

Un Sdgs And The Modern Consumer: A Study On Sustainable Decision-Making

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Abstract:

The United Nations (UN), established to uphold international peace, security, and global cooperation, introduced the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable Development. These 17 global objectives aim to promote environmental preservation, ethical development, and technological advancement in a balanced and sustainable manner. As environmental degradation intensifies due to rapid technological progress and lifestyle shifts, there is a growing emphasis on sustainable consumption. Consumers are increasingly leaning toward environmentally responsible choices, influenced by heightened awareness of sustainability and the global green movement. The study examines the influence of the UN SDGs on consumer decision making by particularly focusing on how awareness and corporate integration of these goals affect consumer preference in Indian market. It explores the role of SDG aligned practices by businesses in shaping consumer behavior, while also identifying the barriers that prevent widespread adoption of sustainable choices. The study has been conducted by considering both primary and secondary data whereas primary data collected among 129 consumers by involving both aware and unaware consumers of SDGs and the collected data has been analyzed using SPSS. The findings provide insights into the extent to which sustainability awareness impacts the purchasing decisions and the challenges which remain in embedding SDG oriented thinking in consumer behavior.

Keywords : *Sustainable Development, Awareness on SDGs, Ethical consideration, Corporate adaption, Integration of SDGs.*

INTRODUCTION

Environment is a natural module which is not replaceable by mankind. It has been incepted in the 19th century, where environmental health has been highly debated. The degradation of environment has an adverse effect on living beings influencing the mental, emotional and physical health of them. The idea of sustainable development was first presented in the United Nations Conference in the year 1972 on Environment and Development(UNCED).

Sustainability is about advancing in the present in a way that does not hinder future generations from fulfilling their needs. It has gained global significance as it satisfies both consumers and environment, which influences interest in sustainable practices and integration of sustainable objectives as it is the responsibility among suppliers and consumers. As a result, concern towards environment has increased interest in sustainable practices and objectives.

The products which are sustainable have a positive environmental, social and economic impact through out the life cycle of the products as they are toxin free and been positive on environment, whereas reducing pollution and carbon footprint. There upon, corporations are proactively implementing United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as a part of their CSR and marketing strategy which influence consumer purchasing behaviour, enhance the product image and reputation among consumers. Hence the study has been concentrated to ascertain consumer purchasing behaviour, knowledge of the Sustainable Development Goals and their incorporation into consumable items. SDGs are a significant factor influencing consumer decisions as they promote responsible consumption and production, which is a key to sustain the present and future generations.

A few UN Sustainable Development Goals which are considered in study are as follows:

- UN SDG Goal 02 – Zero Hunger
- UN SDG Goal 07 – Affordable and Clean Energy
- UN SDG Goal 08 – Decent Work and Economic Growth

- UN SDG Goal 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities
- UN SDG Goal 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production

History of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

The history of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) is rooted in the global community's evolving understanding of sustainable development and the need for a coordinated response to pressing social, economic, and environmental challenges. The concept gained prominence with the 1987 Brundtland Report, which defined sustainable development as meeting the needs of the present without compromising future generations. This foundational idea was further solidified at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, where world leaders adopted Agenda 21, a comprehensive action plan for sustainable development. In 2000, the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) marked a significant step forward, setting specific targets to address extreme poverty, hunger, education, and health by 2015. However, as the deadline approached, it became clear that a more inclusive and universal framework was needed to tackle the root causes of these issues. This realization culminated in the Rio+20 Conference in 2012, where the international community agreed to develop a set of universal goals to succeed the MDGs.

Following extensive consultations and the work of the Open Working Group, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on September 25, 2015. This agenda includes 17 SDGs and 169 targets, designed to be universal, inclusive, and transformative, addressing the interconnected challenges of poverty, inequality, climate change, and environmental degradation. The SDGs emphasize the importance of partnerships among governments, civil society, and the private sector to achieve these ambitious goals by 2030. Since their adoption, the SDGs have guided global efforts toward sustainable development, although significant challenges remain, particularly considering the COVID-19 pandemic, which has hindered progress in many areas. The SDGs continue to serve as a vital framework for fostering a more sustainable, equitable, and resilient world.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. **Khalufi Nasser Ali M et al. (2025)** This paper highlights the increasing importance of integrating environmental factors into CRM for better consumer involvement and loyalty. Sustainable activities like green certifications and energy-efficient displays significantly influence consumer behaviour. Studies, including the use of Expectation-Confirmation Theory and structural equation modelling, have shown how sustainability initiatives impact customer satisfaction and loyalty. Research also focuses on aligning retail sustainability with UN Sustainable Development Goals, emphasizing responsible production and building partnerships. Overall, the literature stresses sustainability as crucial for retailers, not only for customer relationships but also societal goals. This study examines how sustainability practices impact customer relationships, addressing a key research gap.
2. **Hussin Elansari et al. (2024)** This literature review examines the impact of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) on customer perceptions and loyalty in the banking sector. The study explores the link between SDG implementation and customer loyalty in banking through the SOR model. Positive relationships exist between SDG implementation, image, trust, and reputation, enhancing customer loyalty. This underscores the impact of SDGs on customer perceptions and loyalty, offering practical insights for banking institutions to align with sustainability goals. Integrating SDGs with company operations is crucial for addressing social, economic, and environmental challenges and ensuring sustainable growth.
3. **Seda Yildirim et al. (2024)** Sustainable business practices and global sustainability goals are crucially intertwined, according to this study on the contribution of green brands to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to a number of studies, green brands—which place a high value on environmentally friendly practices like waste management, recycling, the use of organic materials, sustainable trade, and environmental protection—really contribute to the advancement of sustainability in a variety of industries, including fashion, electronics, restaurants, cosmetics, and tourism. By encouraging ethical patterns of production and consumption, these companies not only support environmental preservation but also the larger objectives of the 2030 Agenda. The review suggests green enterprises bring hope for a sustainable future by embodying collaborative and innovative principles vital for achieving SDGs. Green brands play a key role in advancing the 2030 SDGs, helping to understand their impact on sustainable development.

4. **Melanie van Driel et al. (2024)** Several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) rely on established international organizations, while others, like SDG 12 on sustainable consumption and production, struggle due to weaker governance. This literature underscores how the SDGs could enhance global governance, potentially promoting institutional growth. For example, research examines initiatives like the 10-Year Framework of Programmes for Sustainable Consumption and Production, illustrating efforts to foster sustainable practices. Qualitative analyses reveal how the SDGs influence global institutionalization processes, emphasizing accountability, partnerships, and a shared agenda. While the SDGs offer a short-term boost for institutional advancement, sustained efforts are vital to address fundamental structural issues in global governance. This body of work emphasizes the intricate relationship between the SDGs and global governance, showcasing the potential and challenges of utilizing the goals for institutional development.
5. **Sheetal Deo et al. (2023)** The integration of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into higher education curricula has gained increasing attention in recent years, particularly within specialized fields such as marketing. Research stresses aligning educational practices with global sustainability goals, utilizing frameworks like Bloom's Taxonomy. Courses vary in SDG incorporation, indicating a need for systematic assessment to address weaknesses. Educators' reflective techniques aid in enhancing sustainability knowledge and curriculum development, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration. Overall, embracing comprehensive approaches is vital in integrating SDGs in higher education, preparing students for addressing global challenges in their careers.
6. **Ryan. J. Langan et al. (2023)** This literature review addresses the growing importance of sustainability in business education, particularly within marketing programs, as organizations increasingly seek to align with sustainable practices. The study examines 529 undergraduate marketing program websites that are accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) in order to assess how well business schools are teaching students to contribute to sustainable organizations and society. The review identifies a gap in sustainability integration in business curricula, citing literature and the UN's Blueprint to suggest a new curriculum framework. The framework guides business schools to embed sustainability, meet market demands, advance SDG goals, and adhere to AACSB standards. Business schools should enhance courses to equip students with necessary information and skills for navigating sustainable business challenges to contribute to a more sustainable future. This review is a crucial resource for educational institutions aiming to enhance sustainability education and meet current marketing education standards.
7. **Weng Marc Lim (2022)** The sustainability pyramid, which promotes a hierarchical approach to accomplishing UN Sustainable Development Goal 12 (SDG12), is introduced in this study. The pyramid emphasizes prioritizing the triple bottom line—economic, social, and environmental sustainability—in that order, positing that mainstream consumers are more likely to respond to economic incentives. The findings have significant implications for marketing theory, practice, and public policy, that the marketing messages that are in line with consumer values can help promote considerable behavioural change in the direction of sustainability.
8. **Rini Astini et al. (2022)** It argues that MSMEs' lack of optimal marketing strategies is a major factor contributing to their low income. It argues that MSMEs' lack of optimal marketing strategies is a major factor contributing to their low income. This was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, necessitating a change in marketing strategies for business continuity. The study conveys how important it is for MSME entrepreneurs to comprehend and use sustainable marketing strategies. MSMEs can enter the market, compete successfully, and take control of their niche with sustainable marketing strategy. The study concludes by advocating for universities to provide education and training in sustainable marketing strategies to equip MSMEs with the necessary knowledge and skills to enhance their competitiveness.
9. **Ranjith Voola et al. (2022)** B2B marketing scholars can utilize the 17 Sustainable Development Goals to guide their research, aligning it with real-world challenges and involving stakeholders beyond academia. The research on the Sustainable Development Goals remains dispersed, notwithstanding the recent growth in B2B sustainability studies. The findings revealed varying levels of engagement with specific goals, indicating vast potential for B2B marketing scholars to proactively and strategically engage with the Sustainable Development Goals. The "Observe, bridge and challenge" model is put forth using specific research questions in order to stimulate scholarly activity at the nexus of B2B marketing and the Sustainable Development Goals.

10.Ivan Montiel, Junghoon Park et al. (2021) This paper examines how multinational corporations might align the concept of externalities to match their regular investments with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN. The authors propose a framework categorizing the 17 SDGs into six groups based on generating positive externalities and mitigating negative ones. They suggest integrating these categories into an extended value chain to align corporate investment strategies with sustainable development, emphasizing the role of multinationals in advancing the SDGs and boosting their competitive advantage. The paper highlights stakeholder engagement; MNCs collaborate with local communities, governments, and civil society to address externalities effectively for sustainable development. By fostering partnerships, corporations enhance reputation, drive innovation, and create shared value for a sustainable global economy.

Objectives

- To study the level of awareness and Understanding of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) among consumers
- To find out the factors influencing consumer purchasing decisions and preferences for sustainable products and services
- To ascertain the willingness of consumers to pay more for sustainable products
- To study the relationship between consumer purchasing behaviour and consumer prioritization of sustainable products

Scope of the Study

The study investigates how consumer behaviour, including product preferences, purchasing decisions and brand loyalty has impacted by perception and awareness of sustainability challenges those pertaining to SDGs. The results of the study may include practical management and implications for businesses who sell or intend to sell eco friendly sustainable items. This study will be useful for academicians and research scholars who are planning to conduct their study in it. Hence, the current study offers customers the opportunity to comprehend the merits of using sustainable products and items that are in line with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and marketers may develop strategies to promote sustainable products that align with the SDGs.

Statement of Problem

- Though United Nations SDGs are a global framework for sustainability, many consumers may not be fully aware or their relevance in purchasing decisions and so the study aims at spreading awareness on UN SDGs.
- There is limited empirical evidence on how awareness of the UN SDGs and companies' sustainable initiatives translate into actual consumer behaviour, such as purchase intentions, brand loyalty and advocacy for sustainable practices.
- The decision-making process of consumers is influenced by a myriad of factors including demographic factors, psychological factors, and cultural contexts. The interplay of these factors in relation to the UN SDGs is not well understood, making it challenging for companies to effectively target and engage consumers
- Companies may struggle to effectively communicate their sustainable initiatives and the relevance of the UN SDGs to consumers. The lack of clarity and consistency in messaging can hinder consumer understanding and engagement, resulting in missed opportunities for promoting sustainable products
- There is a scarcity of empirical research that directly links consumer awareness of the UN SDGs and companies' sustainable initiatives to actual consumer behaviour, such as purchasing decisions, brand loyalty, and advocacy for sustainability. Understanding these relationships is crucial to contribute to the achievement of the UN SDGs.

Limitations of the Study

- The research is limited to Chennai city
- The respondents were limited to 129 and interpretations of analysis are based on the opinions of the respondents on UN SDGs
- The respondents do not represent the entire population
- Duration and resources are limited
- The UN SDGs may create a lot of resistance since the awareness level is low
- The study focuses on the subset of the 17 UN SDGs

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design	Exploratory research Design
Sampling Method	Simple Random Sampling
Data Collected	Primary and Secondary Data
Sample Size	129
Tools for Data Analysis	Reliability analysis, Independent T test, Factor analysis, Chi Square analysis

Data Analysis and Interpretation

RELIABILITY TEST

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.870	42

Source: Computed Data

Interpretation:

According to the above table, the study has .870 of the reliability of data collected from respondents, as determined by Cronbach's Alpha reliability test. Hence the data is reliable for further analysis.

INDEPENDENT SAMPLE T-TEST

AWARENESS LEVEL

Independent Sample T test Table											
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
				t	df	Significance		Mean difference	Std Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		f	Sig.			One side d P	Two side d P			Low er	Upp er
Awareness On UN SDGs	Equal Variance Assumed	2.989	.087	3.331	106	<.001	.001	1.082	.325	.438	1.726
	Equal Variance not assumed			4.324	30.726	<.001	<.001	1.082	.250	.571	1.593

Source: Computed Data

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant difference in awareness of UN SDGs between the age groups.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant difference in awareness of UN SDGs between the age groups.

INTERPRETATION

According to the above table. it is inferred that there is a significant difference between the Age and the Awareness on UN Sustainable Development Goals. The null hypothesis is rejected as the p value is less than .05 (2-tailed significance), hence age and the level of awareness on UN SDGs have significant different.

CHI SQUARE ANALYSIS

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONSUMER PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR AND CONSUMER PRIORITIZATION OF SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS

Chi Square Test Table			
	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2 sided)
Pearson Chi Square	23.456	5	.002
Likelihood Ratio	21.876	5	.003
N of Valid Cases	129		

Source: Computed Data

Null Hypothesis (H0)

There is no significant relationship between consumer purchasing behaviour and consumer prioritization of sustainable products.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1)

There is a significant relationship between consumer purchasing behaviour and consumer prioritization of sustainable products.

INTERPRETATION

From the above analysis table, it can be interpreted that the p value is less than 0.05 ($p = 0.002$, $p = 0.003$). It is inferred that variables are dependent and one variable influences the other. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

FACTOR ANALYSIS

FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMER PURCHASING DECISION & CONSUMER PREFERENCE FOR SUSTAINABLE PRODUCT

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.805
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. chi square	19.194
	df	15
	Sig.	.025

Source: Computed Data

Null Hypothesis (H0)

There are no significant factors influencing consumer purchasing decisions and preferences for sustainable products and services.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1)

There are significant factors influencing consumer purchasing decisions and preferences for sustainable products and services.

Descriptive Statistics			
Particulars	Mean	St.Dev	N
What motivates you the most to consider a brand's sustainability practices when making a purchase? [Environmental Impact]	1.88	1.03	129
What motivates you the most to consider a brand's sustainability practices when making a purchase? [Social Responsibility]	1.95	1.04	129
What motivates you the most to consider a brand's sustainability practices when making a purchase? [Ethical Practices]	3.09	1.08	129
What motivates you the most to consider a brand's sustainability practices when making a purchase? [Personal Values]	1.83	1.03	129
What motivates you the most to consider a brand's sustainability practices when making a purchase? [Brand Reputation]	2.14	1.15	129

Source: Computed Data

COMMUNALITIES TABLE		
Particulars	Initial	Extraction
What motivates you the most to consider a brand's sustainability practices when making a purchase? [Environmental Impact]	1.05	.39
What motivates you the most to consider a brand's sustainability practices when making a purchase? [Social Responsibility]	1.07	.38
What motivates you the most to consider a brand's sustainability practices when making a purchase? [Ethical Practices]	3.37	3.34
What motivates you the most to consider a brand's sustainability practices when making a purchase? [Personal Values]	1.06	.67
What motivates you the most to consider a brand's sustainability practices when making a purchase? [Brand Reputation]	1.31	.88
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis		

Source: Computed Data

TOTAL VARIANCE EXPLAINED

	INITIAL EIGENVALUES			EXTRACTION SUMS OF SQUARED LOADINGS			ROTATION SUMS OF SQUARED LOADINGS		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.90	49.6%	49.6%	3.90	49.6%	49.6%	3.48	44.3%	44.3%
2	1.76	22.4%	72.0%	1.76	22.4%	72.0%	2.18	27.7%	72.0% ^x
3	.90	11.5%	83.5%						
4	.77	9.8%	93.3%						
5	.53	6.7%	100.0%						

Source: Computed Data

ROTATED COMPONENT MATRIX

PARTICULARS	COMPONENT	
	1	2
How often do sustainability efforts influence your purchasing decision?	.03	.01
Have you ever switched brands for their alignment with UN SDGs?	.94	.35
Are you willing to buy sustainable products in future?	.50	.05
How much more are you willing to pay for sustainable products?	.52	.17
How likely are you to recommend it to others?	-.12	-.50
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis		
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization		
a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations		

Source: Computed Data

INTERPRETATION

According to the tables above, the KMO measure .778, which suggests the factors are satisfactory to proceed for further research analysis. The Bartlett's test suggests that p value is .003 which is less than .05 and hence the null hypothesis is rejected. There are significant factors influencing consumer willingness to pay premium for sustainable products and services.

Findings

- A majority of 58% respondents are Female and 42% of respondents are Male.
- A majority of 71% respondents are 18 – 30 years old, 13% are between 31 – 45 years old, 11% of respondents were more than 45 years old and 5% respondents were under 18 years old.
- A majority of 57% respondents are students, 28% are working professionals while 15% belong to other category such as housewives and unemployed.

- A majority of 67% respondents receive an annual income of less than 2LPA 16% respondents earn between 2LPA – 5LPA, 9% respondents earn 5LPA – 10LPA and 8% earn more than 10LPA.
- A majority of 31% respondents are unaware about UN SDGs 26% of respondents are neutrally aware, 20% respondents are somewhat aware, 12% are aware of UN SDGs and 11% of respondents are very much aware.
- A majority of 50% respondents are willing to pay 5% - 10% premium, 21% are willing to pay more than 15%, 17% are willing to pay 10% - 15% additionally and 12% are willing to pay less than 12% premium for sustainable products.
- A majority of 8% of respondents believe that UN SDGs 3 & 6 are important respectively, 7% believe UN SDGs 1, 2, 4 & 16 as important respectively, 6% respondents perceive UN SDGs 12, 13 & 14 as important and 4.9% perceive UN SDGs 9 & 11 each as important.
- A majority of 34% respondents might have switched brands due to its alignment with UN SDGs and 26% haven't switched yet, 21% of respondents have switched brands and 19% will might switch brands in future.
- A majority of 23% respondents are motivated due to personal values to consider brand's sustainability practices, 22% are motivated due to environmental impact of sustainability, 20% due to social responsibilities, 19% consider due to brand reputation and 16% motivated by ethical practices.
- A majority of 44% respondents believe consumers hold greater responsibility in advancing sustainability goals through products, 34% believe companies are responsible in advancing sustainability and 22% believes government hold greater responsibility.
- A majority of 44% of respondents are neutrally influenced, 21% is somewhat influenced by sustainability efforts of brands while purchasing, 17% might have been influenced and 20% each have been never influenced & highly influenced respectively.
- A majority of 24% respondents prefer social media as a means to be informed about sustainability efforts of brands, 22% prefer word of mouth / recommendation from friends and family, 20% respondents each prefer website and advertisement respectively and 14% prefer information through newsletter.
- A majority 24% of respondents prefer transparent labelling & certification, 22% prefer customer engagement through social media from companies as a means to better communicate their sustainability efforts to consumers, 19% respondents each prefer regular updates & reports as well as partnership with environmental / social organisations respectively and 16% prefer sustainability-focused marketing campaign.
- A majority 64% of respondents are willing to buy sustainable products in the future and 34% might buy in future while 6% respondents are not willing to buy products in future.
- A majority of 50% respondents highly recommend sustainable products and services to others, 47% are moderately willing to recommend it and 3% never recommend sustainable products.

Suggestions

Consumers are to be made aware about UN Sustainability Goals and how sustainability can impact the environment positively along with the lifestyle and health of consumers. Through this India can achieve the UN SDGs by 2030 as per the plan of United Nations. Due to greenwashing and other Unethical marketing practices consumers are skeptical about the reliability which results in brand loyalty for unethical brands, and so companies must provide reliable and trustworthy claims without misleading consumer population.

The Government must impose high stern regulation for the false claims made by companies which mislead consumers and confuse them what to believe and what not. Hence, government must rigorously implement strategies to achieve 17 UN SDGs by 2030 along with empowering sustainable brands with out the implementation of additional schemes to encourage and benefit both sustainable and enthusiastic brands.

Manufacturers need to produce transparent labelling and certification which helps consumers to easily identify authentic eco brands. Regular updates and reporting on initiatives taken as well as collaborating with environmental and social organizations and NGOs helps the companies achieve their CSR while promoting their sustainable products. At the end of the study, it is clearly understood that majority of consumers are willing to buy more sustainable products and so it is suggested to set up more sustainable brands that produces sustainable products.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this comprehensive study on the influence of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) on the consumer decision-making process has revealed significant insights into how sustainability initiatives shape consumer behaviour. The results show that consumers are driven by a desire to support global sustainability initiatives and are becoming more conscious of the UN SDGs. This knowledge results in a preference for goods and companies that share similar objectives, indicating that incorporating sustainability into corporate operations is not only ethically imperative but also beneficial from a commercial standpoint.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes how different SDGs affect consumer decisions to differing degrees, with targets pertaining to clean water and sanitation, good health and wellbeing, and responsible consumption and production standing out as having the biggest effects. This implies that in order to better connect with their target audiences, companies should give priority to these areas in their sustainability initiatives. Considering these findings, several recommendations have been made. First, companies should enhance their communication strategies to better inform consumers about their sustainability efforts and how these align with the UN SDGs.

Transparency in reporting and authentic storytelling can foster trust and loyalty among consumers. Second, businesses should consider developing products and services that directly contribute to the achievement of specific SDGs, thereby meeting the growing demand for sustainable options. Finally, collaboration with stakeholders, including NGOs and governmental bodies, can amplify the impact of sustainability initiatives and further engage consumers in the process.

In conclusion, the influence of the UN SDGs on consumer decision-making is a powerful driver of change in the marketplace. As consumers become more informed and engaged, businesses that align their practices with these goals will be better positioned to thrive in an increasingly competitive and conscientious environment.

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