

Sustainable Consumption: Unveiling the Rise of Ethical and Eco-Friendly Purchasing in Modern Markets

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable consumption is a modern trend that marks the emergence of environmental and ethical awareness among consumers in modern markets. The emergence of ethical and green consumption is discussed through this article with reference to key drivers, including corporate responsibility, consumer behavior, regulatory frameworks, and sustainable supply chains. It is concerned with how businesses are addressing the growing need for sustainable products by incorporating sustainable materials, ethical sourcing, and carbon reduction into their operations. It also investigates the impact of technology, online marketing, and social media on consumers' inclination towards sustainable products. The study also considers problems such as greenwashing, higher cost of production, and accessibility issues that are barriers to mass adoption of sustainable consumption. Through case studies and market trends analysis, the study offers insights into the future of ethical consumerism and how it can propel sustainable long-term economic and environmental benefit.

Keywords: Green markets, sustainable consumption, ethical consumption, corporate social responsibility, greenwashing

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years of the past, sustainability has been the top priority in consumer markets, influencing buying behavior across many industries. Ethical and sustainable consumption is a sign of a greater need to reduce environmental impacts and promote fair labor conditions. This is fueled by increased awareness of climate change, resource scarcity, and social injustice. Firms, thus, have integrated sustainability into their agendas, creating eco-friendly products and implementing green supply chains. However, greenwashing, rising production expense, and ambiguous consumer behavior remain gigantic challenges. The aim of this paper is to analyze the major drivers of sustainable consumption, comprehend its impact on business and consumer, and provide remarks on challenges associated with its uptake in modern markets.

Over the past decade, consumer shopping behavior has been significantly altered with a greater preference for ethical and green products. This shift is a reflection of heightened awareness about global issues like climate change, exploitation of workers, and destruction of the environment, leading consumers to look up to businesses to be responsible. What was once niche, ethical consumption, has become mainstream today, influencing industries from apparel and food to technology and transport.

Leading this revolution is the shifting relationship between consumers and firms. Firms are being forced more and more to react by adopting sustainable business, open supply chains, and green branding in order to survive. The trend of ethical consumerism, however, has its own set of complications. The movement is alleged to be perpetually undermined by greenwashing; a marketing technique where companies falsely depict their products as green. Moreover, ethical products are generally more costly and raise issues of access and poor consumers' marginalization to engage in green consumption.

Aside from that, the efficacy of consumer-driven change is questionable. Ethical consumption in itself, it is believed, is too weak to address inherent environmental and social defects without the presence of

complementing regulatory measures and corporate accountability reform. Others note the challenge of ethical consumption in a capitalist system where the urgency for sustainability continues to be vulnerable to profit rationale rather than genuine interest in the environment.

This paper critically analyzes the rise of ethical and sustainable consumption in modern markets, its determinants, implications, and limitations. Drawing on an analysis of consumer culture, business tactics, and policy impact, this study aims to contribute to a holistic analysis of whether ethical consumerism is a force for change or a fleeting market trend with no lasting impact.

Factors Driving Sustainable Consumption

Sustainable consumption has been a defining trend on world markets, driven by a combination of environmental, social, and economic factors. Consumers are shifting to green and ethically produced goods, due to increasing concerns over climate change, corporate accountability, and governmental policies. However, the extent to which these drivers truly catalyze sustainable consumption in the longer term remains questionable, up against issues of affordability, greenwashing, and in concentric consumerism.

Consumer Awareness and Behavior

One of the most influential drivers of sustainable consumption is growing environmental consciousness. With heightened public concern over pollution, forest depletion, and global warming, consumers increasingly make purchasing decisions in favor of products that have lower negative impacts on the environment. Social activism, media reports, and television documentaries are among the leading influencers of popular sentiments, translating to socially responsible purchasing practices. However, one of the biggest challenges is the intention-action gap widely referred to as the "value-action gap." Even though consumers are environmentally conscious, their real consumption patterns tend to contradict their moral intentions due to convenience, price, or habit.

Customers increasingly make purchases based on moral and ecological reasoning. A survey shows that millennials and Gen Z particularly appreciate being sustainable in brand choice. But even with vigorous dedication, the "intention-action gap" is an issue since price and convenience win over ethical considerations during final purchasing.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Business Practices

Many large firms worldwide are embracing sustainability in their business models in order to cater to consumer needs. CSR measures include minimizing carbon prints, ethical trade practices, and eco-friendly packaging. But skepticism about the sincerity of these moves has enhanced the demand for third-party audits and transparency.

Businesses have responded the calls for sustainability by implementing green initiatives, ethical practices, and ecologizing branding into their operations. The majority of businesses today focus on how they are going green as a competitive advantage. Greenwashing the deceptive practice of exaggerating green advantages dissolves consumer confidence and makes it more challenging to distinguish truly sustainable brands from businesses whose sustainability is just an ad gimmick. Studies show that while corporate sustainability efforts can positively influence consumer choice, cynicism regarding corporate transparency remains a significant barrier.

Regulatory and Policy Frameworks

Government policies also play a crucial role in shaping sustainable consumption by enforcing environmental policy, carbon taxes, and premiums for sustainable production. Government policies, such as bans on single-use plastics and stricter emissions legislation, compel companies to become more sustainable at the expense of consumers into sustainable shopping behavior. Policy-based sustainability has been problematic in terms of effectiveness, bearing in mind that its implementation varies across the globe and loopholes allow large businesses to avoid close regulation. Second, over-regulation has economic drawbacks, such as increasing the

cost of sustainable goods, and thereby restricting greater access to it by poorer customers. Governments are implementing policies for supporting sustainable consumption, such as a prohibition on single-use plastic, carbon pricing, and stricter environmental regulation. The European Union has been the most progressive in establishing sustainability legislation, while other regions rely heavily on voluntary firm compliance.

As sustainable products are typically more costly, affordability is thus one of the most important factors in achieving mass take-up. While higher-end segments of consumers can afford to pay a premium for greener alternatives, lower-income consumers are bound by budget constraints that bar them from entering sustainable consumption. Arguments against sustainable markets would be that such would become elitist instead of mass and therefore perpetuate economic inequalities. Additionally, mechanisms of mass production and fast fashion are required since they are inexpensive and convenient to adopt, fighting efforts at promoting sustainability.

Although motivated by a range of influences, major deterrents such as cost, greenwashing, regulatory fragmentation, and disconnections in behavior slow the adoption of sustainable consumption. Unless structural change manifests itself as business responsibility, policy innovation, and affordability through economics, sustainability has to become a way of life and not an elite choice. Besides, consumer education campaigns and campaigns have to break out of cosmetic involvement such that attempts towards sustainability see real and long-term effects rather than being a trend.

Challenges in Ethical and Eco-Friendly Purchasing

The shift towards ethical and sustainable consumption is widely seen as a step towards sustainability. However, among the growing consumer activism and firm action, there are key barriers to translating ethical commitments into mass green consumption. These are over high prices, greenwashing, lack of proper infrastructures, regulatory gap, and local cultures.

Greenwashing and Misinformation

Greenwashing when companies trick customers into buying products as environmentally friendly is a common issue. The practice undermines trust between companies and customers and disrupts the operation of genuine sustainability initiatives. Agencies such as the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the EU's Green Claims Directive are on a mission to stop misleading advertising strategies. The majority of organizations are practicing greenwashing, which leads consumers to believe that their products are more sustainable than they actually are. This fraud undermines consumer trust and leads to consumer confusion, as consumers are unable to distinguish between truly ethical products and products which are misled into thinking they are sustainable.

H&M's "Conscious Collection" was marketed as sustainable, but reports indicated that the company continued to use unsustainable supplies and exploitative labor. The company has been accused by the Norwegian Consumer Authority of presenting misleading advertising claims. Furthermore, more and more consumers are asking for environmentally friendly products, and some Chinese companies are falsely labeling their products as "organic" or "biodegradable" without getting the proper permission, exploiting consumers' trust in the authenticity of such green-labeling terms. Greenwashing undermines the legitimacy of ethical consumption, which causes consumers to be skeptical and reduces the efficacy of actual sustainability efforts.

High Costs and Accessibility Issues

Sustainable products are more expensive since they incorporate ethical supply chains and environmentally friendly manufacturing processes. They are therefore unaffordable to low-income families, and the outcome is unsustainable consumption power. Businesses must find a way of offering affordability without compromising on their ethics. However, A major setback to ethical purchasing is that sustainable products are more expensive and therefore out of reach for most consumers. Sustainable products are characterized by ethical sourcing, fair labor prices, and environmentally sustainable manufacturing, which are expensive. This cost disparity disproportionately harms low-income consumers.

In the US, eco-friendly brands like Patagonia and Tesla are attractive to green consumers but remain expensive compared to fast fashion brands like Shein or cheap gasoline-powered vehicles. This cost ceiling limits ethical purchasing to high-income segments. Most Indian consumers prefer fast fashion brands like Zara and H&M over

sustainable brands because of affordability. Ethical products remain a niche market due to financial constraints in a price-sensitive economy. Hence, while there is an encouragement to be ethical in consumption, cost remains a strong restraint with sustainable goods struggling to match the mass-produced equivalent.

Supply Chain and Production Limitations

The shift to sustainable production methods requires heavy investment and supply chain restructuring. Operationally and financially, most companies struggle to become completely sustainable, particularly those based on complex global supply chains. Even when consumers in nations are willing to buy ethical products, inadequate infrastructure and supply chain limitations create barriers to sustainable consumption.

Although Brazil is a leading producer of organic food, inadequate distribution networks make organic food unaffordable for people in regions outside urban cities. High transport prices also contribute to costs, discouraging extensive use. Sub-Saharan countries face inadequate collection and recycling of waste. In Kenya, the use of plastic bags was banned, but lack of proper waste collection infrastructures makes sustainable waste management difficult, making effective green consumption difficult to attain.

In the absence of suitable infrastructure, the supply of ethical products is low, and sustainable buying is a luxury option and not a common practice.

The Role of Digital Technologies in Promoting Sustainable Consumption

Social media and online marketing are crucial in ensuring awareness of sustainability. The use of the internet enables consumers to find out more about brands, verify authenticity of sustainability claims, and engage in ethical consumption dialogue. Online retail also increases availability of sustainable products, which leads to increased demand in the marketplace. Digital technologies have played a key role in enabling sustainable consumption through providing consumers with greater access to information, supply chain openness, and the capacity for adopting low-carbon lifestyles. Blockchain for ethical sourcing, AI for resource optimization, e-commerce platforms for environmentally friendly products, and mobile apps for carbon footprint tracking have significantly influenced consumer mindsets. But while digital technologies hold vast potential to drive sustainability, concerns such as data privacy concerns, digital divide, greenwashing, and the environmental impact of technology itself hinder them from being effective in bringing about real systemic change.

Among the top benefits of digital technology is enhancing supply chain transparency. For instance, blockchain technology has been utilized broadly to verify sustainable products. Through the creation of an irreversible history of transactions, blockchain helps in tracking the origin of raw materials, and it can ensure that the raw materials have been obtained ethically. IBM Food Trust blockchain is one such instance. This blockchain allows consumers to trace food items back to the origin to verify that they fulfill ethical and sustainability standards. Fashion brands such as Stella McCartney and Everlever utilize blockchain for sustainable sourcing of materials. However, despite such innovation, a majority of companies still exploit loopholes by dishonestly claiming sustainability credentials, leading to digital greenwashing where firms use technology to exaggerate environmental actions. Without stringent regulation and consumer awareness, technology can become a tool for deception rather than accountability.

E-commerce and digital marketplaces have also made sustainable products more accessible. Shops like Etsy, Patagonia, and Amazon's Climate Pledge Friendly program encourage consumers to buy ethically produced goods by choosing sustainable product lines. Good On You is one of the applications that rate fashion brands based on ethics and the environment, making it easier for consumers to choose. However, green e-commerce falls short when it comes to price and ease. Ethically produced goods cost more, a price tag beyond the reach of low-income buyers. Further, the green impact of excess packaging and carbon output through web deliveries

disrespects the ideals of sustainability for online business. The majority of companies use speedy delivery and over-packaging, which result in wastage and contamination, and whether digital platforms truly embrace sustainability or merely export the issue somewhere else is debatable.

AI and big data analytics have helped greatly in the resource optimization and waste reduction. For example,

smart grids based on AI make energy use optimal, and data analytics enable firms to minimize wastage in manufacturing. Google and Microsoft, for instance, use AI to minimize energy consumption in data centers, which slashes carbon footprints significantly. But the irony is the environmental cost of digital technologies themselves. The rapid expansion of cloud computing and data centers is the cause of massive energy consumption, with estimates placing the internet and digital technology at almost 4% of global carbon emissions. Moreover, e-waste from retired digital technology remains a problem because planned obsolescence leads to constant technology upgrades, which makes electronic waste disposal even more complicated.

Another digital technology limitation of sustainable consumption is the digital divide. While advanced nations benefit from tech solutions to sustainability, the majority of developing regions of the globe are denied exposure to digital platforms that facilitate moral purchasing. Mobile apps for sustainability, blockchain validations, and optimization using AI all serve technologically enabled, city-dwelling individuals at large, leaving out rural communities and those without access to the internet. Without equitably distributed exposure to digital technologies, sustainable consumption is not a people's phenomenon but an elitist luxury.

In summary, digital technologies bring strong tools in favor of advancing sustainable consumption in terms of greater transparency, improved resource efficiency, and the mainstreaming of fair products. Some important challenges however persist, including digital greenwashing, environmental technological costs, the affordability gap, and uneven digital tool access. To make the digital innovations strongly contribute to supporting sustainability, stringent regulations, accountability of corporations, and investment into green technology infrastructures are critical. If not these underlying factors, then the role of digital technologies in driving sustainable consumption could be more performative than transformational, reduplicating inequalities rather than offering a truly sustainable future.

Case Studies in Sustainable Consumption

Sustainable consumption has become popular globally as businesses, governments, and consumers try to reduce environmental and social degradation. There are many case studies that report on both the success and the pitfalls of implementing sustainable consumption. While some efforts have led to environmental and economic benefits that can be quantified, others illustrate persistent issues with greenwashing, economic limitations, regulatory gaps, and consumer behavior paradoxes.

One of the strongest examples of sustainable consumption is the circular economy in Sweden. Repair, reuse, and recycling practices have been encouraged by Sweden using tax relief and investment in infrastructure. Sweden reduced the VAT paid on fixing such items as clothes and electronic appliances so that the cost of mending them was lower than purchasing new. IKEA and others have adopted circular design approaches, such as furniture take-back initiatives and resale initiatives. Sweden's approach demonstrates the ability of incentive-based policy to stimulate sustainable consumption, albeit with scalability being a challenge. Other countries have the economic capacity or policy environment to pursue such undertakings in most cases, and the Sweden model is therefore challenging to implement on a global basis.

Besides, South Korea's Zero-Waste campaign, in which strict waste administration policy and shopper education schemes have achieved considerable reductions in waste creation. Seoul launched a volume-based waste fee scheme, which made citizens pay based on the amount of waste they generated, thereby inducing waste minimization and recycling. In addition, the government has banned single-use plastic bags and spent heavily on public awareness campaigns. While the model has worked, it is faced with consumer compliance and corporate responsibility issues. Overpacking by most companies remains in use, shifting the burden of sustainability to individual consumers rather than addressing systemic production issues.

In the fashion industry, the UK's Sustainable Apparel Coalition is another example of sustainable consumption efforts. Large brands, including Stella McCartney and Adidas, have adopted sustainable materials, good labor practices, and carbon footprint reduction targets. Second-hand fashion websites like Depop and Vinted have also gained popularity, promoting resale and reuse of clothing. However, the fast fashion industry remains a powerhouse, with brands like Shein and Zara continuing with disposable, low-cost apparel that undermines sustainability efforts. Besides, the paradox of green consumerism is still active most consumers buy sustainable

products but still overconsume, undermining the benefits of sustainable fashion consumption.

In addition, Brazil's sustainable agriculture push via its promotion of agroforestry and organic farming. The Brazilian government, in collaboration with NGOs, has encouraged small-scale farmers to adopt agroecological farming practices that foster biodiversity and reduce chemical pesticide use. Efforts like the Amazon Sustainable Landscapes Project have tried to balance conservation and economic growth. However, despite these efforts, deforestation is still happening at a high level, driven by corporate demand for beef and soy. Agribusiness corporations continue to find loopholes, demonstrating that market-driven sustainability efforts are often at odds with profit imperative.

The above demonstrate both the potential and limitations of sustainable consumption. While policy intervention, corporate responsibility, and consumer consciousness can enable positive change, economic, regulatory, and behavioral barriers hinder widespread uptake. The Swedish circular economy, South Korean zero-waste policy, UK sustainable fashion, and Brazilian agroforestry all present fascinating insights into sustainability practice, but their effectiveness is contingent upon scalability, corporate responsibility, and systems change. If these challenges are not addressed, sustainable consumption can become an inspirational aspiration instead of a transformational reality.

Consumer Behavior and the Shift Toward Sustainability

Consumerism is the primary impetus of sustainability, and increasingly individuals are opting for eco-friendly products, ethical companies, and green consumption patterns. IBM's 2021 report identified that nearly 57% of world consumers are willing to change their purchasing habits in order to make an impact on reducing the environment. Further, 32% of customers are willing to spend extra for sustainable goods. Nonetheless, regardless of this transformation, several economic, psychological, and systemic issues inhibit the complete attainment of sustainable consumer behavior. This analysis objectively reviews the worldwide trends in sustainable consumption, presenting both advancement and roadblocks with the use of statistics and case studies. A Nielsen (2021) report indicates that 73% of the world's consumers are willing to alter shopping behavior to minimize environmental footprint. Millennials and Gen Z are at the forefront, championing green brands. McKinsey & Company reports are indicating that consumers are increasingly considering ethical sourcing, carbon footprint, and sustainable packaging when deciding to purchase.

Despite greater awareness, research by the Journal of Consumer Research has found that consumers' sustainability intentions and actions fall short. Price sensitivity, convenience, and lack of belief in companies' sustainability claims deter mass adoption. Secondary research shows that increased transparency and cost-effectiveness would make bridging the gap easier.

Growing trends toward sustainable consumerism among millennials and Gen Z consumers who place value on environmental and ethical dimensions in their consumption are underway. In the European Union, over 60% of consumers would prefer products bearing sustainability certification, such as Fair Trade or organic. In China too, there has been growing demand for green products, with the market for organic foods growing by 18% annually. The success of second-hand fashion sites such as Depop, ThredUp, and Vinted in Western countries also points to changing consumer attitudes towards sustainability.

Yet one glaring issue persists: while numerous consumers purport to value sustainability, what they intend and what they really do can be two different things. The value-action gap, the disparity between what people report doing and what they really do is a formidable problem. A McKinsey report in 2022 found that while 66% of

consumers say they are willing to purchase sustainable products, only 29% do so on a regular basis. Such a gap is primarily driven by affordability, convenience, and accessibility and, as such, mainstreaming sustainable consumption has been difficult.

One of the primary inhibitors of mainstreaming sustainable consumption is that sustainable products are more expensive. Sustainable clothing, organic produce, and sustainable products are comparatively more expensive due to fair remuneration for workers, sustainable materials, and ethical processes. For example, where a low-cost t-shirt of the fast fashion category would cost \$10, an ethical t-shirt will cost anywhere between \$40–\$60, and hence the budget-conscious customer can't afford to be sustainable. This economic hardship is primarily achieved in the developing world, where price is a stronger factor than sustainability. In India, for example, only 14% of customers find sustainability a significant factor in making decisions, as compared to 53% in Germany. The affordability gap indicates that sustainability is still a luxury for richer consumers, constraining its influence at a worldwide level.

As sustainable consumption increases, the majority of corporations practice greenwashing, tricking consumers into perceiving their offerings as eco-friendly. According to a 2021 European Commission report, it was discovered that 42% of corporate statements on sustainability were overstated, untrue, or misleading. Fashion brands like H&M and Nestlé have come under fire for deceptive advertising, presenting themselves as sustainable while indulging in non-sustainable acts. This practice creates consumer cynicism, causing it to be more difficult for truly ethical companies to receive global support.

Sustainability trends also vary globally. Whereas European countries lead in sustainable consumerism, the United States lags behind, with only 26% of American consumers preferring sustainability to convenience. In Japan, though less frequent is marketing for sustainability, its minimalist culture promotes long-term purchases and waste avoidance. Conversely, Africa and Latin American countries are hindered by infrastructure and availability of alternatives that are more sustainable.

The shift towards sustainable consumption exists but sporadic and unpredictable all over the world. Younger consumers and wealthier nations drive green consumption, but cost thresholds, greenwash, and behavioral disconnects inhibit large-scale adoption. Sustainable consumption must move to mainstream levels through corporate conscience, price drops, and tighter regulations. Until the deep-seated system-wide issues are addressed, sustainability will be an aspirational trend and not a worldwide standard.

Future Outlook for Sustainable Consumption

The purpose of sustainable consumption is on the verge of unfolding, driven by technological development, growing regulation, and evolving consumer awareness. Still, important barriers remain, including economic affordability, business accountability, and system behavior change. If a shift toward sustainability is to be scalable and inclusive, there must be concerted global action around policy adherence, innovation, and education.

Other countries will likely adopt circular economies, promoting reuse, repair, and recycling. Sweden and the Netherlands have already shown the way, and emerging economies can follow suit with the appropriate incentives.

More and more governments are making truthful claims about sustainability mandatory, like the EU's Green Claims Directive. Enforcement worldwide will then follow suit and increase the transparency of business. Implement tax rebates on green products and stiffer punishments for greenwashing. AI, blockchain, and IoT will supply chains become cleaner and waste fewer resources, make sustainability cheaper and easier. Increasing economies of scale with growing demand can reduce cost, making ethically produced items just as price competitive as standard items.

Policies such as tax credits on environmentally friendly products and penalties for greenwashing are essential in promoting corporate responsibility. Policy enforcement, however, is uneven across the world. In developing nations, there may be a lack of regulation mechanisms and funding to effectively enforce sustainability claims,

while in free markets, corporate lobbying weakens environmental policies. For instance, despite the EU's Green Claims Directive, there are several companies that still use loopholes to appear greener than they really are.

Corporate responsibility, particularly life-cycle analysis and disclosure of supply chains, is the heart of sustainability. Voluntary corporate behavior, however, is typically ineffective in the absence of third-party audits and harsh sanctions for failure. Mega-corporations like Nestlé and Coca-Cola, despite their commitment to sustainability, continue to add heavily to global plastic waste, raising questions about whether or not corporations can police themselves. Education on the part of the consumer is a powerful solution, but education alone does not become action. The value-action gap wherein consumers voice concerns about sustainability but value convenience and price is still an obstacle. For instance, even with broad awareness of the effects of fast fashion, players such as Shein and Zara still reign supreme.

Lastly, fair access to sustainable goods is needed, but affordability is still an issue. While subsidies are beneficial, governments need to weigh economic viability against environmental considerations to guarantee long-term effect.

CONCLUSION

Sustainable consumption has emerged as a critical global agenda, driven by the increasing concern for environmental degradation, social injustices, and the long-term implications of unsustainable economic growth. The shift towards green and ethical purchasing is a reaction to evolving consumer values, corporate social responsibility, and governmental endeavors to mitigate climate change, reduce waste, and provide ethical labor conditions. However, despite these advancements, significant barriers and contradictions continue to hinder the widespread adoption of sustainable consumption. This conclusion critically evaluates the key findings of the discussion, assessing the progress made, ongoing challenges, and the future trajectory of sustainable consumption.

Over the past two decades, sustainable consumption has gained significant traction, with businesses, governments, and consumers playing active roles in driving change. Some of the most notable progress includes:

Consumers are more socially and environmentally conscious than ever before. More consumers actively seek out ethical and ecological products, and sustainability is considered in purchase decisions. According to a Nielsen report in 2021, over 73% of consumers globally report they would definitely or probably alter their habits to reduce environmental impact, and 32% would pay extra for sustainable products. The growing demand for organic food, fair trade products, second-hand apparel, and zero-waste lifestyles is reflective of this shift.

Moreover, minimalism, veganism, and circular economy have made headlines, while consumers rethink how they consume as a move away from fast-fashion towards longevity, quality, and ethical beginnings. Second-hand buying has been given a bad girl makeover by social media sites like Depop, ThredUp, and Vinted and is eroding demand for quick fashion. Food consumption, through plant-based cuisine such as Beyond Meat and Oatly, has disrupted historical markets with the environmentally friendly fare.

Corporates have responded to growing consumers' demands for sustainability by adopting green policies, sustainable sourcing, and waste reduction practices. Corporates like IKEA, Patagonia, and Unilever have adopted sustainable supply chain management, reduced carbon footprints, promoted fair wages, and circular economy practices.

Further, artificial intelligence and blockchain-based analytics have enhanced supply chain transparency to allow customers to verify claims of ethical sourcing. IBM Food Trust blockchain, for example, provides real-time traceability of food products to assist with sustainable sourcing. Adidas's Future craft Loop program is also leading the charge on fully recyclable shoes, waste-free.

Governments worldwide have enacted stronger environmental regulations, banning single-use plastics, incentivizing sustainable production, and holding corporations accountable for greenwashing. The European Green Deal, China's anti-pollution push, and India's EPR law are a few instances of global efforts to mainstream sustainability. Carbon taxes, emissions caps, and subsidies for sustainable products are a few of the policies encouraging sustainable business.

Despite unprecedented progress, sustainable consumption has a number of issues that hinder its widespread adoption.

While surveys indicate strong consumer interest in sustainability, revealed preference through actual purchase behavior does not always follow stated preference. The value-action gap the discrepancy between intention and behavior remains a key challenge. Studies show that while 66% of consumers indicate a preference for

sustainable products, only 29% purchase them regularly (McKinsey, 2022). The gap typically occurs because of factors such as higher cost, unavailable product, and convenience considerations. For example, the fast fashion industry continues to thrive even while it is universally criticized for its environmental and moral wrongdoings. Brands like Shein and Zara continue to record strong sales, indicating that affordability and convenience have a way of outweighing sustainability in consumer decisions.

Economic affordability is one of the greatest hindrances to sustainable consumption. Sustainable products are typically more costly due to the use of ethical labor, eco-friendly materials, and the production of smaller volumes. A fast-fashion t-shirt can cost \$10, while an organic cotton, fair-trade equivalent will cost \$40–\$60, making sustainability a luxury rather than a norm. This issue is even more pronounced in emerging economies, where affordability drives purchases. For example, while 53% of consumers in Germany rank sustainability first, only 14% of consumers in India consider it a significant factor (Nielsen, 2021). Without subsidies or economic restructuring, sustainable consumption may remain a privilege of more prosperous segments.

As sustainability becomes a top marketing strategy, greenwashing by businesses is widespread, with companies misleading consumers with false or exaggerated sustainability claims. In a report in 2021, the European Commission discovered that 42% of corporate sustainability claims were false or misleading. Brands such as H&M, Nestlé, and Coca-Cola have been accused of promoting "eco-friendly" initiatives while retaining unsustainable business models. This is added to by the lack of standard regulations and independent verification, making it difficult for consumers to separate genuine sustainability efforts from greenwashing.

While there have been improvements in government policies, their implementation remains inconsistent. The majority of nations, particularly those from Africa, South America, and certain ones in Asia, lack infrastructure to facilitate waste management, recycling, and sustainable supply chains. Even among developed nations, recycling operations are inefficient, leading to high contamination rates and landfill dependence.

Sustainable consumption is a challenge as well as an opportunity for the modern world. Despite all that has been done, systemic economic, behavioral, and corporate challenges persist. The success of sustainable consumption is a collective action and requires Stronger policy to police corporate sustainability claims, corporate responsibility through transparency and independent verification, Education and awareness to close the value-action gap and Economic restructuring to make sustainability affordable and accessible.

If these problems are not resolved, sustainability risks becoming a privilege, rather than a universal standard. Yet with international cooperation, sustainable consumption can be an economic, social, and environmental game-changer, assuring a strong and responsible future for all.

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