

## **EXAMINING THE CONSUMER PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS TO PAVE THE PATH TO SUSTAINABLE FOOD CONSUMPTION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper discusses unsustainable food consumption, propelled by heavy marketing that further brought resource depletion and climate change. The intended purpose is to realign consumer behaviour, fostering sustainability through a social-ecological system perspective in conjunction with the theory of planned behaviour (TPB). In the current study, the effect of resilience and adaptability concerning psychological variables is investigated simultaneously with perceived behavioural control and subjective norms on attitudes, intentions, and behaviours toward sustainable food consumption. It also investigates the factor of religiosity as a source of potential intervention that could close the intention-behavior gap. The study postulates an extended TPB model of psychological factors from a basis of socio-ecological perspectives to predict sustainable behaviour in terms of sustainable food consumption. This study will guide green marketers, businesses, and policymakers on how to promote sustainability through marketing using the resilience and adaptability of consumers.

**Keywords: Adaptability, Religiosity, Resilience, Sustainable Food Consumption, Theory of Planned Behaviour.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Anthropocene is an age in which environmental change occurs at a magnitude mainly due to human activity. Of these, food consumption patterns contribute significantly toward ecological degradation, resource exhaustion, and climate change (Steffen et al., 2015). Modern food manufacturing, heavily marketed for convenience and profitability, has resulted in unsustainable consumption that worsens these environmental problems over time (Poore & Nemecek, 2018). Unsustainable food consumption involves high rates of wastage, one-time plastics, and overreliance on single-use plastics for meat-based diets, all of which collectively impact the environment. Take the instance of farming which contributes significantly towards deforestation and contribute towards global biodiversity loss (Steinfeld et al., 2006). The challenges posed to the fishing industry are such that approximately 90% of global fish resources are estimated to be fully exploited or overexploited, imposing further threats upon marine ecosystems (FAO, 2020). About 24% of world greenhouse gas emissions are caused by agriculture in fulfilling food needs, worsening climate change, and undermining food security (FAO, 2018; Masson-Delmotte et al., 2019). The consumer's unsustainable consumption practices degrade the environment and also pose serious health

risks including but not limited to cardiovascular diseases due to poor dietary choices (Willett et al., 2019). Hence, it is the need of the hour to divert consumer behaviour towards sustainable food consumption to eradicate adverse environmental impacts. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) provides a valuable framework for understanding and predicting consumer behaviour in which behaviour is driven by intentions under the influence of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). Some additions of perspectives from the Social-Ecological System (SES) may open up possibilities for deeper insights into broader contextual and psychological factors that affect sustainable consumption.

### **Research Problem**

Even though sustainable consumption has been recognized at various levels, personal consumer behaviour remains one of the significant contributors to environmental degradation. The modern food industry promotes, with the backup of powerful marketing, patterns that are causing harm to climate change and increasing resource degradation (Poore & Nemecek, 2018; Steffen et al., 2015). Extant marketing strategies shift their focus to what gives the consumer immediate satisfaction and the individual company profits, overlooking sustainable long-term gains that result from personal consumer behaviour that is sustainable (Ivashura & Borysenko, 2021). A broader insight into the existing literature on sustainable consumption is often needed, whereby this becomes indispensable for solutions: specifically, the incorporation of psychological factors, such as resilience and adaptability, in a unified framework with perspectives of TPB and SES will increase the level of analysis to understand and promote sustainable consumption behaviour. Also, the intention-behavior gap of sustainable consumption is a complex issue based on various contextual and psychological factors. Religiosity, with its own ethical and moral guidelines, is expected to influence some manner of consumer behaviour and, therefore should minimize the gap between intention and behaviour (Hirschman, 1983). However, even this dimension of religiosity in the context of sustainability remains under-examined mainly.

### **Research Questions**

To address the identified research problem, this study formulates the following research questions:

1. How do psychological factors, such as resilience and adaptability, influence attitudes toward sustainable food consumption?
2. How do attitudes, social norms, and perceived control influence the sustainable intentions of consumers?
3. How are consumer intentions translated into sustainable consumption behaviour?
4. How can religiosity reduce the intention-behaviour gap?

### **Research Objectives**

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To investigate the impact of psychological determinants, particularly resilience and adaptability, on attitudes towards sustainable food consumption.

2. To establish how attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioural control jointly shape the sustainable intentions of consumers.
3. To analyze the process by which consumer intentions translate into sustainable consumption behaviour.
4. Exploring the role of religiosity in the intention-behaviour gap reduction of sustainable food consumption.

**Significance of the Study**

This research is essential for several reasons. First, it integrates the TPB framework with psychological constructs, mainly resilience and adaptability, to better explain consumer behaviour in sustainable food consumption. The study integrates Social-Ecological System perspectives in having a holistic view of the environmental and contextual factors affecting sustainable consumption. Moreover, probing into religiosity as an interaction term adds to the novelty of the present inquiry. Understanding how religiosity works toward moderating intentions vis-à-vis behaviour can also help develop targeted interventions for sustainable consumption across culturally and religiously diverse contexts. Thirdly, this study has practical implications for green marketers, businesses, and policymakers. With better insight into consumer psychological resilience and adaptability, pertinent stakeholders will have the capability to devise more effective marketing strategies and policies that could foster sustainable consumption practices. This act will be key in reducing the environmental impact to approach sustainability. Finally, this paper responds to the identified urgent need for interdisciplinary research in sustainable consumption. By combining psychological, behavioural, and socio-ecological perspectives, it provides a robust framework for future research and policy development aimed at promoting sustainable consumption behaviours.

**METHODOLOGY****Research Design**

To achieve the objective of this research, the research methodology devised is a narrative literature review, which is capable of synthesizing high-quality journal articles and allows exploration and analysis of the current state of research on consumer psychological resilience and adaptability in sustainable food consumption. The narrative review showed the overall view of the topic by combining evidence from different studies, exposing gaps, and generating future research ideas (Tranfield et al., 2003; Snyder, 2019).

**Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

To maintain quality and relevance in the study area of the selected literature, some specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were adopted. Inclusion criteria were based on different vital aspects to guarantee the relevance and quality of the study. The inclusion period they consisted of studies published within the last ten years (2013-2023), as suggested for current trends by Adams et al. Only high-quality peer-reviewed journal articles with findings that were positive will be included, weighted by the impact factor. Manuscripts published only in the English language are included to avoid any issues related to translation. The focus was on consumer psychological resilience and adaptability toward sustainable food consumption, mainly based on SES theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

(Ajzen, 1991; Folke et al., 2016). Inclusion criteria were empirical studies, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and theoretical papers relevant to answering each research question (Sandelowski et al., 2007). The exclusion criteria are devised for the study to eliminate the papers that are not aligned with the review requirements to a greater extent. Items that were excluded were conference papers, editorials, opinion pieces and other non-peer review articles due to lack of rigour (Greenhalgh, 1997). In addition, the documents that were not in English language were also dismissed to avoid translation issues. Furthermore, the articles after 2013 were considered to capture the most recent literature. Other than this the articles that were not pertinent to consumer psychological resilience, adaptability, or sustainable food consumption were also excluded. Last but not least certain papers were also rejected due to the apparent flaws in their research methodology (Moher et al., 2009).

### **Literature Search Strategy**

This literature review was conducted using databases including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The search was done using the given string, "Consumer psychological resilience" AND "Consumer adaptability," "Sustainable food consumption," "Social-Ecological Systems theory," and "Theory of Planned Behavior." Boolean operators, such as AND, OR, and NOT, were used to filter results (Booth, Sutton, & Papaioannou, 2016).

### **Screening and Selection Process**

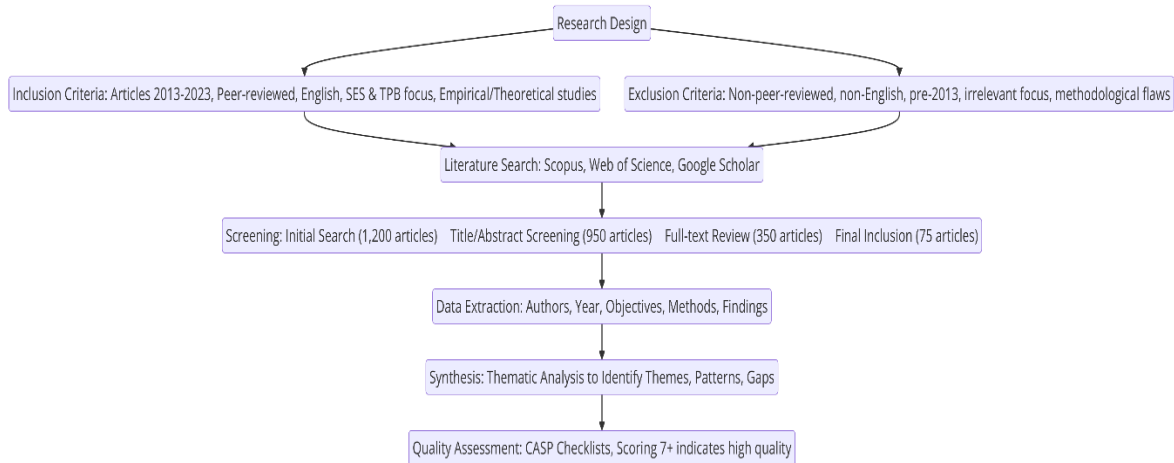
The screening and selection process took place over three stages: the initial search, title/abstract screening, and full-text reading. The leading search terminated with a sum of 1,200 articles. This resulted in the retrieval of 950 unique studies. Screening of titles and abstracts identified 600 studies as non-relevant. The screening process thus continued to detail, with these 350 articles going through an in-depth quality screen designed according to this review, and 75 high-quality papers were selected for narrative synthesis (Liberati et al., 2009).

### **Extraction of Data and Synthesis of Results**

The data has been extracted into a standardized form that incorporates: the author, year of publication, study objective, methods used, primary results, and relevance to the research questions. The thematic analysis, which is by Braun and Clarke (2006), will be used to synthesize data by developing relationships and identifying common themes/patterns/research gaps.

### **Quality Assessment**

Three main dimensions of quality appraisal were relevant: validity, results, and relevance. Checklists under critical appraisal skills from CASP were applied. The studies in question were then ranked on a scale of 1 to 10, which rated studies scoring above seven as being high in quality.

**Figure 1: Research Methodology Flow Diagram**


**Source:** Developed by the author for the study

### Ethical Considerations and Limitations

The review adhered to ethical standards, including proper citation of sources and avoiding plagiarism. The synthesis respects the original authors' contributions and ensures an accurate representation of their work (Gaskell et al., 2000). Limitations include the restriction to English-language articles and the exclusion of non-peer-reviewed literature, potentially omitting some relevant studies. Focusing on high-impact journals may introduce bias, overlooking valuable insights from lesser-known sources (Cooper, 2016).

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This study addresses the multidimensionality of sustainable food consumption through the theoretical underpinning and empirical evidence regarding weak and strong sustainability, consumer behaviour theories, and the contribution of psychological factors, such as resilience and adaptability. The review extends further to the intention-behaviour gap, emphasizing perceived behavioural control and religiosity in fostering sustainable consumption behaviours.

### Weak and Strong Sustainability – The Clashing Paradigms

Weak sustainability is based on neoclassical economics, where the world is perceived to be a closed system with infinite resources. According to this view, natural resources become commodities, and value can always be given to them under monetary terms, guaranteeing economic growth. Market equilibrium and technological development are paramount in dealing with environmental problems. Technological advance proponents hold that it will balance economic growth with environmental sustainability, such as the circular and green economies, respectively (Brand, 2012; Sauvé et al., 2016). However, the argument of reversibility of environmental damage and the limitation of the approach in a globally diverse context is an issue pointed out by some to be critical (Martín-Martín et al., 2019; Ji & Luo, 2020).

In contrast, strong sustainability develops from a social and human ecology, with an integral invariability of humans with nature under the aegis of social-ecological systems (SES) (Hill & Boyd, 2021; Ruggerio, 2021). With more emphasis on the precautionary principle, it challenges the substitutability of natural capital with artificial capital (Ivashura & Borysenko, 2021; Oliveira Neto et al., 2018). For a dematerialized economy, degrowth and mindful consumption favour intrinsic value over Western ideas (Adloff & Hilbrich, 2021; Estermann, 2012). A comparison between weak and strong sustainability has established that weak sustainability deals with economic growth and technological solutions. On the other hand, strong sustainability is more focused on preserving natural systems to achieve sustainable consumption.

### **Role of Consumers in Harnessing Sustainability**

The consumption habits of modern society overly strain the earth's ecological balance, which worries many about the aspect of sustainable consumption and environmental degradation (Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al., 2021). Despite consumers being more informed about the issues affecting their environment, most of them uphold unhealthy consumption habits that continue causing problems worldwide, for example, issues like climate change (Bouman et al., 2020). However, historical reports like the U Thant Report (1969) and the Limits to Growth (Meadows et al., 1972) tried addressing these but later failed to steer modern consumer behaviours.

### **Adaptability and Resilience among Consumers**

The literature insists on understanding consumer psychological adaptability (CPA) and resilience (CPR) in enabling sustainable consumption. CPA and CPR are essential in developing strategies aligning with consumer values while achieving positive attitudes toward sustainability (Hoekstra & Leeflang, 2023; Sesini et al., 2020). Emphasis and collaboration on eco-friendly alternatives enhance corporate social responsibility and competitiveness. Accounting for religiosity as a moderator allows for customizability at the cultural level and promotes inclusive and effective approaches toward sustainable consumption by individuals (Escursell et al., 2021; Concari et al., 2020).

### **Intention-Behaviour Gap and Religiosity**

The review underscores the intention-behavior gap as a significant obstacle to sustainable consumption. According to Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior, the gap between intentions and actual behaviours is said to exist, drawing attention to factors that guide the execution of these differences in intentions and actions (Ajzen, 1985). The research incorporates SES to the extent of TPB to model sustainable consumption behaviours while bringing resilience and adaptability from SES theory (Holling, 1973; Ajzen, 1985; Ammann et al., 2023). Religiosity is something that inspires consumers helps them to make choices that are sustainable and provides them motivation to indulge in sustainable consumption (Sobaih, 2023; Veiga et al., 2023). So, understanding the interplay of resilience, adaptability, perceived behavioural control, and subjective norms will empower researchers to model sustainable consumer behaviour and to advocate for sustainable practices overall.

**Prominent Theories Predicting Consumer Behavior**

The literature review critically evaluates the theories predicting consumer behaviour in the sustainable food consumption domain. Among multiple available theories, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) stands out for its structured approach. TPB is a versatile theory that predictive power is encapsulated in behavioural intentions, attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1985). TPB has a very clear operational framework for sustainable food consumption. It emphasizes that behavioural intentions are the primary determinant of an individual's actions. TPB offers valuable insights for designing effective interventions. TPB puts special emphasis on perceived behavioural control, as a result, it allows researchers to address issues related to unsustainable food consumption through examination of consumer perceptions of resource availability and the respective feasibility of their actions (Chen & Tung, 2014; Wang et al., 2018). On the other hand, the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) focuses on intention, attitude, and subjective norm as antecedents to behaviour. However, TRA is limited to behaviours under volitional control (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1981). The Value-Belief-Norm Theory (VBN) focuses on personal values in shaping beliefs and norms but lacks actionable interventions. Another theory the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) highlights observational learning and self-efficacy. SCT insufficiently addresses behavioural intentions in comparison to other given theories. Ultimately, after review, the study concludes that TPB is the most appropriate theory with higher predictive value for sustainable food consumption. the reason is that TPB adopts a holistic approach by integrating intentions, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. The study leverages TPB and integrates it with the Social-Ecological Systems approach to enhance consumer resilience and adaptability in and their respective importance to model sustainable consumption behaviour.

**Integrative Framework**

The merger of the SES framework with TPB will be a relatively holistic approach towards understanding sustainable consumption. The SES theory encapsulates the social, ecological, and economic systems that are interlinked with one another (Berkes & Folke, 1998). The SES also features adaptive governance along with resilience in managing the practice of sustainability (Walker et al., 2004). In including the TPB with the SES, the holistic justification of why or when individuals can participate in any sustainable behaviour is obtained, which relates to adaptability and resilience properties. From the literature, one can infer that psychological resilience and adaptability are essential variables when shaping sustainable consumption attitudes and behaviours. Thus, integrating TPB with SES theory strongly gives the required framework for understanding such dynamics. Religiosity will moderate the intention-behavior gap and, therefore, provide an all-round approach toward sustainable consumption.

**DISCUSSION**

Investigating sustainable food consumption behaviours from the perspectives of psychological resilience, adaptability, and religiosity results in some form of panacea against the challenges put into effect on the environment. The integration of the Theory of Planned Behavior with the Social-Ecological System framework offers a chance to understand the

drivers of sustainable consumer behaviour comprehensively. Psychological resilience and adaptability contribute to attitudes towards sustainable food consumption. Such consumers have more of these characteristics and are, therefore, more favourably disposed toward the ability to adopt and maintain practices that will remain sustainable in the face of environmental and societal challenges (Hoekstra & Leeflang, 2023; Sesini et al., 2020). In that regard, the TPB framework considers attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control for a structured approach to predicting and influencing these behaviours (Ajzen, 1991). By understanding such psychological factors, targeted interventions may be developed on the part of stakeholders to motivate positive attitudes and enhance perceived control over sustainable choices.

For many people, the lack of congruence between intention and behaviour remains a significant obstacle to sustainable consumption. Most consumers, despite good intentions, are not able to translate them into actual behaviour due to various obstacles that might impede their intentions (Ajzen, 1985). The inclusion of the SES approach helps bridge this gap, taking into account much broader contextual forces that seem to induce adaptive governance and resilience in people living with the land (Walker et al., 2004). It helps ensure a holistic treatment approach; it focuses on not just the conduct of individuals but also changes within systems that will enable the continued use of sustainable practices. Religiosity was a strong moderator of the intention–behaviour relationship. These religious beliefs have ethical and moral guidelines that can largely influence consumer behaviour, promoting more sustainable choices (Sobaih, 2023; Veiga et al., 2023). Such insights are valuable to interventions' development with cultural and religious competence, taking the concerns of various consumer groups into account. In summation, the study calls for interdisciplinary perspectives to be explored for sustainable food consumption behaviour modelling by combining the conventional perspective with the socio-ecological perspectives based upon strong sustainability. This will better enable the researcher to model and mould consumer behaviour for a better and viable future.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study, rooted in the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Social-Ecological Systems approach, examines the factors affecting sustainable food consumption. It highlights the importance of psychological resilience and adaptability in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviours. A key finding is an intention-behavior gap, indicating that strong intentions may not lead to actual behavior without considering broader contextual factors. Introducing religiosity provides a novel angle, suggesting ethical alignment can bridge this gap. The research blends psychology, behavioural science, and societal influences, offering a solid base for future studies and practical interventions. These findings guide stakeholders, from policymakers to marketers, to create strategies beyond mere trends, advocating for a culture of sustainable consumption. The study stresses the need for culturally sensitive, targeted interventions that leverage consumers' resilience, adaptability, and spiritual values to promote sustainable practices. This comprehensive approach aims to foster a more sustainable future.



**FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

One of the key aspects on which future researchers should focus could be the attempt to track human behaviour over a longer time period, particularly devising interventions to enhance and visualize the impact of resilience and adaptability over time. Exploring the cross-cultural impact of religiosity on sustainable consumption can offer deeper insights. Additionally, integrating digital tools to improve consumer education and engagement with sustainability is crucial. Expanding the interdisciplinary approach to include socio-economic and political factors can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the barriers and facilitators to sustainable food consumption. Finally, real-world experimentation is necessary to validate theoretical models and guide policymakers and businesses in developing scalable strategies to promote sustainable consumption practices.

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