green products in India, demonstrated a positive correlation between behavioural intentions and green purchasing behaviour.

A plethora of studies have used different determinants to examine the sustainable or eco-friendly behaviour of consumers. However (Chekima et al., 2016) noted that these studies primarily addressed marketing strategies rather than consumer behaviour. Tseng and Hung (2013) assert that the promotion of sustainable consumption and the development of green marketing strategies face a significant challenge due to a need for more understanding of consumer behaviour within the realm of the green product category. With the pressing environmental concerns and low demand for eco-friendly products, it is imperative to explore the factors that drive consumers to buy green products. Understanding the factors that drive sustainable consumption behaviour can shed light on reasons behind the purchase of green or eco-friendly products, and it will facilitate the managers and marketers to address the growing demand for eco-friendly options and revise their sustainable marketing strategies in the right direction. Besides, promoting responsible and sustainable consumption practices is essential to contribute to a healthier planet.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Over the past few years, there has been a significant increase in consumers' desire for products that feature sustainability attributes and aligns with their personal values (Conner, 2004; Kletzan et al., 2006). According to the United Nations, sustainability refers to "the use of goods and services that meets the needs of the present without jeopardising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland, 1987). The idea of developing and promoting products and services has changed drastically in the digital era. More recently, the concern for the environment and society is among those ideas that have gained significant attention from producers and marketers. Research has shown that an individual's environmental concern can significantly influence their environmentally friendly behaviour (Chan,

1996). However, Kostadinova (2016) argues that factors beyond individual beliefs, such as economic conditions, legislation, and regulations, also play a significant role in influencing consumer behaviour towards environmentally friendly products and services. Therefore, this study aims to comprehensively examine the impact of economic, external, and environmental factors on purchase intention and sustainable consumption behaviour with respect to green products.

Environmental Factors

As individuals become more conscious of environmental issues and the impact of their consumption choices, they often develop a heightened concern for the environment (de Boer et al., 2006). This concern for the environment and increasing awareness catalyse consumers' desire to purchase sustainable products (Rusyani et al., 2021). Chekima et al. (2016) examined the impact of environmental knowledge, cultural values, and environmental advertising and concluded that cultural values and ecological advertising had the most significant impact on building green purchase intention among consumers. Similarly, (Ruggerio, 2021) has endeavoured to consider the influence of environmental concern, perceived consumer effectiveness, social impact, and ethical obligations on green purchase intentions and exemplified the positive association between these antecedents of sustainable consumption and the GPI of consumers. The heightened awareness of sustainable consumption is expected to have a significant influence on consumers' decision-making process (de Moura et al., 2012). A study conducted by (Gulati, 2022) on sustainable consumption has postulated that psychological aspects of consumer behaviour influence the individual's concern for environmental issues and drive them to reduce waste, maintain a clean environment and encourage them to buy green products.

Economic Factors

(Sun & Wang, 2020) measured the consumers' attitudes and intentions to purchase green products in the context of social media marketing. The study's findings revealed that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control positively impact purchase intentions. Meanwhile,

price consciousness has a negative impact. Product knowledge has a positive effect on attitudes and purchase intentions, and social media marketing positively affects subjective norms, product knowledge, and PCE, but has a negative impact on price consciousness. Ahmetoglu et al. (2014) noted that price is a crucial decision standard for measuring green purchase behaviour. The high price of green products can affect the consumers' ability and motivation to purchase green or eco-friendly products.

Likewise, (Biswas & Roy, 2015) noted that consumers exhibit high price sensitivity, irrespective of their product preferences, and the social value component is the most significant factor in promoting the adoption of sustainable consumption behaviour among the green preference cluster. However, consumers' price sensitivity may be reduced when they have adequate resources and the ability to buy eco-friendly goods (Wang et al., 2020). Meanwhile, (Salem & Alanadoly, 2021) have noted that an increase in consumers' perceived effectiveness in their decision-making accelerates a greater inclination toward sustainable consumption.

External Factors

The issue of climate crises is gaining momentum among the growing number of government and non-government organisations (NGOs). The policies implemented by national governments hold significant influence in promoting sustainable consumption. These policies determine which behaviours are encouraged and which are not in society (Kostadinova, 2016). Tan et al. (2016) emphasise the pivotal role of the government in transforming consumers' attitudes toward green products. The authors assert that it is crucial to reward industries and companies that embrace sustainable practices while penalising those who fail to do so. Moreover, the government should promote environmentally-friendly behaviours among consumers.

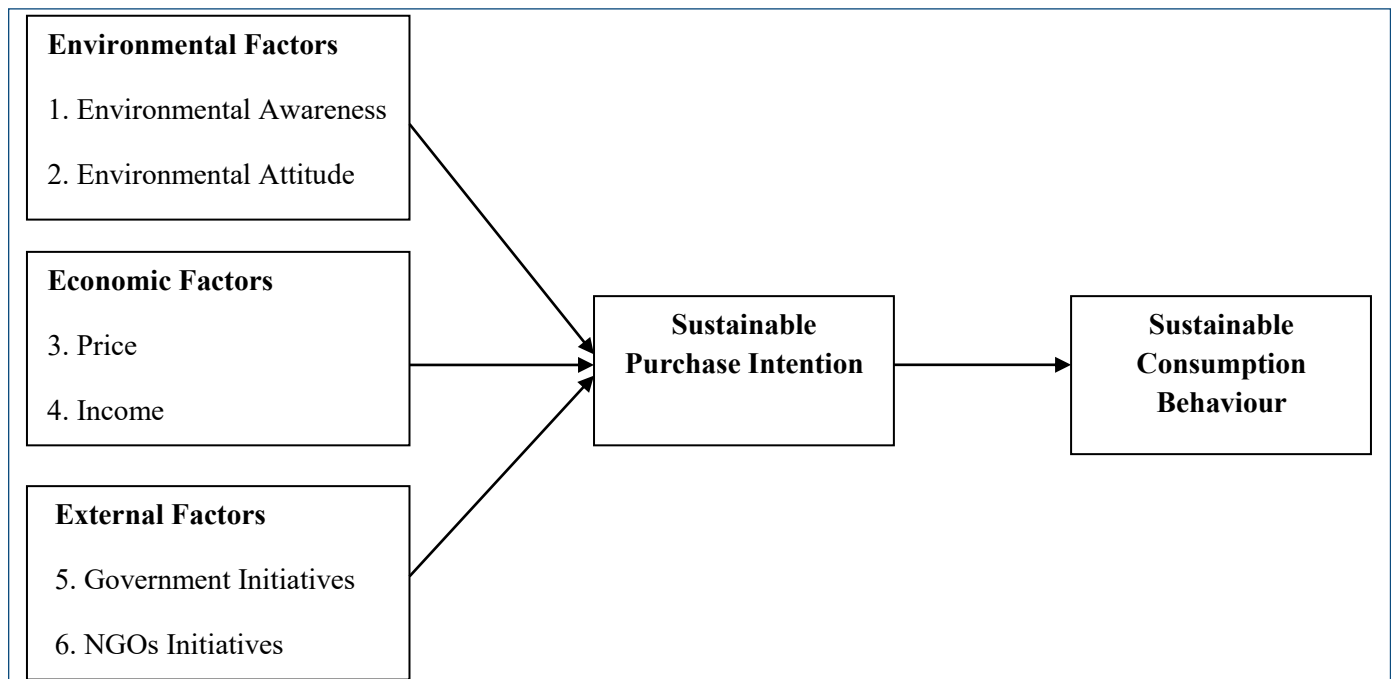
It is imperative to delve deeper into the root causes of sustainable consumption behaviour and establish a conceptual framework as it becomes increasingly prevalent. Several studies have examined sustainable consumption behaviour and how different variables can affect it. However, few of these studies have classified the factors to determine their specific impact. To better

understand the effect of these antecedents, it would be beneficial to conduct a factor-wise distribution analysis.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), developed by Ajzen (1985), is the most widely used theory that

constitutes the foundation of this research study. It has been extensively used to investigate behavioural intentions and actual behaviour (Li et al., 2019; Sun & Wang, 2020). The study seeks to broaden the concept of planned behaviour by incorporating new variables such as environmental awareness, environmental attitude, price, income, government, and NGO initiatives.



Source: Author's compilation.

DISCUSSION

Environmental Awareness

Environmental awareness indicates the individuals' knowledge and concern about issues related to the environment (Rustam et al., 2020).

Several authors provide different arguments on the awareness level of individuals on the basis of different dimensions. A study conducted by (Tong et al., 2020) has argued that men have often more knowledgeable and aware of environmental issues. In contrast, women generally exhibit a greater sensitivity towards eco-quality issues. According to (Awan & Abbasi, 2013) research, environmental awareness is based on prosperity. They believe that more wealthy and prosperous individuals tend to have a higher level of awareness about climate crises. (Joshi & Rahman, 2015) demonstrated that consumers

awareness level and the functional characteristics of products are the leading factors of sustainable consumption behaviour.

Environmental Attitude

Attitude is a crucial factor that determines a person's thoughts and emotions towards something, whether positively or negatively. It can also play an important role in influencing their actions and decisions, such as the decision to purchase products or services. Environmental attitudes refer to a conscious inclination towards behaviours that aim to minimise the negative impact of an individual's actions on the natural world. (Kaur et al., 2022) found that their attitude towards the environment greatly influenced the effect of pricing on intention. Previous studies have shown that consumers who hold strong and positive environmental values and beliefs are more likely to exert responsible and sustainable

consumption behaviour (Barber et al., 2012; Khan et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2019). Additionally, (Khan et al., 2020) demonstrated that the intention to purchase green products varies among consumers depending on their environmental attitude. As per (Lavuri & Susandy 2020) findings, attitude can precisely forecast behaviour and significantly impact one's intentions towards a particular object. Studies like (Barber et al., 2012; Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008) revealed that environmental attitudes have a direct influence on green intention and green consumer behaviour.

Price

Ecological or sustainable consumption behaviour can be achieved through internal and external motivation factors. Still, it can also be limited by external conditions such as household income, price of the products, and others (Abrahamse et al., 2005). Similarly, research conducted by (Zhang & Qing, 2011) opined that consciousness of energy consumption influences energy consumption behaviour but is also affected by the economy, household income, and price.

(Shen & Wang, 2022) asserted that individuals always make rational choices when it comes to environmental behaviour. According to the theory of Customer Perceived Value, consumers consider both the benefits and costs before making a purchase decision. Consumers with high price sensitivity tend to reduce their willingness to buy eco-friendly products when they find green products more expensive than conventional products (Wang et al., 2015).

Income

This is attributed to the fact that there exists a positive correlation between the income level of an individual and their level of environmental awareness. The income level is a critical factor in predicting ecological awareness, as it relates to various factors, including affect-ecological contraction, environmental knowledge, and the willingness to pay a premium for eco-friendly products (Junaedi, 2012).

Individuals with high financial resources possess the capability to cover the supplementary expenses associated with sustaining eco-conscious initiatives and green

products (Straughan & Roberts, 1999). Additionally, (Kaur et al., 2022) noted that income has a significant impact on the green purchase intention of consumers.

Government Initiatives

The alarming situation of the climate necessitated the need to put an end to the era of environmental ignorance. A growing number of different governmental organisations are implementing effective strategies to combat environmental problems. (Dawkins et al., 2019) examined the role and influence of local governments in addressing sustainable consumption, as there is a need for more clarity on how local governments can address environmental issues. Similarly, (Stevens, 2010) analyzed the role of government in promoting sustainable production and consumption and argued that the key to sustainable development lies in good governance. Governments must establish the necessary framework and mandates to encourage sustainable production and provide incentives for sustainable consumption.

NGOs Initiatives

The deteriorating state of the environment due to increasing irresponsible consumption patterns has become more evident. (Kong et al., 2002) explored the role of NGOs in promoting sustainable consumption behaviour and exemplified that NGOs have played an indispensable role in promoting sustainable development, particularly their collaboration with key stakeholders. These organisations are devoted to meeting the needs of individuals and communities by prioritising the current needs of the environment.

Sustainable Purchase Intention

According to (Ajzen, 1991) and (Conner & Armitage, 1998) purchase intention refers to the individual's personal inclination and willingness to engage in a specific purchase behaviour. It reflects the individual's intention and readiness to conduct the act of purchasing the products or services. Prior research (Arora et al., 2021) has found that the more favourable a consumer's view of green products, the greater the chances they will purchase them. Attitudes and purchasing intentions

are formed based on the individuals' predicted positive or negative experiences and expectations, which can be influenced by internal or external societal forces (Ali et al., 2023; Zafar et al., 2021).

Several studies (Chan & Yam, 1995; Chaudhary, 2018) have found a positive relation between sustainable purchase intention and consumption behaviour.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Considering the alarming situation of the environment, it is crucial to conduct in-depth research on the factors influencing sustainable consumption behaviour. The findings from this research will be valuable in guiding policy decisions, driving economic innovation, fostering behavioural change, and ultimately contributing to a fairer and more environmentally sustainable world. A comprehensive conceptual model has been introduced to apprehend the factors influencing consumer behaviour towards sustainability, including both individual and external factors that can promote sustainable alternatives in society. Green products are more likely to be purchased by people who have a favourable attitude towards them. By recognising the interconnectedness of environmental, economic, and external factors, organisations and governments may collaborate to promote green products and encourage buyers to have favourable attitudes toward them. As per the extant literature review high cost of the products might outweigh the ethical considerations in certain instances (Gleim et al., 2013; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2008).

Additionally, there is an observed trend where the likelihood of purchasing green products diminishes as the price premium associated with them rises. Thus, organisations can significantly prioritise this aspect when formulating pricing strategies, ensuring the accessibility of environmentally friendly products at affordable rates. Lastly, these insights assist the government, NGOs, and other advocacy organisations in developing educational programs and marketing campaigns encouraging sustainable consumer behaviour.

CONCLUSION

The current ecological issues demand immediate attention and call for a fundamental shift in the strategic

values of corporations. A comprehensive approach toward sustainable consumption is imperative to combat these challenges. The current research sheds light on the significant impact of various factors (external, environmental, and economic) on consumers' behaviour toward sustainable consumption. The study revealed the positive influence of environmental awareness, environmental attitude, income, NGOs, and governmental initiatives on the purchase intention of people toward green products. Further, the purchase intention for green products is positively influenced by the sustainable consumption behaviour of consumers. However, the price of products showed a weaker relation with the purchase intention. Results revealed that individuals with high price sensitivity tend to emphasise the cost of products more than the sustainable features of those products. The study can be extended further by collecting quantitative data for empirically testing relationships among the stated constructs.

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