



FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENTS' SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND LIFESTYLE TODAY

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Abstract

While sustainability is increasingly valued, students today face a complex web of considerations when it comes to sustainable consumption and lifestyle choices. Therefore equipping students with environmental knowledge is critical in addressing environmental crises and will aid in becoming informed individuals. This paper identified the varied factors which can potentially predict and explain sustainable consumption and lifestyle choice adopted by students. Building upon the complex web of factors influencing students' choices, environmental education, with its holistic approach, fosters an understanding of the interconnectedness of environmental issues. Integrating Environmental Education in our teaching-learning situation help to empower students and foster a sense of collective responsibility, creating a cultural shift towards a greener future. It provides a framework for students to navigate these complexities, identify challenges, and discover opportunities for a more sustainable future. Findings manifested that factors exhibit significant inter relationships, they often interact and influence each other in complex ways. By addressing these various influences, we can empower students to become agents of change, making decisions that benefit themselves, the environment, and the future.

Keywords: *Students', Sustainable Consumption, lifestyle, factors, Environmental Education*

Introduction

The idea of environmentalism has undergone a paradigm change throughout time. During its first stage, environmental education promoted pro-environmental conduct by stressing awareness, attitude, and knowledge about the environment (Bailung & Das, 2023). However, research has shown that these elements are not as successful in protecting the social and physical environment, which is why the idea of sustainable conduct is a more widely recognized kind of environmentalism. Any sort of consumption is equally blamed for environmental deterioration and resource depletion. In fact, Sadeghi (2023) pointed that the stronger environmental and mental self-awareness of the people often lead to more mindful consumption patterns. However, certain regions of India have implemented sustainable living practices, such as installing solar power systems, adopting low-carbon lifestyles, and using energy-efficient products. The UNEP (2011) report points out that young people around the world are well aware of environmental challenges but cannot connect between such challenges and their lifestyles. There is a great need to translate these challenges into action and opportunities at the local as well as individual level to create a holistic programme and a vision of what a sustainable society can be achieved by 2050 (Mont et al. 2012)..

Students today face a complex landscape when it comes to sustainable consumption and lifestyle choices. Nonetheless, a number of variables or factors contribute to the consumption habits that result in lifestyle change yielding sustainable behavior (Prakash et al. 2023; Dimitrova, 2022). A report by Defra, (2011) underscores the devastating impact of current consumption patterns on the environment. Thus, fostering environmentally educated students is critical for mitigating global environmental crises. Therefore, equipping students with environmental knowledge is imperative in addressing environmental crises and will aid in becoming responsible leaders (Asmuni et al. 2012) with sustainable consumption patterns and lifestyles. This paper reflects the varied factors influencing students' consumption and lifestyle choice. In addition to this, a holistic environmental education fosters understanding of the interconnectedness of environmental issues, encompassing ecological, social, and economic aspects of sustainability.

Defining Sustainable Consumption

Consumption when considered from a general perspective, implies consuming which is desirable and important (Phipps et. al, 2013). For centuries, consumption has been a key driver of human and societal development, but such a statement does not necessarily imply that the relationship is merely positive in nature. In line with this, Prothero (2011) opined that positive attitudes on sustainable consumption might not lead to actual sustainable consumption behaviors. On the other hand unsustainable consumption patterns threaten this continued progress. Rethinking our consumption habits is crucial for a sustainable future. However, the construct may be summed up as choices made that have remarkable impacts on natural resources, environmental preservation and protection (UNEP, 2011b). Sustainable consumption, according to UNEP (1999) and CDG (2000), does not mean consuming less; rather, it emphasizes how to consume in a different and effective manner in order to have a higher quality of life. Therefore, the main goals of sustainable consumption are to encourage younger the generation to buy environmentally friendly items, increase the manufacture of green products, and support them in adopting a lifestyle that involves making longer-term, better-quality purchases rather than making shorter-term purchases.

Sustainable Lifestyle

A **sustainable lifestyle** isn't just about individual choices. It's a systemic approach where social norms, institutions, and infrastructure all work together to create a network of everyday habits that minimize resource use, waste, and promote a just and prosperous society. In contrast, "sustainability in lifestyles" is a broader concept. It encompasses the entire spectrum of actions and consumption choices we make to navigate our daily lives. These choices not only fulfill our basic needs and improve our quality of life, but they also minimize environmental impact by reducing resource use, waste generation, and pollution throughout the product life cycle. Crucially, sustainable lifestyles prioritize the well-being of future generations by ensuring their ability to meet their own needs (CSR, 2004). Promoting green consumption per se will not enable a student to adopt a sustainable lifestyle rather it requires redesigning ways of living, feeling, communicating and thinking (Cohen, 2017). Adopting a sustainable lifestyle necessitates a complete overhaul, impacting everything from consumption choices to social interactions. As the future generation of leaders, policymakers, and innovators, students hold immense power to shape a more sustainable future. By embracing sustainability early on, they not only develop the knowledge and values needed to make informed decisions, but also gain valuable practical learning experiences. Transitioning to a sustainable lifestyle allows them to experiment with different approaches, understand the interconnectedness of environmental issues, and witness the positive impact of their choices firsthand. It requires students to rethink everything from how they shop and structure their daily routines to how they connect with others, share resources, learn, and even build their sense of self. The choices they make today regarding food, housing, mobility, and consumption all become the building blocks for a future where sustainability is not just a concept, but a way of life.

The need to promote sustainable consumption and lifestyle

Consumption is often thought of as a social blueprint for our lives; it shapes our identities, directs our habits, frames our behavioral and lifestyle decisions, affects our health, and determines whether we are accepted or rejected in social interactions. Everybody has a lifestyle, but maintaining a sustainable consumption pattern is still difficult to comprehend on a systemic level and to deal with head-on in the context of societal change. Nonetheless, there is a wealth of research showing that consumption is modifiable and subject to change. From the standpoint of sustainability, students' consumption patterns play a crucial role in safeguarding the availability of resources for future generations (Ello et al. 2024). As students' understanding the impact of their daily consumption habits on the environment empowers them to make informed decisions. The way we live, as individuals and families, influences other people and the environment as we pursue our goals of pleasure and well-being (Fischer et al. 2017). and these choices form the basis of sustainable development. The conversation has taken on additional complexity in the twenty-first century due to globalization creating value chains that cross-national borders and advancements in information and communication technology making the globe smaller and more linked. Even while many individuals are doing better, global ecological trends and rising social inequality (both within and across nations) pose a danger to our interconnected societies' stability and our capacity to satisfy all of humanity's needs. They also push the limits of our planet.

Therefore, focusing on the youth of growing countries in addition to addressing lifestyles will be crucial to maintaining the sustainability of the world. Sustainable lifestyles are no longer on the periphery rather a significant shift is underway. Major policy initiatives like the Paris Agreement and the SDGs integrate them into the global agenda. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Goal 12 focuses on: "Our planet has provided us with an abundance of natural resources. But we have not utilized them responsibly and currently consume far beyond what our planet can provide. We must learn how to use and produce in sustainable ways that will reverse the harm that we have inflicted on the planet."

Factors influencing Sustainable Practices

Since consumption is deeply ingrained in our daily routines, researchers are pinpointing areas where our choices have the biggest environmental impact. (Akenji, 2014; Jackson, 2005; Mont & Power, 2013; OECD, 2002; Tukker et al. 2010; Vergragt, Akenji, & Dewick, 2014). While research on lifestyles has a long history, sustainable consumption and lifestyles introduce a new layer of complexity. This is because the factors influencing these choices are intricately interwoven and interdependent. Since human behavior is a complex web. To untangle it and understand why people buy and how they behave, we need to consider the factors that influence their decisions. Thus, the present study examines the underlying factors that determine consumption patterns, in order to get a deeper understanding of what shapes sustainable lifestyles and choices.

Personal Values: Values act as powerful determinants shaping our outlook, choices, behavior and actions (Brodhag, 2010; Prakash et al 2023; Schrader & Thøgersen, 2011). They are often seen as the cornerstone of our consumption habits, as we strive to acquire products and services that fulfill goals aligned with our core beliefs. These values can be personal, reflecting our individual priorities, or stem from broader cultural and ethical influences (Mont & Power, 2013). Values like frugality, minimalism, and social responsibility can also influence sustainable choices.

Knowledge: Environmental knowledge is an essential prerequisite about environmental issues (Saari et al. 2021) or sustainable alternatives plays a significant role in shaping our behavioral intentions (Ello et al. 2024; Wang et al. 2014) leading to lifestyle choices. Lack of knowledge can be a major obstacle. However formal education, the type of job we have, and informal information sharing through media, family, and friends all contribute to students' knowledge base (Barth et al., 2012; UNDESA, 2010).

Awareness: Driven by a deep concern for the environment, people with a strong sense of environmental stewardship actively seek out sustainable choices in their everyday lives. (Ello, 2024; Kharbanda & Singh, 2022). People who are aware of the environmental impact of their consumption habits are more likely to make changes. Understanding the impact of consumption on both individual and collective levels empowers people to make informed choices. While awareness can influence behavior, sometimes the act of trying sustainable practices can actually heighten awareness (Guagnano, Stern, & Dietz, 1995).

Social norms and peers: Our lifestyles are deeply woven into the social fabric around us, shaped by family background, social circles, workplace expectations, professional etiquette, and prevailing social norms. Social and cultural institutions, acting as custodians of tradition and values, propagate social norms and value systems that ultimately influence our lifestyle choices and sustainable consumption patterns (Kharbanda & Singh, 2022; Prakash et al. 2023).

Media: Media, with its ubiquitous presence, including social media, facilitated by technology exerts a powerful influence on our values, social norms, and lifestyles adopted by students'. It acts as a potent force in promoting and amplifying consumerist tendencies. Marketing strategies often create fleeting desires for new products, leading to the replacement of functioning items and increased consumption (Cooper, 2004).

Income level: Income plays a major role in shaping our consumption habits. Students belonging families with higher disposable income can afford more goods and services, and are more likely to engage in consumerism (Girod & De Haan, 2010; Tukker et al. 2010). This creates a complex dynamic where income not only influences what we buy, but also creates social expectations around consumption. Hence, students typically have less disposable income compared to others. This makes them prioritize affordability over other factors.

Market prices: Prices act as a gatekeeper, determining who can access different options. This is particularly true for luxury goods and sustainable products. While sustainability is a priority for many, affordability remains a key concern, limiting the willingness to pay a premium (Kharbanda & Singh, 2022). In contrast, businesses often target students with special offers, discounts, and budget-friendly options, knowing their price sensitivity.

Technology: As technology becomes more widely adopted, it has the power to transform how we do things, including how we shop (Christensen et al., 2007; Shove, 2004). The rise of online shopping and e-commerce platforms are prime examples. Several factors influence how readily people accept and use new technologies. These factors can include the technology's complexity, resource efficiency, local relevance and of course, affordability.

Infrastructure: The infrastructure we rely on - housing, transportation, and leisure facilities - shapes our consumption patterns. To move towards a sustainable future, these systems need to be redesigned with long-term sustainability in mind, encouraging eco-friendly choices like energy efficiency, alternative modes of transportation, or leisure facilities that promote outdoor activities and minimize resource consumption.

The research examines a range of explanatory factors that can potentially predict and explain the sustainable consumption patterns and lifestyles adopted by students. Thus most of the factors exhibit significant inter relationships, they often interact and influence each other in complex ways. By addressing these various influences, we can empower students to become agents of change, making decisions that benefit themselves, the environment, and the future.

Environmental Education as a Catalyst for Sustainability

Environmental education is a cornerstone of building a more sustainable society. UNESCO/UNEP (1978) mentioned the long lasting recognition of this connection. It encourages students' to think critically and make more informed decisions. In order to reach the goals of environmental literacy (Athman and Monroe, 2004),

environmental education programs must be effective. Neal and Palmer (1990) observation emphasizes the transformative power of EE in shaping new environmental behaviors. Educating students about sustainability can lead to changes in household practices, consumer behavior, and lifestyle patterns. Integrating EE into various subjects like science, social studies, and even arts can create a more holistic understanding of environmental issues and their connections to different aspects of society. According to a study by Solveig et al, (2023) incorporating educational programs on threats to ecosystem services and biodiversity into school curriculum is crucial, particularly for students residing near protected areas. Further the objectives of Environmental Education have motivated the educators to develop programs which would lead to the development of positive beliefs, values and attitudes, equipping students' with the skills to take action for their conservation (Bailung & Das, 2023).

Despite the growing awareness, environmental education aids in stimulating and molding the young minds of the children and resulting desired lifestyles changes. Since teachers are vital for the progress and development of a nation, it is agreed that they are capable of not only enlightening and sensitizing their students' brains but also bring about overall changes in their daily life consumption patterns. Teachers as role models can greatly influence sustainable lifestyles among students by choosing more eco-friendly products and services. Since the destiny of our nation is being shaped by the children (Kothari Commission, 1964) therefore there is the need for emphasizing the moral and ethical aspect of Environmental Education in our teaching-learning situation. Thus, by empowering students and fostering a sense of collective responsibility, it can create a cultural shift towards a greener future.

Conclusion

In the ecological view, development of environmental ethics, responsibility, personal value, in students is perhaps the goal for environmental learning. The study has great implications in the field of environmental education especially why and how sustainable consumption and lifestyle patterns are adopted by students over years. The research work proposed a framework for sustainable behavior leading to a sustainable lifestyle. Thus theoretical underpinning of the concept of sustainability is strengthened and new insight is developed in this respect. Apart from the theoretical modification of sustainable behavior the practical implication of the study is no less important. The findings from the study have direct influence on the policy makers and authorities who are involved in creating public awareness and community action in the sphere of Environmental education to usher sustainable lifestyle. Hence the study identified the underlying factors of students' sustainable consumption and lifestyle, an actual sustainable behavior leading to sustainable lifestyle. Therefore, it proves that personal beliefs, social and cultural influences, economic factors, infrastructure and accessibility plays a remarkable role in determining the choices made by students today. A multifaceted approach that addresses these diverse influences holds the key to empowering students to make sustainable choices. These choices will not only benefit them in the present but also contribute to a healthier planet for generations to come.

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