

# Perceived motivational factors of sustainable consumption behavior: Future propositions

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## Introduction

Sustainable consumption' has developed a core policy objective of the new era in national and international arenas (Dermody et al., 2015). The study of sustainable consumption can be discovered at a series of scales, from the global to the continental to the household. Consumption is now recognized as a critical driver of unsustainable development. The urgent need to promote more sustainable consumption behaviors has been prominently reaffirmed in the post-2015 agenda laid out by the United Nations (2015) in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), where it features as a distinct goal (SDG 12). In response to the question how consumers can be motivated to reorient their consumption practices toward more sustainable ones (Jackson, 2005), sustainable consumption research has proliferated as a scholarly field (Reisch and Thøgersen, 2015).

Sri Lanka is a developing country which is new to the sustainable consumption concept. A business which manages its resources sustainably will last. A consumer who buys a product which is sustainable will ensure that our environment, as well as our health, is guaranteed. Moreover, a country which promotes sustainable production and industry will thrive for generations to come. However, the question is how many of our businesses and products are truly sustainable and how do we make the switch?

Modern agriculture depends on the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides for high harvest yields. Although high advanced technology-based agricultural practice has increased crop productivity and abundance, the resulting ecological and economic impacts have not always been positive. Environmental pollution and food safety associated with agrochemical usage has become a significant concern worldwide. Indiscriminate use of agrochemicals and careless application of pesticides have often led to health hazards. The residual effect of pesticides is a source of several health problems including cancer, miscarriages, child deformities, kidney ailments, liver diseases and sterility among men and women. Insufficient knowledge of the farmers about proper handling of pesticides, such as

mixing of pesticides during spraying time, recommended application levels, a method of application, the timing of applications can lead to future health problems.

Past researchers have made studies in sustainable consumption behavior through numerous independent variables such as social consumption motivation, Materialism, environmental concern, (Dermody et al, 2015) environmental attitude, (Ballantyne & Packer, 2005; Kotchen&Reiling, 2000), environmental knowledge (Flamm, 2009; Kaiser et al., 1999; Lynne &Rola, 1988; Oreg& Katz-Gerro, 2006) and mediating variable as pro-environmental self-identity (Dermody et al, 2015), response efficacy (Ping Wang et al, 2013), green advertising (Chan 2000; Chang 2011; Chang 2012; Hartmann and Apaolaza-Ibanez 2009; Kong and Zhang 2014; Schuhwerk and Lefkoff-Hagius 1995). These studies have been made in a different context, so here the researcher is going to make the study by combining human consumption motivation, Materialism, response efficacy as variable factors and pro-environmental self-identity as a mediator.

Thus, the problem statement of the study is “to what extent the social consumption motivation, materialistic consumption motivation, response efficacy, pro-environmental self-identity influence on sustainable consumption behavior and this study extend to provide literature on mediating effect of between perceived motivational factors and sustainable consumption behavior in Sri Lanka.”

### **Objectives of the study**

1. To understand the impact of perceived factors of sustainable consumption (social consumption motivation, materialistic consumption motivation, response efficacy) on sustainable consumption behavior in Sri Lanka
2. To understand the mediating effect of pro-environmental self-identity between perceived factors of sustainable consumption and sustainable consumption behavior
3. To understand the impact of perceived sustainable factors on sustainable consumption behavior

### **Literature Review**

Consumption is a socio-cultural practice involving sense-making, identity construction, group membership and connection, not just an individual cognitive process. (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Bagozzi, 1975).

In other words, sustainable consumption is defined as follows: the use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better value of life, while minimizing the use of natural means, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations

(Norwegian Ministry of the Environment 1994). Sustainable consumption focuses on formulating reasonable tactics that foster the highest quality of life, the competent use of natural resources, and the effective fulfillment of human needs while concurrently promoting equitable social development, economic competitiveness, and technological innovation (Tukker et al. 2006).

However, research in psychology, sociology, and marketing science has revealed that “consumer behavior is far more complicated than just a rational response to price signals” (Mont – Plepys 2008: 532). Consumer behavior and consumption practices are influenced by numeral factors beyond economics (Sanne 2002; Buenstorf- Cordes 2008), involving sociological, psychological, technological, and environmental issues. Among these, social and behavioral phenomena shaping everyday life, including collective expectations; cultural norms, values, and attitudes; the way choice options are made available and presented to consumers by different markets; and the existing infrastructure, organization, habits, and routines (Jackson 2005; Tukker et al. 2006). Therefore varying behaviors, and in particular, motivating more sustainable behaviors is far from straightforward, because we are often locked into unsustainable patterns despite our own best intentions

Social consumption motivation is concerned with the images of brands and the images of other people who buy/use the brand (Fitzmaurice & Comegys, 2006). Thus, it is related to social status and social identity. While Fitzmaurice and Comegys (2006) confirmed a significant positive relationship between materialism and social consumption motivation, the link between human consumption motivation and actual behavior is far less clear from the literature and might also be context specific.

According to the American Heritage Dictionary (2000), Materialism is ‘the theory or attitude that physical well-being and worldly possessions constitute the greatest good and highest value in life.’ People with an above-average drive for survival security have a deep concern regarding their safety and accessibility to products that meet basic needs. (eg. Food, water, shelter). Inglehart’s (1977, 1997) notion of materialism underpins survival security motivation, and he argues that insecurity during the earlier years of human can bring about materialism later years of life. Response efficacy is equal to the locus of control, which symbolizes an individual’s perception of whether he or she can bring about change through his or her behavior (Newhouse, 1990).

Response efficacy is equal to the locus of control, which symbolizes an individual’s perception of whether he or she can bring about change through his or her behavior (Newhouse, 1990). People with a strong inward locus of control

believe that their actions can bring about changes. People with an outward locus of control, on the other hand, feel that their actions are insignificant and feel that change can only be brought about by convincing others. A feeling that one can make concrete/meaningful changes in his/her own also has significant impacts on environmental behaviors (Roberts, 1996; Samuelson and Biek, 1991).

Self-identity is a significant predictor of consumption choice-making (Belk, 2010). Pro-environmental self-identity refers to individuals having a sense of self that embraces pro-environmental actions (Van Der Werff, Steg, & Keizer, 2013b). Pro-environmental self-identity is of paramount importance in understanding why consumers consume (un)sustainably. This is because evidence steadily depicts self-identity as an essential predictor of consumption choices (Belk, 2010; Thorbjørnsen, Pedersen, & Nysveen, 2007; Whitmarsh & O'Neill, 2010), with a stronger impact on consumer choice-making than attitudes or values (Gatersleben, Murtagha, & Abrahamseb, 2012). Self-identity influences purchase intentions at low, rather than high, levels of past behavior (Fekadu & Kraft, 2001; Smith, Terry, Manstead, Louis, Kotterman, & Wolfs, 2007). It may be that behavior informs identity construction as people seek behavioral consistency (Bem, 1967), but that, as the behavior becomes routine and automatic (i.e., habitual; Verplanken & Orbell, 2003), it disappears from view and thus from self-identity.

## **Underpinning theory**

Theory of planned behavior was used as the underpinning theory in this study. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) started as the Theory of Reasoned Action in 1980 (Ajzen & Fishbein 1980) to predict an individual's intention to engage in behavior at a specific time and place. The Theory of Planned Behavior is one of the most widely employed models in the learning of pro-environmental behavior (Paul, Modi and Patel, 2016; Wang, Zhang, Yin, Zhang, 2011). The theory was intended to explain all behaviors over which people can exert self-control. The critical component to this model is behavioral intent; behavioral intentions are influenced by the attitude about the likelihood that the behavior will have the expected outcome and the subjective evaluation of the risks and benefits of that outcome.

## **Methodology**

Previous literature provides with a rich foundation on which to build a conceptual framework for the study of sustainable consumption in the organic food sector. According to Douglas et al. (1994), robust theoretical and conceptual frameworks can be developed through an integration of constructs from different research traditions and disciplines. In the current study, the researcher reviews the prior

literature on sustainable consumption practices in organic food and analyze the theories and the underpinning factors.

In this study, the researcher conducted an exhaustive and systematic electronic search using ProQuest, Social Science Citation Index and other bibliographic sources with keywords such as “sustainable consumption behavior,” “organic food and sustainable consumption,” “materialism in organic food” and this study adopted the meta-analysis method.

A total of 62 articles in the area of sustainable consumption during the year from 1994 to 2017 were identified. For any study to be included in our analysis, it has to focus primarily on the sustainable consumption behavior. Electronic copies of the articles obtained and they were stored and analyzed.

Researcher read all related articles and found out the most relevant variables for Sri Lankan context. With the help of those studies, the current conceptual model was formulated. Through the conceptualization, the researcher gives the future propositions for future research studies.

## **Discussion**

Research has a significant contribution to make in simplifying the conversion towards increasing and strengthening sustainable consumption behaviors. However, this is being weakened by a single conceptual focus within much sustainable consumption research, even though sustainable consumption is influenced by uncountable interconnected micro and macro influences. In this study, the researcher has selected social consumption motivation, environmental concern and response efficacy as dependent variables which are going to have an impact on pro-environmental self-identity as well as on sustainable consumption behavior.

Social consumption motivation is concerned with the images of brands and the images of other people who buy/use the brand (Fitzmaurice & Comegys, 2006). Thus, it is related to social status and social identity. Social consumption motivation might have a positive influence on sustainable consumption because of its social visibility in signaling a pro-environmental attitude to significant others, for example, in groups, or, in China, facilitating ‘face’ (mien-tsu). Vermeir and Verbeke (2008), for example, found that perceived social influence has a highly significant positive impact on sustainable food consumption intention.

In the context of the above discussion concerning Social consumption motivation, the researcher has the following proposition

**P1:** Social consumption motivation has a positive impact on sustainable consumption behavior.

Inglehart's (1977, 1997) socio-political conception of materialism for survival security plays a principal role. Inglehart maintains that materialism is a characteristic of modern culture (the most significant example is the US during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century).

For this reason, the researcher has formulated this proposition:

**P2:** Materialism has a negative impact on sustainable consumption behavior.

Response efficacy concerns our belief that a particular action will be useful. It is about whether we think our actions will lead to the desired result (when I do it, will it be useful?). People with an active internal locus of control believe that their actions can bring about changes. People with an external locus of control, on the other hand, feel that their actions are insignificant and feel that change can only be brought about by convincing others.

From the above arguments, the following proposition was formulated.

**P3:** Response efficacy has a positive impact on sustainable consumption behavior.

Pro-environmental self-identity refers to individuals possessing a sense of self that embraces pro-environmental actions (Van Der Werff, Steg, & Keizer, 2013b). An ethical or green consumer is ecologically conscious and buys products that are environmentally friendly and not harmful to the environment or society (Laroche et al. 2001; Harper & Makatouni, 2002) thus it can be related to ethical self-identity. As a consequence, the researcher proposes the following proposition.

**P4:** Pro-Environmental self-identity has a positive impact on sustainable consumption behavior.

Some recent articles have provided tentative support for the mediating role of pro-environmental self-identity between values, environmental preferences and behavior (Van Der Werff et al., 2013b). Self-identity has been defined as the label used to define oneself (Cook et al., 2002), which relates to a particular behavior (Conner & Armitage, 1998). Hence, we define an environmental self-identity as the extent to which you see yourself as a type of person who acts environmentally-friendly. Someone with a strong environmental self-identity will more strongly see herself or himself as the type of person who will act environmentally-friendly and consequently be more likely to act pro-environmental. The researcher, therefore, suggests that pro-environmental self-identity will be influenced by the values of social consumption motivation (via the social value of acquisitions), environmental concern and response efficacy.

Given that strong support, the research provides the following propositions.

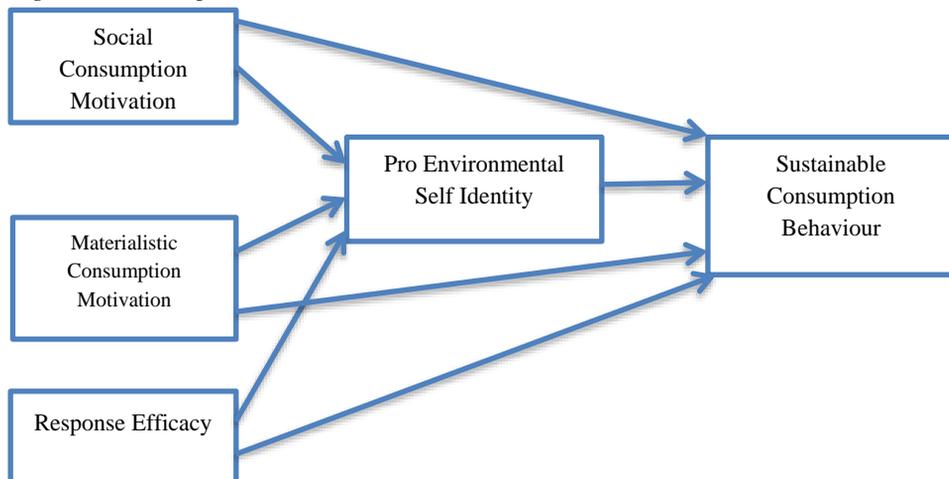
**P5:** Social consumption motivation has a positive impact on pro-environmental self-identity.

**P6:** Materialistic consumption motivation has a positive impact on pro-environmental self-identity.

**P7:** Response efficacy has a positive impact on pro-environmental self-identity.

The critical components of this study's research framework for sustainable consumption of organic food in Sri Lanka can be seen in Figure 1. This framework suggested that sustainable consumption behavior is impacted by social consumption motivation, environmental concern & response efficacy. Pro-environmental behavior is playing a role as a mediator.

*Figure 1: Conceptual Framework*



## **Conclusion**

In this study, the researcher built on current knowledge and outlined a series of research propositions that can move the readers towards a more comprehensive understanding of sustainable consumption of organic food in Sri Lanka. The research framework explicitly considers social consumption motivation, material consumption, response efficacy & Pro-environmental behavioral critical drivers of sustainable consumption behavior in organic food in Sri Lanka. The dimensions of the critical drivers are carefully identified and analyzed. Understanding sustainable consumption of organic food in Sri Lanka is associated with several variables. In this study, the variables discussed can highly assist the researchers in understanding how consumers are going to deeply involved in sustainable consumption behavior, especially in the organic food sector. Mostly, this

framework helps explain three fundamental issues: (1) to what extent perceived factors of sustainable consumption (social consumption motivation, materialistic consumption motivation, response efficacy) impact on sustainable consumption behavior in Sri Lanka? (2) To what extent pro-environmental self-identity effect between perceived factors of sustainable consumption and sustainable consumption behavior? (3) What is the impact of perceived sustainable factors on sustainable consumption behavior? Also, our research suggested that theories proposed by various prominent researchers can be integrated into one framework so that the understanding and sustainable prediction consumption of organic food in Sri Lanka is far more comprehensively grounded than by using only one line of research. Further research needs to investigate the dynamic influencing factors proposed in the framework, test the model amongst different groups of consumers and refine measurements of the core constructs, and thus, deepen the understanding of sustainable consumption.

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