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# THE IMPACT OF HEALTH CONSCIOUSNESS AS A MODERATOR ON SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOUR: FUTURE PROPOSITIONS

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## ABSTRACT

*Sustainable consumption behaviour is an emerging trend in twenty first century. From individual level to the national level everyone should be conscious about their consumption deeds. Along with that, health awareness is a major factor that all people are considered about. Studies in this area remain broad and appear relatively fragmented. In view of this, the purpose of this study is to propose a research framework that integrates sustainable consumption behaviour literature and perceived factors of sustainable consumption literature. We believe this research framework and propositions serve as salient guidelines for future researchers.*

**KEYWORDS:** Sustainable consumption behaviour, materialistic consumption motivation, health consciousness, social consumption motivation, pro-environmental self-identity

## INTRODUCTION

The term ‘sustainable consumption’ entered the international policy arena in Agenda 21, the action plan for sustainable development adopted by 179 heads of state at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit.

‘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 key driver of unsustainable development.

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. And a country which promotes sustainable production and industry will thrive for generations to come. But 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 have become a great concern worldwide. Indiscriminate used 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 by farmers about proper handling of pesticides, such as mixing of pesticides during spraying time, recommended application levels, method of application, timing of applications can lead to future health problems.

In this study, the researcher is going to analyze the health consumption as a moderating variable of sustainable consumption behavior. Health conscious customers are mindful and concerned about their wellness and are motivated to improve and/or maintain their health, and quality of life to prevent ill health by engaging in healthy behaviours and being self-conscious regarding health (Kraft & Goodell, 1993; Plank & Gould, 1990; Gould, 1988). Such individuals tend to be aware of and

involved with diet and body fitness (Kraft & Goodell, 1993).

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 behaviour and this study extent to provide literature on mediating effect between perceived motivational factors and sustainable consumption behaviour in Sri Lanka and the moderating effect of health consciousness on sustainable consumption behaviour”.

### **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The objective of this study is to describe a theoretical-grounded research framework that provides future propositions for the relationship between perceived factors of sustainable consumption and sustainable consumption behaviour and the moderated effect of health consciousness.

### **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 fulfilment of human needs while concurrently promoting equitable social development, economic competitiveness, and technological innovation (Tukker et al. 2006).

The early 2000s have also seen design work that explores lifestyle change clearly in terms of sustainable consumption. For example, instead of consuming efficiently, buy two shirts instead of six, one design proposal recognizes laundering as one of clothing's biggest eco-impacts and suggests a "no wash" shirt. It has ventilation and wipe-able surfaces and otherwise wears dirt or stains like a badge. Another example is not simply "greening" our houses, but also substantially decreasing the size of houses, or sharing a bigger house among several families, relinquishing private car ownership in favor of "city cars," or reworking existing use patterns, such as putting schools in with other community facilities, art exhibitions in with self-storage, and cultural facilities in with parking garages.

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 with social status and social identity. Whilst Fitzmaurice and Comegys

(2006) confirmed a significant positive relationship between materialism and social consumption motivation, the link between social consumption motivation and actual behaviour is far less clear from the literature and might also be context specific.

According to American Heritage Dictionary (2000) Materialism is ‘the theory or attitude that physical wellbeing 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 personal 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 an insecurity during the earlier years of human can bring about materialism later years in life. Response efficacy is equal to locus of control, which symbolizes an individual’s perception of whether he or she has the ability to bring about change through his or her own behavior (Newhouse, 1990).

Self-identity is a major 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).

Health consciousness is a very important factor in this research study.

During the past decades a number of commodities have been the focus of media attention because of their perceived potential to have a positive influence on consumers’ health. Some companies have capitalized on this media attention through their promotion of these products. According to Lord et al., (1987) food companies tended to rely on attributes such as taste when advertising food products. However, more companies are becoming increasingly aware of health issues, and are guiding their marketing efforts accordingly. Of all the food products introduced in the first quarter of 1989, 40 percent carried health messages (Carey, 1989).

The most dramatic impact on consumer purchasing behavior occurred in the spring of 1989. A CBS 60 Minutes program highlighted the link between Alar – a chemical used to regulate the growth of fruit products – and cancer. Following this and other news stories, apple and apple products became the focus of attention, because of Alar’s association with apple production.

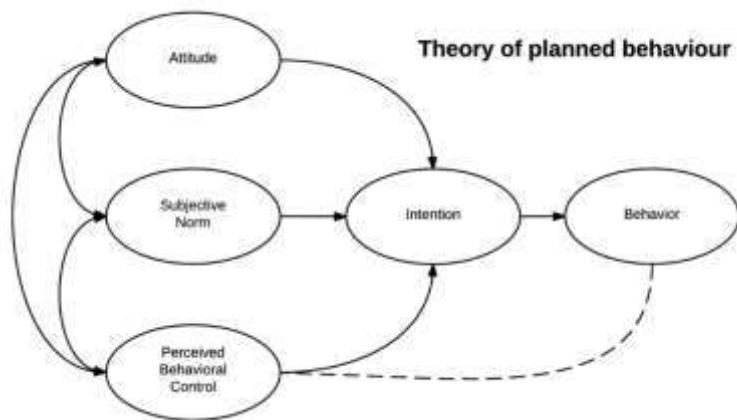
According to Tim Dodd and Steve Morse (1994) recent experiences with apples and oat bran have shown a substantial impact the media can have on food consumption. Health issues, mainly when they relate to cancer and heart disease can quickly change consumer attitudes to food products especially if the matter is carried through main media channels.

### ***Underpinning theory***

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) started as the Theory of Reasoned Action in 1980 to

predict an individual's intention to engage in a behavior at a specific time and place. The theory was intended to explain all behaviors over which people have the ability to exert self-control. The key 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.



**Figure 1. Theory of planned behaviour**

## METHODOLOGY

Previous literature provides with a rich foundation on which to build a conceptual framework for the study of sustainable consumption in organic food sector. According to Douglas et al. (1994), strong theoretical and conceptual frameworks can be developed through an integration of constructs from different research traditions and disciplines. In the current study, the researcher review the prior literature of 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 behaviour", "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 behaviour. Electronic copies of the articles obtained and they were stored and analysed.

## DISCUSSION

Research has a major contribution to make in simplifying the conversion towards increasing and strengthening sustainable consumption behaviours. 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, 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 with social status and social identity. Social consumption motivation might have a positive influence on sustainable consumption because of its social visibility in signalling a pro-environmental attitude to significant others, for example, in groups, or, in China, facilitating 'face' (mien-tsü). 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 behaviour.

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 behaviour.

Response efficacy concerns our belief that a certain action will actually be effective. It is about whether

we think our actions will lead to the desired result (when I do it, will it be effective?). People with a strong 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 powerful others.

From the above arguments the following proposition was formulated.

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

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 propose the following proposition.

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

A number of 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 behaviour (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. Researcher therefore suggests that pro-environmental self-identity will be influenced by the values of social consumption motivation (via

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.

People tend to react to the sustainable consumption patterns as they are more aware of their healthy practices and issues. This study is going to make an in-depth review regarding the moderation level of health conscious factor in sustainable consumption behavior.

Organic food is related to the issue of health which is very sensitive issue especially for women as well as men. As a result, women are particularly careful when evaluating such products.

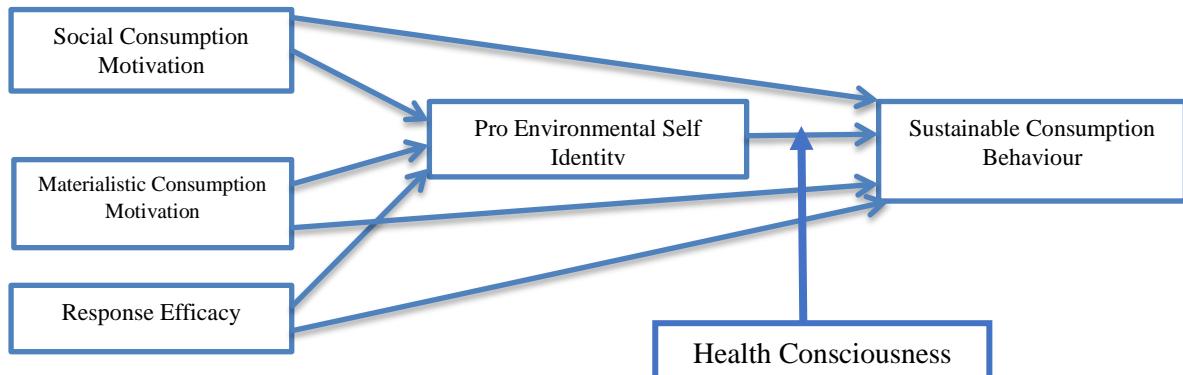
Health consciousness assesses the readiness to undertake health actions (Becker et al. 1977). Health conscious consumers are aware and concerned about their wellness and are motivated to improve and/or maintain their health, and quality of life to prevent ill health by engaging in healthy behaviours and being self-conscious regarding health (Newsom et al. 2005; Kraft & Goodell, 1993; Plank & Gould, 1990; Gould, 1988).

As a consequence, the researcher propose the following proposition.

**P8:** Health consciousness has a moderated effect on sustainable consumption behaviour.

The key 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 behaviour is impacted by social consumption motivation, environmental concern & response efficacy. Pro-environmental behaviour is playing a role as a mediator and health consciousness as a moderator.

**Figure 2: Conceptual Framework**



## CONCLUSION

In this research study, the researchers 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 with the special moderating effect of health consciousness. The research framework clearly considers social consumption motivation, materialistic consumption, response efficacy & Pro-environmental behaviour as key drivers and health consciousness as a moderating factor of sustainable consumption behaviour in organic food in Sri Lanka. The dimensions of the key drivers are carefully identified and analysed. 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 behaviour especially in the organic food sector and how they have to consider the health consciousness factor. Essentially, this framework helps explain four basic 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) To what extent does the health consciousness function as a moderating factor? In addition, our research suggested that theories proposed by various prominent researchers can be integrated into one framework so that the understanding and prediction sustainable 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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