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# An Introduction to Socially Responsible Sustainable

# **Consumption: Issues and Challenges**

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Unsustainable consumption and production patterns are endangering global development more than ever (United Nations Environment Programme, 2015). Indeed, the need to change the current economic model of excessive and ineffective production and consumption of natural resources is becoming increasingly prominent on the political agenda. The United Nations reviewed these global imperatives and endorsed the ideas of 'Green Growth' and 'Green Economy' as an alternative to the current economic paradigm at the Rio 2012 Conference on Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2012). By focusing on reducing carbon emissions, improving energy efficiency, and decreasing biodiversity loss through public and private investments, the green economy framework allowed governments to refocus their commitment to addressing the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development (United Nations Environment Programme, 2015). This notion was reinforced in when the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or Global Goals were proposed by the United Nations in 2015 to build an integrated approach to sustainable development to address the needs of current and future generations (United Nations, 2015).

Rising global tempretures associated with climate change has created much awareness among the people around the world resulting in organized protest campaigns against local and global instutions to act immediately before it is too late. The Unitted Nations in its role as a supra national body has spent 30 years to bring all the countries together to agree on a plan to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emisions. However, little progress has been made to agree on a net emission reduction target by the biggest pollutors. The UN's secretary general has called on leaders of countries to propose concrete plans to reduce their national net carbon emissions to zero by 2050. This is considered critical given the anticipated, clolosus damage to the ecosystem and lives of the people if global temprestures continue to increase by more than 2° C above preindustrial levels (Gao et al, 2017). The Sicentists claim that 97% of climate change is caused by human behaviour which is termed as anthropocentric perspective of climate change (Cook et al, 2016). Energy contributes nearly three-quarters of global emissions, followed by agriculture. If we closely look at the power generation and usage, electricity and heat generation constitute the largest portion of emissions, followed by transportation and manufacturing.

Most of us play the roles of consumer and producer in our day to day activities. Our unsustainable consumption and production behavours are argued to be causing excessive amount of carbon emissions resulting in an agrivated level of global warming. Given the intricacies surrounding the political debate and differences of opinions as to whether climate change is real or not, rapid and significant actions by governments are assumed to be progressing at a very low speed. It is in this context that consermers and marketers could intitiate meaningful action toward achieving a sustainable ecosystem by innovating novel ways of production and consumption of goods and services. Consumers in modernday society have emormous power to influence business firms to change or upgrade—their value creation processes so that business firms become important nodes of the cicular economic network.

Examplary sustainable behaviours demonstrated by both consumers and marketers need to be propergated through case studies and further research. This is undountedly a task that should be performed by academics and practioners alike.

Consumers are critical to the transition to a green economy because they must practice socially responsible sustainable consumption (Prothero et al., 2011; Sun, Bellezza, & Paharia, 2021). Sustainable consumption refers to consumer behaviors and purchases concerned with social and environmental responsibility (Balaji, Jiang, & Jha, 2019). In other words, consumers must strive to reduce the negative outcomes of their consumption process (including product acquisition, usage, and disposal) while increasing the social and environmental benefits (Lim, 2017; Wang et al., 2019). Today, sustainability consumption is regarded as the need of the hour because it entails development in the present while also working to safeguard resources for future generations to survive and live (Geiger, Fischer, & Schrader, 2018; Pauluzzo & Mason, 2021). Given the importance of sustainable consumption in accomplishing sustainable development goals, it has piqued academics and practitioners' interest. For example, previous research has explored various aspects of sustainable consumption, such as environmentally friendly consumption (Haws, Winterich, & Naylor, 2014; Hosta & Zabkar, 2020; Yadav, Balaji, & Jebarajakirthy, 2019), environmental consciousness and knowledge (Golob & Kronegger, 2019; Polonsky et al., 2012), environmental value orientations and lifestyles (Sony & Ferguson, 2017), and environmental behaviors (Lacroix & Gifford, 2020; Paço & Lavrador, 2017). Furthermore, scholars have investigated sustainable consumption in a variety of contexts, including food products (Moser, 2016), apparel (Kim & Seock, 2019), hospitality services (Balaji et al., 2019), tourism destinations (Jiang & Hong, 2021), airline services (Hwang & Choi, 2018), utilities (Paço & Lavrador, 2017), and low-income consumers (Al Mamun et al., 2018). Similarly, a few scholars have investigated sustainable consumption from

the perspectives of marketers, business models, and policymakers (Kiss et al., 2018; Torma, Aschemann-Witzel, & Thøgersen, 2018; Tunn et al., 2019).

While these research efforts have enhanced our understanding of sustainable consumption, there are still significant hurdles to achieving sustainable development goals by 2030. Major challenges involve the maintenance of natural resources and equitable resource distribution. This indicates that a deeper understanding of how present consumption and purchasing behaviors might be made more sustainable in practice is required. Thus, the current chapter seeks to improve understanding of sustainable consumption, identify issues and challenges associated with sustainable consumption, and chart a course forward.

### **Sustainable Consumption**

Sustainability consumption is regarded as an important goal in the pursuit of sustainable development. It is defined as the consumption of goods and services produced economically using techniques and materials that cause little environmental damage, are socially equitable, and meet the basic requirements of all individuals (Huang & Rust, 2011). Some consider it as a way of life which resists consumerism and materialistic lifestyles, and encourages living the simple life (Jackson, 2005). The term consumerism is now commonly used to denote couspicuous consumption or over consumption but in the early periods it was used to mean organized actions by consumer groups against unfair or unsustainable business practices. However, few consider sustainable consumption as going beyond consumerism to regulate expensive expenditures for improved quality of life and happiness. The most comprehensive definition was offered by OECD (2002), who defined it as the consumption of products and services that meet basic requirements and improve the quality of life without risking future generations' requirements. According to the preceding discourse, sustainable consumption is a shared commitment between the consumer and the society, which is determined by the consumer's ability and capacity to take on the responsibility of sustainable consumption.

Middlemiss (2010) defined this ability as the ecological footprint, which indicates the consumer's ability to use only a sustainable quantity of ecological resources. This ability of the individual consumer to take on the responsibility of sustainability varies and is determined by cultural capacity (cultural values and norms with which the consumer identifies), organizational capacity (resources offered by organizations with which the consumer is affiliated), infrastructural capacity (facilities for a sustainable living), and personal capacity (personal resources such as knowledge, financing, etc.).

## **Achieving Sustainable Consumption**

Consumers can practice sustainable consumption in various ways, such as responsible consumption, anticonsumption, and mindful consumption (Lim, 2017). Webster (1975) described a socially responsible consumer as one who analyzes the societal implications of his or her consumption and uses his or her purchasing power to promote social change. Socially responsible consumers exhibit three characteristics: They are motivated to acquire products or services when they see a social problem; they believe they have the ability to change the society; and they are interested in social affairs and community involvement (Prendergast & Tsang, 2019). The socially responsible consumer will strive to limit or eliminate hazards to the society while maximizing long-term benefits. As a result, consumers are more inclined to avoid products or services from companies that they believe to be harmful to the society and prefer products or services from companies they perceive to benefit the society (Mohr et al., 2001). Thus, socially responsible consumer behavior relates to the individual purchase, usage, and disposal of things with the goal of minimizing or eliminating any negative repercussions while maximizing the positive effects on society (Francois-Lecompte and Roberts, 2006). However, previous research has demonstrated that the behaviors of a socially responsible consumer can be quite different. This includes boycotting businesses that harm the natural environment, preferring eco-designed items, donating to social causes and charities, and opposing mass

consumption behaviors (Palacios-González & Chamorro-Mera, 2020). While socially responsible consumer behavior is desirable, it is challenging to implement in daily consumption. Additionally, education and awareness initiatives on the social and environmental consequences of consumption are critical.

Anticonsumption is a term that refers to those who resist, challenge, or oppose consumption (Kozinets, Handelman, & Lee, 2010). In other terms, being anticonsumption involves abstaining from unsustainable behavioral tendencies such as overconsumption. In addition, it is related to the identification of feasible solutions for maintaining an adequate level of psychosocial well-being (Seegebarth et al., 2016). Anticonsumption is a kind of nonconsumption that exists as a conscious restriction or outright rejection of consumerism. However, if a consumer is strongly convinced and compelled to shun or reject a specific product or service, nonconsumption becomes synonymous with anticonsumption (Chatzidakis & Lee, 2013). Anticonsumption is distinct from the socially responsible sustainable consumption behavior, as it is viewed as a negative purchasing habit. Consumers engage in anticonsumption for a variety of reasons, ranging from environmental, social, and ideological concerns to symbolic benefits, self-interest, and well-being (Lee, 2019; Sekhon & Armstrong Soule, 2020). Past studies suggest that anticonsumption is primarily motivated by self-interest, self-identity, and social or environmental concerns, rather than rational utility maximization (Ziesemer, Hüttel, & Balderjahn, 2021). Thus, anticonsumption is a critical component of sustainable consumption and development. However, it is not clear to what extent anticonsumption attitudes are motivated primarily by environmental concerns. Furthermore, understanding psychological how demographic and factors influence different anticonsumption choices made by consumers could aid in clarifying the motivations behind anticonsumption activities.

Mindful consumption is using mindfulness to guide consumers' choices (Sheth, Sethia, & Srinivas, 2011). It is based on an understanding of the implications of consumption in cognition and consequences. Mindful consumption entails the ability of the consumer to choose what and how much he or she consumes (Milne, Ordenes, & Kaplan, 2020). This indicates that neither the circumstances nor the market conditions push or constrain an individual to consume in a particular way. Instead, the consumer makes a deliberate consumption decision based on his or her values and preferences (Brunneder & Dholakia, 2018). To that extent, the mindful mindset influences and shapes the consumer behavior associated with sustainable consumption. Researchers and practitioners propose mindful consumption as a crucial method for transforming the society, the economy, and individual well-being. Moverover, a consumer's religiocity and how it affects consumption choices have received researchers' attention. Specifically, Perera & Hewege, (2018) explore how religiosity influences one's environmentally concerned consumer behaviour. When considered as a process, mindful consumption requires consumers to pay attention to their physiological sensations, thoughts, and emotions in order to make consumption decisions based on their direct encounters with needs and values (Bahl et al., 2016). Additionally, it entails an attitude of self-, community-, and environmental stewardship, which translates into consumer behavior determining their acquisition, consumption, and repeat purchase behaviors. Thus, mindful processes emphasize the awareness of internal and external inputs, which helps to lessen ties to habitual behaviors and transform marketplace choices and experiences. However, it is unclear how consumers may develop a caring mindset and what marketing activities can facilitate the development of a mindful consumption mindset.

From an overall ecological, socio-economic and individual wellbeing perspective, ideal state that we ought to aim for would be achieving complete harmony with the nature when engaging in our production and consumption behaviours. The most effective innovative

practices could be those practices that would enhance consumer utility (convenience or happiness) while minimizing the adverse effects of these practices to mother nature. Both consumers and marketers need to work collaboratively to achieve this ideal state of sustainable consumption that generates maximum happiness and welbieng to consumers.

# **Issues and Challenges with Sustainable Consumption**

Despite the fact that sustainable consumption is recognized as a cornerstone for reaching sustainable development goals, it confronts several challenges, including a lack of environmentally friendly products for consumers to engage in a sustainable way of living, sustainable production processes to support sustainable consumption, and policies to encourage a sustainable lifestyle.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers actively seek sustainable products and services and reward environmentally responsible businesses (Jiang & Wen, 2020). According to a recent survey by E.ON (Searle, 2020), 33% of consumers claimed that the company's environmental certifications and credentials impacted their buying decisions the most. A further 80% stated that they intended to buy goods and services from companies that actively engage in environmentally friendly business operations. The pandemic has drastically altered consumer behaviors, with 72% of consumers reporting that they are concerned about businesses' ecologically friendly operations. They are also ready to pay a price premium, with 51% of consumers saying that the product's environmental certifications are just as significant as the price they pay. While this presents a tremendous opportunity, businesses must address and ensure that the growing demand for environmentally friendly products is met. A big question is whether businesses can supply consumers with practical solutions to make sustainable consumption accessible to all and become a mainstream way of life.

While sustainable consumption has placed a strong emphasis on consumption patterns, sustainable production, which refers to creating products and services using procedures that

have a low environmental impact, is gaining prominence. Sustainable consumption and lifestyles are inextricably linked to sustainable production. A new approach to production is required because sustainable production focuses on resource conservation and environmental regenerative capacity throughout the product's life cycle (product design and development, raw material procurement, manufacturing, distribution and logistics, product use, and disposal). Companies can benefit from sustainable production in various ways, including cost savings through improved material and energy efficiency, competitive advantages, adaptation to changes in consumer behavior, and long-term profitability. One of the most difficult challenges for sustainable production is appropriately pricing social and environmental externalities so that businesses can invest their revenues in sustainable processes throughout the product life cycle.

In recent times, the world has seen remarkable innovations underpinned by Internet of Things (IOT). To illustrate, innovative web 2.0 based business applications such as Uber Taxi, Uber Eats, Airbnb, Tripadvisor, Booking.com, DropBox, Airtasker, and TaskRabbit (to name few) have revoultioned the consumption and production relationships by creating a sharing economy that leads to blurring production and consumption roles and driving the emerging prosumer behaviour. Uber has undoubtedly revolutioned the way people use taxi services and this business model has resulted not only in efficient use of motorvehicles but also in reducing the need for owning a car. Duing the COVID-19 pandamic when resturents are closed for dine-in they have kept their kitchens busy through online food ordering and delivery platforms. The concept of 'ghost kitchen' is worth mentioning here, as it allows a chef to hire a common industrial kitchen space to offer a limited menu items on sale through home delivery. Without a dining area and restaurant face, these kithcens operate with the help of virtual restuarent applications reducing the demand for electricity and other unitlity resulting in a low carbon emission operations. Consumers enjoy the convenience of home delivery of their favourite

meal while an entrepreneur with minimum investment and intrastructure is able to operate a business. This is a win-win situation for the consumer, producer and the environment. Sustainable 'pro(con)sumer' practices underpinded by IOT would be the wayforward for a sustainable consumption practices. We are witnessing a growing trend of new prosumers who refrain from buying sercives and ownership and tend to engage in swarpping, borrowing or renting from each other (Möller, 2016; Perera, Hewege & Mai, 2020; ). For those readers who are inquisitive to learn more about sharing economy and the opportunities it presents to the world of consumption and production, we highly recommend reading, for example, Bardhi & Eckhardt, (2012); Belk, 2010; Belk, 2014a & 2014b; Lamberton & Rose, 2012).

Policies, processes, and structures all play a critical role in enabling people to engage in sustainable consumption and production. Policies can mediate various capitals such as financial and human capital and resources such as natural resources. This mediation occurs through the government, civil society, and business sectors, which influence how markets operate. They all develop various policies to ensure that their initiatives are aligned with the sustainable development goals. Public policies can support a sustainable lifestyle by encouraging the regeneration of natural resources and raising awareness of environmental problems and solutions. Understanding the impact of government policies and corporate activities on the local environment, local residents' livelihoods, and the local ecosystem has been a serious challenge. An efficient regulatory framework is essential to connect all the industry stakeholders to a semealess value chain where every industry partner works for the overll betterment of the industry and the societal wellbeing.

#### Conclusion

Sustainable consumption is considered as one of the key priorities for achieving a sustainable future. It is now at the top of the agenda for businesses, consumers, media, and governments. Sustainable consumption provides a plethora of interesting opportunites for both

the present and future. This, however, necessitates a thorough understanding of various issues and challenges related to sustainable consumption. The major goal of this book is to understand, through real-life case studies, the practice of sustainable consumption and production. This book will help readers gain a critical understanding of socially responsible consumption behaviors, as well as how businesses and governments may overcome barriers to generating positive environmental behavioral changes in consumers. This book takes inspiration from the the United Nations 2030 agenda for sustainable development to provide a rich account of sustainable consumption while seeking integrated solutions to make consumption more sustainable.

### Organization of the Book

The remainder of this book is divided into four key sections. The book begins with an outline of socially responsible sustainable consumption and marketing. Readers can expect to learn about sustainable consumption concepts, initiaives, and strategies from these chapters. Second, the book includes a series of case studies that provide information about various practices of sustainable consumption and sustainable marketing initiatives and policies to encourage consumers to engage in sustainable consumption behaviors that have occurred in developing and developed countries. Third, the book contains a number of chapters that present the most recent findings from original research on sustainable consumption. Fourth, the book discusses pedagogical directions for teaching sustainable consumption and marketing. In conclusion, we hope that the chapters contributed by eminent scholars will be valuable to marketing academics, educators, and practitioners, and that our book will effectively empower future sustainable consumption initiatives and sustainable marketing activities.

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