

Analysis of Sustainable Concept and Consumer Behavior

Yining Zhang *

Shanghai experimental foreign language school, Shanghai, China

* Corresponding Author Email: zyn242741@outlook.com

Abstract. Under the background of global environmental problems such as resource depletion and climate change, the concept of sustainable consumption is gradually popularized, and consumers' attention to the brand's environmental attributes and social responsibility performance is significantly improved. This paper focuses on the influence path of sustainable consumption on consumers' brand choice behavior and explores the optimization strategy of brand marketing. The results show that sustainable consumption affects brand selection through direct and indirect paths: in the direct path, consumers turn the values of environmental protection and social responsibility into the core criteria for brand screening, fit brands based on value identification preferences (such as paying attention to animal protectors' preference to choose beauty brands without animal testing), and actively check the brand's sustainable functional attributes (such as recyclable packaging and natural raw materials), and those with firm ideas are even willing to pay a premium for brands that meet the standards; On the indirect path, it is transmitted through three intermediary factors-brand credibility (transparency practices such as disclosing raw material sources and carbon emission data to dispel the "greenwashing" doubts), perceived value (evaluating brand value from environmental and social dimensions, such as recognizing the social value of fair trade coffee) and social identity (taking sustainable brands as identity symbols, gaining peer recognition through selection, such as young people sharing sustainable brand experience to consolidate their preferences). This study reveals internal mechanisms of sustainable consumption driving consumer behavior, provides theoretical support and practical reference for brands to formulate accurate marketing programs.

Keywords: Sustainable concept, consumer behavior, environmental problems.

1. Introduction

Due to population growth and the increasing commodification of human activities in modern urban lifestyles, environmental challenges are becoming increasingly severe. At the same time, the consumption of resources is also increasing, and these resources are under continuous mining threats, which have significant impacts on society, economy, and the environment [1]. Consumers no longer merely focus on the performance and price of products, but prefer environmentally friendly, energy-saving and low-carbon goods and services. For instance, green household appliances, with their low energy consumption and high efficiency, have become the first choice for many families; green food, due to its no-additives and no-pollution characteristics, has won the trust of a large number of consumers [2]. Sustainable consumption refers to the optimal, conscious, and responsible use of existing natural resources, goods, and services at the individual, household, community (local, corporate), local government, national government, and international level, in accordance with the principles of sustainable development. The rationality of environmental utilization and the possibility of resource recycling should be reflected in its system. It provides people with a safe environment that will not degrade beyond its elastic limits. The primary goal of sustainable consumption is quality of life, which should be considered from multiple aspects: economic, ecological, social, psychological, demographic, spatial, and intertemporal. The characteristics of sustainable consumption are persistence, sustainability, and self-sufficiency [3]. This article aims to explore the impact of sustainable development on consumer behavior and provides suggestions for product marketing. Researchers reported that many consumers desire to purchase products that are more environmentally friendly, healthier, and more sustainable. One widely accepted conclusion drawn from this study is that individuals are not completely rational

consumers. In contrast, consumers' decisions are based on specific circumstances and influenced by cognitive biases [4]. The vast majority of past reviews have mainly focused on environmental aspects, although there are some exceptions [5]. In fact, published search trends exploring the three dimensions of sustainability over the years indicate that in addition to growing interest in environmental aspects, the social impact of sustainable practices also seems to be receiving increasing attention. Additionally, the number of papers published in academic journals in social sciences increased in 2019, while the number of papers in the fields of business, management, and accounting has decreased [5]. The results of this study indicate that people's interest in sustainability themes continues to change over time. This is of great significance not only for scholars, but also for marketers and companies who can view sustainable consumption from a broader perspective. For example, deepening consumers' attention to the three dimensions of sustainability, exploring less explored areas in sustainable consumption, and finally adjusting recommendations for services and products based on current trends in consumer sustainable behavior may be relevant [5]. The significance of this research lies in highlighting the behavioral changes brought about by the concept of sustainable consumption for consumers, as well as which brands better meet consumers' needs.

2. Direct Pathways of Sustainable Consumption Affecting Brand Choice Behavior

Research on marketing and consumer behavior in the context of sustainable consumption often involves ecological issues, analyzing consumers' attitudes, values, beliefs, norms and behaviors towards purchasing "green" products, handling waste and other related activities. Sustainable consumption is defined as the desire to consume in a way that improves quality in the environmental, social and economic spheres of life [6].

2.1. Consumers Form Brand Preference Based on Value Recognition

The core of sustainable consumption is the value of environmental protection and social responsibility. These values are not abstract concepts, they will directly translate into consumers' selection criteria for brands - When a brand's core proposition such as "zero-carbon production" or "fair trade" aligns with these values, consumers will directly prefer the brand due to recognition. For instance, consumers who care about "animal protection" are more inclined to choose beauty brands that do not conduct animal testing. For example, the Body Shop launched #ForeverAgainstAnimalTesting global petition in 2017 in collaboration with the international animal rights organization Cruelty Free International. The goal of this campaign was to submit 8 million signatures to the United Nations, calling for a global ban on animal testing for cosmetics [7]. By 2018, they had successfully collected over 8.3 million signatures and officially submitted them to the UN headquarters in New York on World Animal Day (October 4th) that year. This was one of the largest anti-cosmetic animal testing petitions in history.

2.2. Brand Attribute Screening based on Functional Cognition

Consumers actively pay Attention to the sustainable functional attributes of brands. Today, consumers' attention to brands goes beyond the mere use value of products. They actively explore the sustainable functional attributes of brands, such as whether the packaging is recyclable and whether the raw materials are natural and harmless. They verify the authenticity of these attributes by checking product details, brand websites, or third-party certifications, and then use them as core screening criteria when making purchases. Brands that do not meet the requirements are often directly excluded. More obviously, consumers' sensitivity to and willingness to pay for such attributes are directly linked to the strength of their sustainable concepts: the more determined their concepts are, the higher their requirements for details, for example, they not only look at "recyclable" but also pay attention to the recycling rate; they not only look at "natural raw materials"

but also confirm whether there is organic certification, and their sensitivity even extends to the production process. They do not consider spending more money on such products as an "extra burden" but rather see it as an endorsement of environmental protection values and are willing to pay a premium to choose brands that align with their values.

3. Indirect Ways of Sustainable Consumption Philosophy affecting Brand Choice Behavior

Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is one of the most commonly used models for studying behavioral change. This theory proposes that behavior change is mediated by the intention to change, which is predicted by a person's attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Attitude involves an individual's evaluation of the performance of specific behaviors; Subjective norms refer to an individual's perception of recognition of the behavior to be implemented [8].

3.1. Make Choices Based on Brand Credibility

The sustainable consumption philosophy prompts consumers to pay more attention to whether a brand's sustainable commitments are genuine instead of "greenwashing" practices. For instance, if a brand merely creates an environmentally friendly image through advertising but still extensively uses non-degradable materials, emits excessive pollutants, or fails to fulfill its carbon neutrality goals, these are all examples of false sustainable operations. When a brand actively breaks down information barriers and proves its sustainable practices through specific and verifiable transparent measures, it will effectively dispel consumers' doubts and significantly enhance brand trust. These transparent information enables consumers to clearly perceive the actual investment and achievements of the brand in the sustainable field. This encourages consumers to prefer the products of this brand and even form long-term brand loyalty. For example, Patagonia utilizes the "Footprint Chronicles" platform to disclose the sources of materials, production factories, and carbon emission data, such as providing detailed information on the origin and processing procedures of organic cotton. This enables consumers to understand the "background" of the products. Additionally, it uses channels like documentaries, blogs, and social media to share environmental protection stories, project progress, and concepts, achieving comprehensive transparency and allowing consumers to clearly perceive the brand's actions and sincerity in sustainable development.

3.2. Transmission Mediated by Perceived Value

The concept of sustainable consumption prompts consumers to break away from the traditional framework of "only focusing on the functional use of products" and shift to a more comprehensive "multi-dimensional value assessment". For one thing, there is environmental value. Consumers will pay particular attention to whether the brand can take practical actions to reduce negative impacts on the environment, such as using degradable materials to reduce white pollution, optimizing production processes to reduce wastewater and waste gas emissions, and implementing carbon reduction plans to alleviate climate issues. For another, there is social value. They will pay attention to whether the brand ensures fair labor in the supply chain, such as eliminating child labor, ensuring workers receive reasonable salaries and a safe working environment, and supporting disadvantaged groups to participate in the production process to promote social fairness. When a brand can truly meet these diverse value demands, consumers' emotional value and value recognition of the brand will significantly increase. For example, fair trade coffee guarantees the rights of coffee farmers, by setting a minimum purchase price to avoid market fluctuations that harm the income of coffee farmers, and at the same time providing additional community development funds for coffee farmers' medical care, education, and production skills training. This alignment of social value will significantly enhance consumers' liking and trust for the brand, ultimately becoming their preferred choice.

3.3. Transmission Mediated by Social Identity

Consumers may purchase sustainable products out of a desire for social acceptance. Emotions occur in relationships during the consumption process, or generate a sense of social connection to improve consumers' awareness of establishing and maintaining a friendly environment. This represents consumer satisfaction and establishes an intimate relationship with the product [7]. Sustainable consumption has become an "identity symbol" in some groups. For consumers who deeply integrate the concept of sustainability into their lives, choosing sustainable brands has become an important way to convey their values to the outside world. This expression of values is essentially aimed at seeking "group recognition" within the same circle - they yearn to find like-minded peers through their consumption choices and gain spiritual resonance and recognition. This need for social recognition will indirectly and powerfully drive consumers' brand choices. Taking the young group as an example, as active participants in social communication, they often actively share their experiences of using sustainable brands through social media. Through these shares, they create a distinct environmentalist image and receive likes, recognition, and interactions from peers who also pay attention to sustainable issues in the comment section, further consolidating their preference for this brand.

4. Suggestions on Marketing Strategies for the Brand

In the past ten years, the concept of green industry has been proposed to align the sustainable development of industry with the global challenges of sustainable development. This initiative aims to raise awareness, develop knowledge, and build capacity. They collaborate with the government to support industrial institutions and provide assistance to businesses and entrepreneurs in various aspects related to industrial greening [9]. The sustainable consumption of resources used in the production process by the company aims to provide ecologically correct products, adjust production activities according to the reality of the social environment, and promote good practices among the consumer public. Given the increasing concern for sustainability, companies that adopt or encourage sustainable consumption measures will ultimately generate positive perceptions among the public, who are more likely to purchase their products or services [10]. Regarding the concept of sustainable consumption, the author has some suggestions for brand marketing.

4.1. Targeting Consumers, Delivering Value Accurately

For consumers, in a market environment where consumer demands are increasingly segmented, precisely delivering value to consumers with a strong sustainability mindset is a key strategy for brands to win over this group. The core lies in highlighting the environmental and social values of the brand as the focal points of communication, ensuring that the information aligns deeply with the core demands of the consumers. These consumers are more concerned about whether their consumption behavior can lead to actual contributions to the environment or society. Therefore, brands need to convey information through specific and perceptible value propositions, such as clearly stating "For every product purchased, we will donate the corresponding funds to plant one tree", and simultaneously disclosing the execution area, progress and ecological benefits of the tree-planting project, such as "100,000 tamarisk trees have been planted in the Inner Mongolia desert, effectively preventing the desertification of 2000 acres of land".

4.2. Enhance Information Transparency for Enterprises

For Enterprises, enhancing information transparency has become a crucial measure for enterprises to win the trust of consumers and secure their purchases. Brands can establish dedicated sustainable information sections on their official websites or third-party platforms, converting abstract environmental protection commitments into specific, traceable data and processes. For instance, they can detail the origin information of core raw materials, disclose the carbon footprint calculation results of the production process, and even showcase the qualification certifications of

supply chain partners, enabling enterprise customers to clearly trace the sustainable practices throughout the product's entire life cycle. This concrete approach to information transparency can effectively allay the concerns of enterprise customers about "greenwashing marketing," allowing them to directly perceive the depth and sincerity of the brand's sustainable practices.

4.3. Balancing Price and Value for the Brand

For Brands, balancing between price and value to cover different consumer demands. Based on the differences in the purchasing power of the target customer groups, a sustainable product line matrix covering high, medium and low tiers is constructed. The high-end line focuses on environmental protection technology and material innovation to meet the quality demands, while the mass line controls pricing through optimizing supply chain costs and simplifying packaging designs. For high-net-worth users who pursue high quality, the premium line featuring rare and environmentally friendly materials should be retained. For price-sensitive groups, a budget-friendly basic line should be created while ensuring the core sustainable attributes, in order to reduce costs. This tiered design neither loses high-demand users nor allows consumers with limited budgets but who share the sustainable philosophy to choose sustainable products without bearing excessive economic pressure, thereby lowering the selection threshold and expanding the brand's audience.

5. Conclusion

This article focuses on the core issue of sustainable consumption and systematically studies its profound impact on consumer behavior. It conducts targeted analysis centered on "how consumers choose sustainable products" and clearly divides the influence paths into direct and indirect categories. At the direct influence level, the research indicates that the concept of sustainable consumption directly changes consumers' decision-making criteria - consumers no longer solely rely on product functions and prices as the core selection criteria, but actively incorporate the sustainable attributes of the brand (such as recyclable packaging, natural raw materials, carbon reduction measures) into the evaluation system, and even consider them as priority selection conditions, directly driving their preference for products that meet the standards. At the indirect influence level, the research finds that sustainable consumption acts on choice behavior through multiple intermediary factors: On the one hand, consumers will actively pay attention to the environmental and social values of the brand (such as reducing pollution, supporting fair labor) due to their identification with the sustainable concept. This alignment of values will enhance the perceived value and trust of the brand, indirectly prompting their choice. On the other hand, the "identity symbol" attribute formed by sustainable consumption in some groups enables consumers to gain recognition within the same circle by choosing sustainable brands. This social recognition need will also indirectly drive product selection. Based on the analysis of these influence paths, this article further proposes targeted suggestions for sustainable product marketing, aiming to help brands more accurately meet consumer needs. For example, by publicly disclosing supply chain information to enhance trust, launching multi-price product lines to lower the threshold for choice, and highlighting multiple values to match consumers' evaluation criteria, it provides theoretical support and practical references for brands to formulate effective sustainable marketing strategies.

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