

REVISITING THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION IN INDIAN CONSUMERS: DELHI NCR REGION

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ABSTRACT

Businesses have succeeded in developing a market for goods that consumers were unaware they ever required which has led to generation of more waste in the environment. Countries are opting for practices like recycle, reuse, and reduce but if the world becomes successful in creating sustainable consumers, then these practices will show instant results and the world will become a beautiful place to live.

Sustainability is regarded as the practice of conservation of resources for the future generation. This practice should also be considered when the context of consumer behavior takes place. Sustainable consumerism means getting more things done while utilizing lesser resources. Although this concept is comparatively new for the western world but has existed in India for a very long time. This paper tries to examine the current consumer consumption practices with the ancient ones and what all consumption patterns have been brought back by the Indian consumers with the change in climate and environment.

Methodology: To analyze the presence of sustainable practices in present consumer consumption patterns, a questionnaire was prepared and responses were collected from 100 consumers from Delhi-NCR region.

Results: Responses revealed that 98% of Indian consumers are practicing sustainable consumption practices knowingly or unknowingly. Some of these practices are being carried from generation to generation. However, awareness has increased with the introduction of SDG's and social media platforms.

Keywords: Sustainability, Sustainable Consumer Behavior, Sustainable Living, Indian Consumers

Introduction

In 1987, the United Nations Brundtland Commission defined sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” But this concept existed in India since ages. We all as individuals have witnessed some or the other practices followed in our Indian households that have taught us sustainability. Our culture promotes nature protection. We have always worshiped plants, air, planets, rocks, fire, water, etc. When we examine more closely at the consumption habits of Indian consumers, we see that the practice of recycling, reusing, and reducing is already present. The subject of environmentalism is embedded in many customs, celebrations, and even philosophical ideas of our country.

Numerous references to environmental management, maintenance, and conservation can be found in ancient Indian literature. Texts like the Arthashastra, Brahamanas, Upanishad, Vedas, Ramayana, and Mahabharata,

among others, are rife with verses that discuss safeguarding natural resources, which aids in our understanding of the earliest concepts of environmental preservation and the importance of upholding a balance in the needs of the human and the nature.

For us sustainability can be called as a fancy name for the practices that have always existed here. Even though there were plenty of natural resources available to our ancestors in their daily lives, it is amazing to see the work they performed to preserve them for present and future generations. However, with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, overuse of natural resources began, leading to a total breakdown of the old methods used to build a sustainable environment where people could coexist with nature.

With the industrial revolution and globalization plastic came to our country. As time passed it became a necessity in our day today lives. People were unaware of its ill effects and treated it as their friend, but the harm it has caused today is turning out to be irreversible. It lead to the removal of leaf plates, neem datuns (for mouth), earthen pots, ecofriendly packaging and what not. Everyone from the producer to the consumer found it convenient and its use went on and on.

Despite this, all Indian customers continue to engage in environmentally beneficial practices. This article investigates the present consumer's sustainable practices with the help of six categories namely: Household activities, sustainable travelling, sustainable fashion, water consumption, sustainable diets and sustainable packaging.

This paper focus on identifying the mindset of these consumers.

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 focus on literature review related to Indian sustainable practices. Section 3 offers details about methodology used for this paper. Section 4 discusses results and findings. Finally in section 5 we will conclude the paper and suggest direction for future research.

Review of Literature

In 1987, the United Nations Brundtland Commission defined sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

In his writings compiled in the Hind Swaraj, Mahatma Gandhi had warned the western society of the ill-effects that their over-consumptive lifestyle could bring on the planet. He also appealed to his countrymen to not remain trapped by the thought of material gains.

Durif, Boivin, and Julien (2010) provided the following definition of a green product: "a product whose design and/or manufacturing is environmentally friendly." or features that employs recycling (renewable/toxic free/biodegradable) resources and enhances environmental effect or decreases environmental hazardous damage over its entire life cycle", the term was developed following an examination and codification of three criteria. If we look at these attributes of green product closely, we can observe that our ancestors and traditions have always preferred and used such products.

Book named ‘People’s Ecology, Exploration in sustainable living’ says “some contributors are candid in their assertions that the modern mind set must integrate understanding of Indigenous people’s traditional relationship with the land in order to achieve long term sustainability, not only for native communities but for everyone everywhere.” authors put great stress on how past and nature can be a guiding force towards the present day need of sustainability. (Gregory Cajete, 1999)

The Vedic scriptures are among the oldest and most significant works of literature in Indian history. They provide information of various historical events as well as the practice of spiritual existence. The mind, body, and surroundings were believed to be in perpetual harmony and to be maintained in such a way that the environment was one with the body of an individual and that it was treated with equal respect. (Rudri Mehta, 2023)

Hindu thought is intertwined with nature, and references to the same are found in the scriptures too. Atharvaveda (12, 1, 8, and 10) and its famous Bhoomi Sukta (verse dedicated to Earth) state that the earth is called mother and imparts “strength and brilliance of energy” to the State. Trees are held sacred in the Padma Purana (Srishti Khanda 58). (Pratha, 2021)

The eco-friendly techniques the world is adopting today have their roots in Indian traditions. Plates and bowls known as pattals are made by sewing Sal or Banyan leaves together with wooden sticks. These are used to serve food in weddings and homes. Our forefathers were already using eco-friendly toiletries such as neem, reetha, gram flour, etc. People of India have always preferred to use earthen pots as refrigerators to cool down the water temperature. (Pratha,2021)

In the past 12 months, a significant rise has been observed in the number of people who have embraced more sustainable lifestyles. Consumers are now far more focused on buying only what they need, eating less meat, and choosing low-emission forms of transportation as compared to the year 2021. Most customers have started living more sustainably at home by recycling, composting, or minimizing food waste. The third area of concentration is having consumers reevaluate how they shop and consume, whether it be by consuming less single-use plastic, purchasing fewer new items, or by purchasing more seasonal goods. 'Circularity' is also being embraced by consumers, meaning they had mended an item rather than buying a new version. (Deloitte, 2022)

India has a very strong and interesting background in terms of sustainability. Several ancient texts prove that sustainability is not a new concept for people of India. We must revisit these principles and stay connected with our roots.

Methodology

The study aims to outline the similar practices of sustainability used in earlier India and today’s India. The research design for this paper is an exploratory in nature. However, this approach was selected in order to capture the enthusiasm, concerns, perspectives and opinions of the consumers in respect of sustainable consumption practices existing in India. The target population for the present study was consumers of Delhi-NCR region. The

investigator has selected 100 respondents for this study by adopting a random sampling procedure. Tools used for the study includes questionnaire and discussion method.

The sustainable practices being carried around the region was divided into six categories namely:

- i. House hold activities (Using furniture made of bamboo or other wood, Using utensils made from clay, Using cloth or jute bags, Sun drying the washed clothes, etc.)
- ii. Sustainable travelling (Opting to walk whenever possible, Using public transport more often, etc.)
- iii. Sustainable fashion (Practicing diversification, Re using clothes in household work, Using patches on clothes, Wearing natural fiber clothes instead of synthetic ones, etc.)
- iv. Water consumption (Reusing and recycling of water, Using bucket to take bath rather than shower, Watering plants in morning or evening, etc.)
- v. Sustainable Diets (Eating seasonal fruits and vegetables, Buying locally available food items, Reducing the practice of overstocking, etc.)
- vi. Sustainable packaging (Reusing the packaging, Using eco-friendly packaging, etc.)

Findings

In order to investigate the similar practices of sustainability used in earlier India and today's India and interest of Indian consumer in knowing more about sustainability a questionnaire was used. Respondents from the age group of 15-25 accounted for 46% and 26-55 accounted for 38% and rest were 56 and above.

77% of the consumers knew that Sustainable Development Goal 12 is titled as " Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. Secondly, when consumers were asked "are you a sustainable consumer in any way?" 99% of the consumers are practicing sustainable consumption practices knowingly or unknowingly.

Study revealed that 97% of the consumers are already practicing the mantra of 3 R's i.e. Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. It was observed that social media influenced a large share of consumers to awaken and understand the concept of sustainable development and consumption.

99% of the consumers agreed that India as a country has always been close to nature and has always tried performing sustainable consumption practices. They also shared several reasons to defend their belief which included stories from mythology, Harapan civilization, the lifestyle of people and roles played by freedom fighters, etc. India was seen as the land of farmers but it is more than just agriculture. People here believe in sustainable thinking and lifestyle.

Conclusion

Through this paper we can conclude that India as a country has always been in touch with sustainability and nature. Sustainability is currently seen as the need of the hour and Indian population is also showing a positive outlook towards it. Some sustainable practices are being carried from generation to generations. The present study tries to create a link between, day today practices of Indian consumers and sustainability. However, this study has several limitations also, namely the area of study is only Delhi-NCR and deeper historical research should have been done.

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