

## **Consumer's Lifestyle Reflecting Responsible Consumption**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Environmental crisis has deepened its roots in today's world. Modern lifestyle has become sedentary. As per the theory of responsible consumption rational and efficient use of resources with respect to the global human population leads to responsible consumption. This study tried to explore the activities from the lifestyle of consumers that exhibits responsible consumption in respect of environment sustainability. Information regarding pro- environmental activities in their lifestyle was gathered through in-depth interviews to answer the question 'Do their lifestyles exhibit responsible consumption?' After conducting the interviews we found that respondents are very concerned about environmental issues but they are struggling to translate this into purchasing activities and barely tried to adopt some new innovative way in their lifestyle to achieve sustainability goals and very less participants heightened with feelings of empowerment and feel committed to responsibility considerations and responsible behavior towards environment. They made efforts to save food, water, electricity, renewable resources, etc. most of the respondents give preference to recyclable, reusable and eco- friendly products. Very less respondents organize their life in order to move towards sustainable lifestyle. Consumers consumption habits are inclined towards sustainable solutions incidentally without any specific ideological motivation they perceive it more emotional than rational though people consider themselves responsible consumer in respect of environment. People should adopt those responsible activities in their lifestyle in order to save this planet. Environmental information is likely to influence the extent and meaning of responsible consumption and it could be achieved through promotion of sustainable goals and agendas so that talk about sustainable goals everywhere they go and whomsoever they met.

**Key Words:** Environmental consciousness, eco- friendly products, sustainability and responsible consumption.

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## INTRODUCTION

In this era of technological advancement businesses are growing with rising productivity, income, and consumption but on the cost of pollution and ultimately resource depletion. Nowadays population of India is increasing day by day which is equivalent to 17.7% of the total world population. Each year witness around 1% to 1.3% increase in the total population and India ranks number 2 in the list of dependencies or countries by population. At the same time, it will place far greater demands on a shrinking world resource base. Environmental crises are unprecedented and widening there scope everyday because consumerism has emphasized consumer rights while ignoring consumer responsibilities. As consumers, we have much more power than we realize so that we can say that every day we vote by what we buy or how we use, as if purchasing and utilization of resources is political choice. Today, social costs are increasing much more swiftly than the social benefits produced by new technology so being a social consumer we can support sustainable development. Over the last decade environmentalism has emerged to be an indispensable aspect reconnoiters due to increasing issues related to acid rains, depletion of the ozone layer, and degradation of the land and many more compelling environmental issues. This resulted in hike in consumer concerns with regards to rehabilitation of ecological balance by boosting demand for eco- friendly products in countries across the globe. A Well Known journalist of consumer affairs and the author of the book 'your consumption can change the world', explains that: **“Through our consumption, we are able to reward fair and responsible models of production”**. Due to the adoption green marketing approach in corporate interest research revealed that 92% of the multinationals companies changed their product and services to cope with growing concerns for environmental pollution (vandermerwe & oliff, 1990). One of the main conclusions of the European Roundtable on Sustainable Consumption entitled “Meeting Consumer Demand for Sustainable Products” points to increase consumer interest in sustainable products and new lifestyles. It is very important to know the interest of consumer in understanding their responsibility towards sustainability and what are the activities they are practicing or try to adopt in their lifestyle.

## RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND LIFESTYLE

The theory of responsible consumption offers a guide to marketing policy that promises movement toward a solution of growing environmental constraints on managerial freedom. "Responsible consumption" refers to rational and efficient use of resources with respect to the

global human population. Responsibility will include planning for life styles which are feasible economically and which will contribute to the sense of justice and dignity of all the people of the earth (Fisk, 1973). Any move to sustainability and sustainable lifestyles will be a gradual process, but must be seen in the context of an holistic move towards new lifestyles, incorporating purchase related and habitual elements that cross conventional behavioral boundaries (Gilg et al. 2005). According to the Norwegian Ministry of Environment (1994) Sustainability involves the use of goods and related products and services which fulfill the basic needs and improve the quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic material as well as less emission of waste material and pollutants over the life cycles, in such a way so as not to jeopardize the need of future generations. Sustainable consumption is not only about production and consumption, but also about the way daily life is organized.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Inglehart (1990)** claimed in the Theory of post-materialism that environmentally concerned individuals are more likely to hold non-material values because of the transformation of individual values from materialist, physical, and economic to new individual values of autonomy and self-expression.

**Roberts (1996)** founded that environmental deterioration may have reached to the point where consumer from the lower socio-economic strata are becoming involved. There is negative relation between incomes and environmental concerns which differs from the findings of the other researchers. Many studies done in this area found a positive relationship between education and environmental concerns. If people are concerned about the environment, but feel that their actions can't cause change, they will be less likely to participate in environment friendly activities.

**Gilg et al. (2005)** has seen the impact of price on sustainable consumption and found that committed environmentalists were more likely to purchase products on their environmental attributes with price factor being less important in purchase decisions.

**Bartiaux (2008)** used the theoretical and empirical evidence in his research on the consumption of energy by households at their residence. Author did not find that Individual consumers are neither just taking environmental information about climate change and environmental advice about saving energy as such, nor do they depict that in their day to day practices. Another important result is that interested households who receive customized and expert advice to save

energy barely implement this advice or information in their behavior. The compartmentalization (a socialized way to keep reflections out of certain practices related to environmental consideration) and moods of the individuals are the reasons for not adopting green lifestyle.

**Shove (2003)** the gap or space between information received and action or actual performance is finally not surprising in societies where socio technical innovative revolution and evolving socio cultural conventions and practices on comfort and convenience converge into daily practices demanding an ever increasing amount of energy consumption.

**De Pelsmacker & Janssens (2007), Shaw & Clarke (1999)** revealed that developing and expanding the knowledge on sustainability issues facilitates acquaintance with the sustainability agenda and helps in the formation of individual attitudes and intentions that lead to the demonstration of sustainability.

**Longo et al. (2019)** revealed that more knowledge represents a source of dilemma, tension and paralysis because value derived from knowledge and information about sustainability of product and indulging in consumption practices creates uneasiness in customer. Knowledge creates inner tension; peer pressure tension. Authors contribute to the contentious role of knowledge when pursuing a sustainable consumption lifestyle. This also leads to possible feeling of unhappiness when not being able to act in righteous way because of overwhelming hedonism in activities.

**Lincoln and Guba (1985)** proposed four criteria (credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability) to assess the trustworthiness and authenticity of the of qualitative research.

**Marchand & Walker (2008)** explored the concept of responsible consumption and its relationship to the preferences of consumer and expectations. The authors also discuss the issue of sustainable consumption in relation to product development. This study was conducted among people who consider themselves responsible consumers. And found that main reason of respondents for adopting more sustainable lifestyles is perceived personal factors or benefits no ecological consciousness. Discussion regarding the four different profiles of the consumers has also been done by researchers.

**Seyfang (2007)** evaluated the effectiveness of community-based initiatives at achieving sustainable consumption objectives by developing a new multi-criteria evaluation tool from New Economics theory. Results showed that the initiative was effective at achieving sustainable consumption in each of the dimensions or on each indicators of measuring sustainability. All key indicators such as localisation, reducing ecological footprints (global companies use resources

and create pollution in host country), community building, collective action, creating new socio-economic institution contribute to sustainability (if these are positive then it indicates sustainability). But organic food faced a number of barriers to achieving its potential like high price or awareness.

**Vermeir & Verbeke (2006)** used ANOVA and correlation analysis to investigate the presumed gap between favourable attitude towards sustainable behaviour and behavioural intention to purchase sustainable food (dairy) products. Author analysed the impact of involvement, perceived availability, certainty, perceived consumer effectiveness (PCE), values, and social norms on consumers' attitudes and intentions towards sustainable food products. Results showed that Individual characteristics like involvement with sustainability, certainty with respect to sustainability claims, and perceived consumer effectiveness have a significant positive impact on attitude towards buying the sustainable food products, which also correlates strongly with intention to buy. Despite of having positive attitude towards sustainability, low perceived availability of sustainable products are the main reason/barrier for the low intention to buy sustainable products. Result also showed that despite of having negative attitude towards sustainable consumption; consumers intend to buy them due to social pressure from peer.

### **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The main objective of the study is to explore the activities from the lifestyle of the consumer that exhibits responsible consumption in respect of the environment sustainability and to gather information regarding pro- environmental behavior of consumers. We aimed to understand the complexity of the concept of responsible consumption in respect of environmental sustainability and tried to contribute to understand the link between the commitment or concerns of the consumer for the environment and the role played by their lifestyle activities in this.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted the qualitative research methodology and 20 in depth interviews are conducted to achieve the objective of the study. Information is collected from the available literature related to pro environmental lifestyle of consumer and from those respondents who are selected from the Environmental Studies Department of the Kurukshetra University. Individuals who consider themselves responsible consumer and displayed knowledge on sustainability issues are identified and invited to participate in in- depth interviews. First filter question asked from them is that whether they consider themselves responsible consumer in respect of environmental

concerns and it was aimed to know the dimensions on which basis they consider themselves responsible consumer towards environmental sustainability. The respondents are asked questions regarding their every day environmental actions, habits, purchase decisions, recycling, etc.

### **JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY**

In depth interviews are conducted to get first person information and new dimensions can be explored according to the changing lifestyle of the people. Our study fulfills the authenticity criteria—fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, and catalytic authenticity (Schwandt et al. 2007). In-depth interview perfectly answered the question ‘Do their lifestyles exhibit responsible consumption’? Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study that shows the compliance of ethical standards by the researcher. It is not possible to consider the consumption question exclusively from the standpoint of any single nation or place, because the consumption of delectable resources in one nation necessarily affects the reservoir of resources elsewhere. Since this problem is global, its analysis and results also reflects global issues.

### **DISCUSSION**

The analysis in our study begins with an examination of the responsibility for limiting consumer’s consumption or balancing. People share their experience regarding concerns, consumption decisions and actions or activities for environmental welfare. This paper seeks to examine diverse behavior within the context of social and psychological basis of sustainable lifestyles, relating not merely to consumption practices, but also to habitual behavior within the home also. In-depth interviews find out many dimensions of responsibility that the consumer thinks that could be.

### **MAINTENANCE OR REDUCTION IN THE LEVEL OF CONSUMPTION**

“I always look for maintained level of consumption. Only limited products which are necessary are needed to purchase .This can be done by alternative way of purchasing like changes can be done in the content of shopping trolleys”.

“I considered myself responsible consumer as I tried to reduce level of consumption of certain things like stop using car unnecessarily, use less water than required, tried to purchase recyclable products, and of course some time rely on non- market exchange mechanism like prefer shared goods”.

“I tried to refrain from buying new clothes, new unnecessary leisure items because it creates extra burden with carrying lot of things with you”. This involves their personal interest not concern for environment but here environment get benefited indirectly.

“We engage in consumption pattern or practices of reusing and recycling of old goods.”

People has concerns for environment that is why they are maintaining their optimum consumption levels and also some respondents tried to reduce their consumption level in order to benefit environment. They are practicing those activities that directly linked with their ecological –consciousness but we can't say they are moving toward sustainability. Because they are using resources than actually required that does not fall under the criteria of sustainability. In some responses we can see their hidden personal interest. As people are adopting some habits not because of increasing crisis in environment instead in order to relieve them from unnecessary burden of more purchase. But one of the respondents believes that level of purchase should be increased in order to save environment and said that “Some said they buy in bulk to reduce packing as it reduce wastage and save environment.” People are showing their concerns towards mother earth by adopting the culture of recycling and waste management.

#### **PURCHASE OF LOCAL PRODUCTS AS IT CONTRIBUTES TO SUSTAINABILITY**

“I always look for local goods; they are sustainable in the both ways for environment as well as for local traders. Or I can say I always follow the concept of son of lands while purchasing the products from market.”

“I never felt my shopping is complete until I buy from local shops in my area because I felt it is necessary to help local producers and sellers to earn their livelihood.”

Respondents believe supporting local farmers and traders by purchasing their products is one of the dimensions that very well fulfill the aim of sustainability. Seyfang (2007) found that localisation is very important indicator that reflects sustainability and this indicator could be used to measure sustainability.

#### **ENERGY CONSUMPTION**

“Especially in winter I avoid using heat appliances and resist cold by using more woolen clothes this will leads to reduction in local carbon foot prints.”

“I compare products by reading technical manuals, books and products comparison to choose the most energy efficient bulbs, and lamps or any other home appliances. I always purchase those products having long life.”

“I do not insulted my home to decrease energy use but tried to be more energy efficient by switch off lights or electricity appliances when not in use, purchase those appliances that are energy efficient, example Air conditioners with green gas that will not emit CFC , use of LED lights, etc.”

Research clearly shows desire among the respondents to adopt habits and measures to save energy consumed by home appliances. This shows their knowledge about the concept of responsible consumption and they are very well recognize the ways to achieve sustainability but some respondents finds themselves incapable to follow them due to some constraints.

### **CONCERN FOR ENVIRONMENT**

“Search for information to identify goods, whose methods of production and distribution reflects consideration for environmental and social issues.”

“I think it is worthless for the individual consumer to do anything about pollution. Since one person can't have any effect upon pollution and natural resource problems, it does not make any difference if I alone do something.”

“When I buy products, I try to consider how my usage will affect the environment and other consumers.”

Responses from the respondent's reveals that they have enough knowledge of imbalance and crises in environment and they even tried to enhance their knowledge by reading labels of the product but feel that their actions do not bring any change. They are less likely to participate in such practices of environment conservation. Also on the basis of some past researches we can say that it is not easy to live responsible consumption lifestyle because some time more knowledge leads to dilemmas and confusion in the mind of the consumer because hedonic values overlap their concern for sustainability.

### **RESULTS**

By evaluating such activities in this way, it is anticipated that a more efficacious understanding of progress towards sustainable lifestyles can be achieved through many activities. These activities are : Purchasing products, such as detergents, that has less environmental impact, avoiding products with aerosols, Purchasing recycled paper products (such as toilet tissue and writing paper, Buying organic produce, Buying locally produced foods, Buying fairly traded goods, Purchasing from a local store, Looking for products using less packaging, Using one's own bag, rather than a plastic carrier provided by a shop, switching of the tap and electrical

appliances when not in use. Some respondents are highly inclined towards sustainability and responsibility towards environment. But they are not able to follow in their daily lifestyle. Some respondents are indirectly benefiting the environment not because they worry about environment but due to their own personal interest. There is a gap between what people believe and intend to do and what they actually do. Leading a sustainable lifestyle is more complex.

### **CONCLUSION**

In this paper we examined or investigated consumer's lived experiences through interpretation of interviews. We analyze the attitude - behavior gap in consumer's efforts to live a more sustainable or responsible lifestyle and what the individual attempts to merge their ethical and green concerns in the conduct of their daily routines. Our results find out the challenges and issues faced by consumer while attempting to consume responsibly in their daily lifestyle. Issues are like lack of knowledge of labels, price constraints, lack of availability of green products, time availability, hedonic values, etc. Confusion about knowledge will have a critical impact on consumer's accomplishment of responsible consumption practices. Most of the consumer focused on locally produced goods and consider this as the most important dimensions of responsible consumption and always purchase from local market for sustainability. It is important to more fully acknowledge more personal aspects of sustainable consumption habits and activities that are usually neglected in academic and popular literature. There is a long list of negative impacts resulting from our attempts of conceiving and producing 'wealth and money', but there is also a list of positive and concrete actions that relate to our patterns of consumption can be undertaken by individuals and groups to contribute to a more sustainable world.

### **FURTHER SCOPE OF STUDY FOR FUTURE**

People are very less aware about the concept of responsible consumption. Information related to the dimensions of responsible consumption should be provided. Sometimes excessive information about sustainability and responsible consumption put people in dilemma. They use products or resources than required and seems little bit confused in their daily life style. Further research can be done on the relationship between environment knowledge, concerns and actual behavior of the consumer in respect of sustainability. Next further research question could be what difficulties are being faced by the consumers while exercising their actual behavior keeping in mind the concept of responsible consumption.

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