

# Chapter 11

## Determinants of Sustainable Consumption Behaviour: Review and Conceptual Framework

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### ABSTRACT

*This study reviewed 82 empirical articles on sustainable consumption published during 1997 to 2014. The review explored different factors affecting sustainable consumption decision-making. The factors were categorized as personal, behavioural and socio-cultural. A taxonomic synopsis of the findings is presented in an extensive table. The paper identifies various prevalent motives, facilitators and barriers affecting sustainable consumption decision-making and provides possible explanations for inconsistencies observed in consumers' sustainable consumption behaviour. A conceptual framework is proposed that considers various motives, attitudes and barriers and explains how they are related to sustainable consumption behaviour.*

### INTRODUCTION

Over the years, there has been increasing evidence suggesting climate change and increasing environmental problems (Patnaik et al., 2013). As a result, academics and practitioners across the world have been forced to pay attention to the concept of sustainable development to minimize damage to environment and society. The study of sustainable development has given rise to the concepts of sustainable production and sustainable consumption. Sustainable production focuses on incorporating sustainability in every step of creation of goods and services (Veleva & Ellenbecker, 2001) while sustainable consumption is concerned with motivating a responsible form of consumption behaviour. Although the number of individuals willing to embrace sustainable consumption has increased in the last few years, it has been observed that such willingness has not translated into action (Nath et al., 2013). People often overlook the

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impact of their consumption patterns on society and environment. Literature also expresses concerns about unplanned consumption practices that may result in “environmental, social and economic degeneration” (Hume, 2010). Several studies have examined the motivations behind various consumption practices and the results of such practices, and found a discrepancy or “gap” between consumers’ expressed favorable attitudes and actual sustainable consumption practices (Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006). This is normally referred to as “sustainable consumption inconsistency” or “sustainable attitude - behaviour gap”.

Sustainable consumption can be defined as “the consumption pattern that supports the ability of current and future generations to meet their material and other needs, without causing irreversible damage to the environment or loss of function in natural systems” (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007). Sustainable consumption is multidimensional in nature and has various forms such as fair consumption, green consumption, etc.

Fair consumption can be described as consumption activities influenced by the consumer’s social concerns that may include societal, human rights and fair trade concerns (DePelsmacker *et al.*, 2005). The word “green consumption” is normally related to environmentally responsible consumption where the consumer considers the environmental impact of purchasing, using, and disposing of various products, or of using various services (Moisander, 2007). Green consumption involves purchasing environmentally friendly products, recycling, and avoiding products that harm the environment (Schaefer, 2005).

In the present study, literature related to sustainable consumption has been explored, analyzed, and reviewed. Findings inform the reader about various factors influencing sustainable consumer attitudes and behaviours that have been covered by other studies, and provide possible explanations for the observed attitude-behaviour gap. The present study also proposes a basic conceptual framework explaining sustainable consumer behaviour.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Sustainable consumption as a concept was first highlighted in the Brundtland Report entitled “Our Common Future” in 1987 (Peattie and Peattie, 2009), and has been defined as: “The use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations” (Ofstad, 1994).

Sustainable consumption is vital to protecting the environment. Davies *et al.* (2002) argued that consumers could reduce or prevent environmental damage by way of their consumption behaviour. However, people often do not pay attention to their consumption behaviour and overlook the impact of their consumption patterns on society and environment (Biswas and Roy, 2015). Such consumption practices may result in “environmental, social and economic degeneration” (Jain and Kaur, 2004). In the quest for modernization and increased consumption, the damage to the environment and society is almost ignored (Khor *et al.*, 2015). To address this issue, mere formulation of laws to promote sustainability is not enough; informing and motivating people to consume responsibly is equally necessary.

Damage to the natural environment has forced corporations to think in a “greener” way, thereby changing the dynamics of competition in the global market (Kumar *et al.*, 2013; Peattie and Peattie, 2009). Many business organizations now view sustainability from a strategic perspective and strive to introduce new brands and products that embrace positive social and environmental outcomes (Rejikumar, 2016). It is expected that liberalization would help increase the supply of products to markets earlier untouched (Banik and Bhaumik, 2014). However, having consumers behave in a sustainable manner appears to be

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