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Promoting Sustainable Consumption in India: Challenges and a Path Forward

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ABSTRACT

The rapid evolution of industries and the influence of globalization have driven the growth of multinational corporations, which have become significant contributors to environmental degradation. Responsible resource consumption is now a pressing concern for both consumers and businesses worldwide. Therefore, it is crucial for all stakeholders to prioritize environmentally responsible behavior. In India, society has a long history of valuing sustainable practices to protect both society and the environment. Throughout ancient times, Indians have upheld the principles of resource conservation and need-based consumption. However, changing economic conditions and rising income levels have led to a noticeable shift in the consumption patterns of India's middle class. To address these changes, government bodies and social organizations are working to raise awareness among businesses about the importance of sustainable consumption. This paper seeks to examine the challenges associated with sustainable consumption in India and emphasizes the need for a collaborative effort involving various stakeholders to promote sustainable consumption practices.

1. 1. Introduction

Introduction

Sustainability is the necessity of the present to have a decent future (WCED, 1987). Sustainability was demarcated as "meeting the requirement of current without compromising the need of future generations. Many descriptions of sustainability have come about since then. Elkingtthe on (1998) well-defined the triple bottom line of sustainability, as economic, social, and environmental. At the Earth Summit at Rio de Janerio in 1992 (Jennifer et. al.,

2008) 143 nations of the world signed the 'Earth Summit Treaty", to bring recognition to sustainable development and consumption. In Rio (1992) Summit, Copenhagen (2009) Summit, and Kyoto (2001) Summit have sustained the dialogue, leading to international agreements, and national laws for sustainability. Research in the zone of sustainability has taken stride.

United Nations has also outlined the Global Compact (UNGC) Programme constructed the world's major corporate citizenship initiative targeting a more sustainable and comprehensive world economy. It is reinforced by over 4000 participants in over 100 countries. It contains many of the world's most powerful companies, such as Coca-Cola, Levi, Tata, Cadbury, Microsoft, and many more. Companies from all over the world account for their growth by executing the 10 Global Compacted principles. This notion is growing in India too as many Indian companies like Tata Motors, ITC, and ONGC are issuing sustainability reports.

Faisal (2010) projected practices like environmentally friendly packaging, return of end-of-life and second-hand products to the producer as well as the ecological handling of these returns, reutilizing, remanufacturing, and acceptable waste disposal have assumed significance. Additionally, issues like product proposal, manufacturing by-products, by-products produced during product usage, product lifespan extension, product end-of-life, and retrieval processes at end-of-life may not form the core actions of the supply chain management but still have a significant impact on the global sustainability of a supply chain that should be achieved utilizing a cohesive method.

In India, consumer expenditure has increased significantly in the previous few years. Reports direct that India is one of the wildest budding consumer markets and consumer confidence in Indian markets is the maximum among the world markets. This mounting market has been fuelled by numerous factors such as speedy growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), growth beneficial change in demographics – many people under 30 years of age and a mounting middle-class population, altering consumption behaviors of people, growing suburbanization as well as higher procuring power in urban and rural zones, due to strategic expenditure in developmental actions.

This is, though, yet to decode into a considerable market for green goods, which even now remains at a knowingly low level. There are numerous challenges in the route of sustainable consumption. These could be largely considered economic, political, and socio-cultural (Hoffman, 2005).

challenges in the lane of sustainable consumption

A. Economic challenges

Production and consumption of ecologically friendly products in India are constrained due to several factors that obstruct the sustainability of these goods in marketplaces (Hatipoglu, B., & Inelmen, K. (2022). Production of green goods involves (a) carbon-based raw materials, locally produced/gained, or environmentally friendly; (b) green-energy-based technology; and (c) waste management plant. Even though there are signals that remarkable changes are taking place, the bordered factors are yet to be entrenched fully in the production processes in India. These generate two main challenges: primarily, the constraint of accessibility and attainment of green raw material and technology, which is a serious

challenge for the producers in emerging countries like India given the inferior level of research and development (R&D) and questions arising from the allocation of technology from other nations. The second and more important problem is the high cost of production of green goods since the inputs (raw material and technology) consistently cost more than the ones used for nongreen deviations. This cost discrepancy between green and nongreen goods is termed Environmental Premium. The higher the cost, the superior will be the premium involved and the higher will be the producer's risk. Consumers also face certain restrictions which are critical in their choice of green goods. It is to be noted that these hindrances are interlaced. The first challenge is the environmental premium (the higher price of green goods (Peattie, K. (2010)). Given the income limitation, consumers wish to purchase goods that give them the highest usefulness at the lowest price. Estimation of usefulness from physical consumption of environmental goods at present is a drawback to satisfying this state since the price is higher than the non-green variant which delivers corresponding utility (Middlemiss, L. (2018).

B. Demographic challenges

The maximum of the population of the world subsists in India and China. China stands in first place just ahead of India. India has a population of more than 1 billion (100 crores) which is 17% of the population of the world, added India claims only 2.4 % of the terrestrial area. It is projected that India will Overawe China by 2045. In the 20th century population of India increased 5 times as related to 3 times for the whole world population. India requires more and more resources to meet the demands of a vast population with inadequate resources. Conservation initiatives implemented by the administration are not operative concerning the surge in the population (Guo, F., Lane, J., Duan, Y., Stoltman, J. P., Khlebosolova, O., Lei, H., & Zhou, W. (2018).

C. Social and Cultural Factors

Consumption attitude is based on sociocultural aspects like location groups, social standing, creed, principles, edification, commandments, and infrastructure among others (Driessen, 2000). The combined effects of these factors position limits to sustainable consumption in India. Education has a noteworthy impact on the consumption behavior of individuals and households. Well-educated and cultured consumers better recognize the linkages between human consumption and the environment (Bloodhart, B., & Swim, J. K. (2020). Sustainability and consumption: What's gender got to do with it?. *Journal of Social Issues*, *76*(1), 101-113.. With an Advanced level of education, it is easier to proliferate sustainable consumption through the expansion of an understanding of the environmental effects of current forms of consumption. The adult literacy rate in India for 2001-2004 is 61 percent. But the statistic sinks severely with only about 52 percent of the population getting secondary education and a simple 11.9 percent going for tertiary education. The low learning rate in India has become a key factor hindering sustainable consumption in the country. Another significant aspect is the legal background for the advancement of sustainable consumption. India, like most other countries of the world, does not have laws to report sustainability on the demand side. However, there are only insufficient, mostly intended, regulations that regulate the production procedures and supply chains of goods to guarantee the least possible damage to the environment. Along with this, the infrastructure essential to

guarantee access of consumers to goods encouraging sustainable consumption is missing. Religious beliefs and culture are also noteworthy drivers of consumption choices (Borusiak, B., Szymkowiak, A., Horska, E., Raszka, N., & Żelichowska, E. (2020). From the view of sustainable consumption, ethnicities, and values dominant in India have a diverse impact on sustainability. On the one hand, vegetarianism is common here due to religious feelings, on the other hand, the practice of bursting many crackers during festivals originates unnecessary pollution and is in contradiction with the idea of sustainable consumption (Evans, D. M. (2018).

D. Political challenges

Political factors are one of the most significant factors of economic and social strategies of the government, which in turn form consumption and production outlines in the country (Spaargaren, 2003). Typically, in a democratic country like India with a substantial part of the population below the poverty line, political choices are based on ground-level realism, which often works in contradiction to the sustainability style. India has, since the introduction of economic reform programs in the 1990s, surveyed an approach with importance given to economic growth. Nevertheless, in recent periods, things have started shifting, and amplified importance is being given to impress sustainability in the growth (consumption and production) processes. Also, international political forces are vital in the promotion of sustainability since international consultations and measures also authorize the national government's efforts for sustainability. But often, countries seek to guard the growth agenda of the country at these international negotiations. As a result, the promotion of sustainability may not get as positive a response as is required due to efforts to guard domestic welfare. The revolution of unsustainable lifestyles holds the key to bringing in an eon of sustainable consumption and production (Howarth, C., Lane, M., Morse-Jones, S., Brooks, K., & Viner, D. (2022). However, there might not be an abrupt change in how people notice their consumption wants and consumption behaviors. Years of hard work and attentive inventiveness at various levels are essential to bringing in the revolution, and all participants – consumers, manufacturers, administration, academics, mass media, and others – must play their part proficiently and successfully. While some of these participants (government, CSOs, etc.) might have simplifying roles, others such as producers and consumers have a multidimensional role in shepherding in the new era. This will necessitate strengthening and enlightening the present initiatives made by the stakeholders, and at the same time floating consumer mindfulness and producing inclination to buy green goods is the kingpin for bringing sustainability in lifestyles. To expedite the transformation, producers must bring in features such as lifestyles, price competitiveness, easy accessibility, and health aids in their products. At the government level, the linkages between spotless energy and the creation of green goods should be emphasized promoted utilized as the benefits of investment in the former lessen the cost of the latter. This could lead to a multiplier effect on the reserves (Wang, Y., & Li, M. (2022).

To make the sustainability style fruitful, India is required to follow the approach of incentivizing producers of green goods through better distribution of resources (land and raw materials), smoothing the development of infrastructure, and making the supply chains of resources and technology more competent and effective. These stages might lead to the creation of social and economic outlays for this industry, and channel administrative resources toward sustainable development. The encounter, however, would ensure that

ingenuities to bring in this transformation do not compromise and threaten the lives and livelihood of the present-day generation, and at the same time encourage sustainability.

Opportunities for sustainable consumption

It is imperative to encourage sustainable consumption through environmental education and public alertness operations supported by the central and State governments and encouragement groups (Marten, et. al., 2005). In several areas, needed limits and ideals for consumption need to be recognized and applied through suitable instruments including education, incentives, and legislation. Development choices regarding technology and infrastructure are chief elements of consumption forms. In India, we have the Bureau of Energy Efficiency, established in March 2002 under the provisions of the Energy Conservation Act of 2001 to deliver a legal framework for the government's energy efficiency initiatives in the country. Energy consumption in suburban structures is 116 billion units vis-à-vis in commercial units which is 33 billion units.

A. Technology upgradation

In modern societies, technology exists everywhere. Technology contains assistance, procedures, technical systems, tools, and raw materials. On the one hand, technology has a constructive effect, such as trains support us to move around and transport goods. On the other hand, the undesirable impact is its outcome on the environment. Most know-hows were designed first for economic outcomes without seeing the ecological environment. In the forthcoming, the ecology and the post-purchase usage and dumping of products will become significant tools in the design of new technologies such as fuel-efficient cars, energy-efficient houses, etc (Belz, F.M., 2009). The designing of products and procedures of production can be done by upgraded technology, to make them environmentally responsive.

B. Altering consumer's mindset

Sustainable consumption asks us to study problems that go beyond the individual when we shop (Spangenberg, 2002). These contain not only the ecological effects of what we buy but also the justice, human rights, and political scopes of sustainability in the production and consumption procedure (Rifkin, 2002). These facets of sustainable consumption offer strategies on how to lessen the social and ecological impressions of what we consume. For example, the Internet Just Shoppers' Guide in America, advises measures to consider when buying everyday products like newspapers, sports shoes, salons, bathing soap, cold drinks, paper, food items, clothing, and so on. Procedures such as these are not planned to make us feel embarrassed, but to inspire us to ask questions such as: Do I want this item? Can I produce it myself? And then, when we have decided to buy something, to think judgmentally about each stage in the 'life-cycle' of a product i.e., production, transport & and retailing, use, and dumping.

C. Reducing Consumption habits

While former research has attempted to identify and demonstrate the "green consumer," less reflection has been paid to understanding the attitude of the population who emphasize reducing their inclusive consumption. Etzioni (1998) outlines three distinctions of the "voluntary simplicity" movement, from modest levels of "downshifting" to "holistic explanation." While some specify compressed consumption because of a wish to "buy time" (Grigsby 2004) and to develop their value of life, others do so because of ideologies such as

anxieties about the environmental and social consequences of consumption (Shaw and Newholm 2002). At the extreme, some consumers strongly abandon consumption, a marvel referred to as "anti-consumption" (Zavestoski 2002). However, as Connolly et al. (2006) claim, much of this research has been released into a shape parallel to that of research on green marketing, with significance on identifying and handling new consumer sections. Returning to our central thesis, a largely unrequited question is, given vigorous explicit provision for the ideals of sustainability, why don't more consumers contribute to compact consumption behaviors (Røpke 1999)? Additionally, research should talk about the attitude–action gap within the framework of condensed consumption, with the importance of understanding why this gap continues for those who articulate support for the principles of sustainability. In turn, this information could direct subsequently research on the most effective public policies to increase reduced consumption.

D. Enlarging the Scope of Consumption Research

Researchers essentially also attempt to develop the possibility of their research. Most consumer behavior investigators have been engrossed in the consumption of packed goods and other comparatively low-involvement goods. We believe that a rigorous drive is needed for further research on the consumption of chief consumptions, such as automobiles, electronics, clothing, and real estate—all of which have substantial consequences for sustainability (Marell, Gärling, and Laitila 2009). For example, the procurement of a household has noteworthy inferences both directly (e.g., energy usage) and indirectly (e.g., commutation distance). Spreading research into suggestively diverse situations will likely lead to novel information on consumption manners and the aspects that impact them, and classify variances in the notch and nature of the sustainability attitude–behavior gap across consumption backgrounds. This expanded schema for consumer behavior researchers is especially vital given that public policies will need to last to discourse a wide range of frameworks and, therefore, will rest on more fully understanding differences in consumer behaviors across these frameworks.

E. Research Prospects for Sustainable Consumption and Public Policy

The discussion advises a variety of paths for additional research on sustainable consumption behavior, with prominence on understanding the gap between attitudes and behaviors across the spectrum of consumption (and reduced-consumption) behaviors and contexts. However, as we discussed previously, it is critical to comprehend consumption inside its macro framework and to move outside to understand behaviors to induce them through practical public policy. This is particularly imperative given that many of the barricades to sustainable consumption behavior are ingrained in public policy or an absence thereof. For instance, variations in the accessibility and value of public transportation, the accessibility and affordability of sustainable goods and housing, the expansion of suitable product classification schemes, and so on all be subject to public policy actions (Thøgersen 2005). Without the portrayal of operative policies, consumers are strictly restricted in the degree to which they can act on their pros stainability attitudes (Jackson 2009)

F. Consumer Rights—and Duties

The consumer–national concept indicates an equilibrium of duties and rights (Hansen and Schrader 1997). Still, consumer scholars and policy creators (Hilton 2005) hardly ponder the responsibilities of consumers. Gabriel and Lang (2006, p. 174) claim that, because they have

the right to select, people also have an obligation "to antagonize the inferences of one's choices." Thus, choosing as a citizen may lead to diverse social, environmental, and ethical estimations of alternatives than choosing as an individual serving one's instantaneous interest. Thus, due to the amount that liberty of willpower and alternate selections occur, consumers have some accountability for the impact of their choices (Hansen and Schrader 1997). Individual consumers–citizens contributing to the market have responsibilities to their community and environment, but they also have duties to their household and themselves (e.g., Gebauer et al. 2008), and some of these duties may contradict. To realize what determines and hampers consumer–citizen conduct concerning sustainable consumption, further research is desirable on people's insights into their community duties, how they stabilize these duties with self-regard and the uncertainties, doubts, and struggles that consumer–citizens observe (see also Connolly and Prothero 2008). For instance, many people sense a compulsion to act in a pro-environmental way (Kaiser 2006), as showed by their source-separating domestic waste according to municipal waste authority guiding principles (Thøgersen 1996), preserving energy in their household (Abrahamse and Steg 2009), or purchasing eco-labeled goods (Grankvist and Biel 2001). However, to encourage or enable such spirits of commitment more efficiently, marketers require more information about likely emergencies for evolving them. Occasionally other compulsions make people act differently to their justifiable attitudes, such as parents who are anxious about their children's security dropping them to school in place of letting them walk (McDonald and Aalborg 2009) or consumers worried about their family's pleasure and comfort purchasing unsustainably formed food or aircraft travel for holidays (Grønhøj and Ölander 2007). How extensive are these responsibility conflicts, how seriously do they hamper sustainable consumption, and what part can public policy perform in highlighting the conflicts?

G. The Marketization of Politics and the Citizen–Consumer

Sellers and consumer scholars are not unaided in enclosing people as consumers. Progressively, Western administrations, the mass media, and even nongovernmental organizations related to the environmental discourse see people as clients rather than citizens (Crompton 2008; Slocum 2004; Trentmann 2007). This "marketization" of politics (Doubleday 2004) has directed the creation of the citizen–consumer in political science and sociology (e.g., Martens and Spaargaren 2005; Soper 2007). One of the suggestions is to stress in the governmental service area on providing comfortable citizen–consumer selections while de-emphasizing the welfare state belief of treating all people equally (Soper 2007; Trentmann 2007). An additional consequence is the collective use of market-based devices in environmental policy (Tews, Busch, and Jorgens 2003), again highlighting a person's liberty to select. The autonomy to select is attractive.

New Education Policy's Initiatives Towards Sustainable Consumer Choices

Governments need to make bold and cautious declarations to encourage a shift toward sustainable consumption and a sustainable society. Public policy is crucial in driving this change. Assadourian (2010) argues that the policies needed for substantial transformation must be diplomatically motivating and resist the status quo. Throughout history, government policies, often influenced by activist groups, have led to positive changes in the name of public welfare. Examples include banning chlorofluorocarbons in aerosols and lead in children's toys, establishing safe drinking water standards, improving home insulation, and enhancing energy efficiency in appliances. Effective policy initiatives with sustainability at

their core have the power to inspire positive transformation and provide guidance on how to further promote sustainable consumption (Berg 2011; Scholl et al. 2010).

One category of public policy initiatives focuses on "getting the prices right" by using taxation to account for environmental impacts and other external factors not reflected in market prices (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2002). For instance, in 2002, the Irish government implemented a plastic bag levy, resulting in a 90% reduction in plastic bag consumption (Convery, McDonnell, and Ferreira 2007). Similar policies have been adopted globally, with varying degrees of success. Washington, D.C., recently introduced a small $.05 tax on plastic bags, leading to a significant drop in consumption from 22.5 million units to 3 million (Gowan 2010). Some cities, like San Francisco, have even banned plastic bags altogether (Goodyear 2007). However, the extent to which these policies align citizens with the New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) remains unclear. For example, plastic bag usage in Ireland increased after the initial steep decline, prompting calls for the levy to be raised to €0.44 per bag. Mainstream retailers have challenged the levy in Irish courts. While this policy initially influenced behavior, it did not result in a fundamental shift in values.

Macro Research Occasions

The levies imposed by the Irish government for environmental initiatives raise questions at the crossroads of marketing, consumer behavior, and public policy. These inquiries revolve around the following aspects:

1. **Public Support for Environmental Projects:** How have the Irish government's levies affected public support for environmental initiatives? Has it increased awareness and support for sustainability efforts?
2. **Efficacy of Educational Initiatives:** To what extent have educational initiatives played a role in encouraging the adoption of the National Emissions Policy (NEP) among the public? Are these initiatives effectively conveying the message and driving behavioral change?
3. **Niche Market Values:** What are the values and preferences of niche markets concerning environmental policies and sustainable consumption? How do specific consumer segments respond to these levies and policies?
4. **Teaching Methods in Consumer Research Academy:** How can the insights gained from studying the impact of these policies be used by the Consumer Research Academy to reevaluate and potentially enhance their teaching methods for consumer behavior? What can be done to better prepare future marketers and researchers in this evolving landscape?

These questions highlight the complex interplay between government policies, consumer behavior, marketing strategies, and educational approaches in the context of sustainability and environmental initiatives.

Research is needed to investigate whether the levies increase or decrease public support, to explore possible complementary measures to help understand the broader implications of the NEP, and to consider how educational programs like Eco-Schools affect the way people think and act from a consumption perspective. Additionally, research should examine if

Belk's concept of sharing can be expanded to include sustainability motives and if the actions of collaborative consumers can help policymakers encourage the responsible consumption of less and differently.

Conclusion

Promoting sustainability, particularly through sustainable consumption, is a critical element in achieving overall sustainability. Sustainable consumption practices not only directly reduce environmental harm caused by unsustainable consumption but also indirectly incentivize producers by increasing demand for environmentally friendly products. In the context of India, there are both challenges and opportunities in this regard. Various stakeholders, including businesses, governments, civil society, and consumers, play essential roles in driving change, often in ways not traditionally associated with their roles.

Consumers may feel a moral obligation to live sustainably, but their ability to do so effectively relies on support from governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the businesses they engage with. It's crucial for businesses, governments, and civil society to align with these sustainable values because they rely on the spending and votes of individuals. This alignment is key to fostering a culture of sustainability and promoting environmentally responsible practices.

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