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Sustainable Consumption and Ethical Consumerism: Lessons from Indian Knowledge System and NEP 2020

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Abstract

Sustainable consumption and ethical consumerism have emerged as global priorities due to increasing environmental degradation, climate change, resource depletion, and socio-economic inequalities. In this context, the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) offers a holistic framework for promoting responsible consumption through values such as simplicity, moderation, environmental stewardship, non-violence (Ahimsa), and the principle of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.' These traditional philosophies encourage individuals to consume resources mindfully while maintaining harmony between human needs, society, and nature. Simultaneously, India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recognizes sustainability, value-based education, skill development, and the integration of indigenous knowledge as essential components of a future-oriented education system. This study examines the contribution of IKS to fostering sustainable consumption and ethical consumer behaviour and analyzes how NEP 2020 supports these objectives by embedding environmental awareness, cultural values, and responsible citizenship into educational curricula. The research adopts a qualitative approach based on an extensive review of academic literature, policy documents, and relevant reports. The findings reveal that IKS provides practical and ethical foundations for sustainable lifestyles by encouraging local production, responsible purchasing, circular use of resources, and community well-being. Furthermore, NEP 2020 facilitates the transmission of these principles through experiential learning, multidisciplinary education, and integration of traditional knowledge with contemporary sustainability practices. The study concludes that the convergence of IKS and NEP 2020 has significant potential to cultivate environmentally conscious and ethically responsible consumers while contributing to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The paper recommends strengthening curriculum design, consumer awareness initiatives, institutional collaborations, and policy interventions to integrate indigenous wisdom into modern consumer education. Such an approach can support sustainable development, promote ethical markets, and encourage responsible consumption patterns for a more equitable and environmentally resilient future.

Keywords: *Indian Knowledge System (IKS), Sustainable Consumption, Ethical Consumerism, National Education Policy 2020, Sustainability, Responsible Consumer Behaviour.*

Introduction

The global shift towards sustainability and ethical consumerism is an essential response to environmental and social challenges. Ethical consumerism promotes conscious purchasing decisions that prioritize environmental protection, fair trade, and responsible production. Sustainable consumption ensures resource efficiency and long-term ecological balance.

India's ancient knowledge systems (IKS) emphasize sustainability through concepts such as 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (The world is one family), Ahimsa (non-violence), and Sarvodaya (welfare for all). These traditional values encourage mindful consumption, minimalism, and environmental stewardship.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recognizes the importance of sustainable development by integrating IKS into education, promoting environmental awareness and fostering ethical consumer behaviour. This paper examines the intersection of IKS, NEP 2020, and consumer behaviour to highlight lessons for sustainable consumption.

The Sustainable consumption and ethical consumerism have gained significant attention in contemporary discourse, especially in the context of global environmental concerns and

economic sustainability. These concepts advocate for responsible consumption patterns that minimize environmental degradation, promote social well-being, and ensure economic viability. The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 provide valuable insights and frameworks for fostering sustainable and ethical consumption practices.

Sustainable Consumption and Ethical Consumerism

Sustainable consumption refers to the use of goods and services in a manner that meets present needs while preserving resources for future generations. Ethical consumerism, on the other hand, involves making purchasing decisions based on ethical considerations such as environmental sustainability, fair trade, and corporate social responsibility. It encourages consumers to support businesses that align with sustainable and ethical values.

Indian Knowledge System and Sustainable Consumption

India has a rich cultural and philosophical tradition that inherently supports sustainable consumption and ethical consumerism. The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) emphasizes a harmonious relationship between humans and nature. Several key concepts in IKS illustrate this principle :

- **Ahimsa (Non-Violence):** Ahimsa, a fundamental principle in Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, advocates for non-violence towards all living beings. This principle promotes ethical consumption by discouraging practices that harm the environment and exploit labor.
- **Aparigraha (Minimalism and Non-Possessiveness):** This Jain and Yogic philosophy discourages material excess and promotes mindful consumption. It aligns with modern concepts of minimalism and sustainability.
- **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (The World is One Family):** This ancient Indian principle fosters global responsibility and ethical consumerism by encouraging sustainable trade practices that benefit all stakeholders.
- **Panch Mahabhuta (Five Elements Theory):** Indian traditions recognize the interdependence of earth, water, fire, air, and space. Sustainable consumption practices are deeply rooted in maintaining balance among these elements.
- **Traditional Agricultural Practices:** Indigenous agricultural methods, such as organic farming, crop rotation, and natural resource conservation, demonstrate sustainability principles. The promotion of organic products and local markets supports ethical consumerism.

NEP 2020 and Its Role in Promoting Sustainable and Ethical Consumption

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes holistic education and integrates sustainability concepts within the curriculum. It recognizes the importance of environmental consciousness and ethical responsibility in shaping future generations. Some of the key areas where NEP 2020 aligns with sustainable consumption include :

- **Incorporation of Environmental Education:** NEP 2020 encourages the integration of environmental education across various disciplines. It aims to in still values of sustainability and responsibility from an early age.
- **Skill Development and Sustainable Practices:** The policy emphasizes vocational training in sustainable industries such as organic farming, renewable energy, and waste management, fostering ethical entrepreneurship.
- **Promotion of Research in Indigenous Knowledge:** NEP 2020 promotes research in traditional knowledge systems, including sustainable agricultural practices, herbal medicine, and eco-friendly technologies.
- **Experiential and Community-Based Learning:** The policy encourages practical learning experiences such as community service and environmental projects, enabling students to engage in sustainable and ethical consumer practices.

- **Integration of Gandhian Values:** NEP 2020 echoes Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of self-sufficiency, sustainability, and ethical consumption by promoting local economies and rural development.

Future Perspectives :

- **Consumer Awareness:** Educating consumers about sustainable choices and ethical purchasing is crucial for long-term change. Schools and universities must integrate such topics into their curricula.
- **Government and Policy Interventions:** Policies that promote sustainable businesses, green products, and ethical trade practices should be strengthened and implemented effectively.
- **Corporate Responsibility:** Businesses must adopt ethical practices in production, supply chains, and marketing to align with sustainability goals.
- **Revival of Indigenous Practices:** Encouraging traditional, sustainable lifestyle practices can help in achieving environmental and social sustainability.
- **Technological Innovation:** Research and innovation in sustainable production, renewable energy, and waste management must be prioritized to support ethical consumerism.

On the bases of studied reviews of related literature the following variables of the study selected by researcher which are mentioned below :

Sustainable Consumption and Ethical Consumerism :

Sustainable consumption involves reducing environmental impact through responsible purchasing and consumption patterns (Jackson, 2005). Ethical consumerism focuses on purchasing goods that align with environmental, social, and ethical considerations (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). Studies show that conscious consumers prefer eco-friendly, cruelty-free, and fair-trade products (White, Habib, & Hardisty, 2019).

Indian Knowledge System and Sustainability:

Indian philosophy promotes harmony with nature and sustainable living. The Vedas, Upanishads, and Arthashastra emphasize environmental balance, conservation, and economic self-sufficiency (Sen, 2017). Concepts like "Rta" (cosmic order) and "Dharma" (righteous living) shape ethical consumption patterns. Ayurveda promotes plant-based consumption, herbal medicine, and organic farming (Sharma, 2019).

NEP 2020 and Consumer Behaviour :

NEP 2020 encourages sustainability education, indigenous knowledge, and entrepreneurship. It aims to cultivate "responsible global citizens" by integrating IKS into modern education. Studies indicate that exposure to IKS-based education influences ethical consumption habits (Rana & Kalia, 2021). The policy promotes vocational training in sustainable industries, organic agriculture, and eco-tourism.

The Role of Businesses and Government in Ethical Consumerism:

Corporations and policymakers play a vital role in sustainable production and consumer awareness.India's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) mandates, green initiatives, and eco-labeling policies encourage businesses to align with ethical consumerism (Ghosh, 2022). Government policies promoting organic farming, renewable energy, and plastic bans significantly influence consumer behavior.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the principles of "sustainable consumption" within the Indian Knowledge System.
2. To analyze how "NEP 2020" fosters ethical consumerism.
3. To examine consumer behavior in light of "traditional Indian values" and "modern sustainability challenges".
4. To provide "policy recommendations" for integrating IKS into sustainable business practices.

Research Methodology

This study follows "qualitative research approach" combining literature analysis, and case studies etc. to examine sustainable consumption and ethical consumerism in India. The secondary data has collected from the books, journal articles, government reports, Case studies (analysis of Indian businesses adopting "sustainable and ethical practices", and policy documents related to IKS, NEP 2020, and consumer behaviour.

Discussion

Lessons from Indian Knowledge System

i. **Minimalism and Ethical Consumption**: Ancient Indian texts promote "Aparigraha" (non-possessiveness), which aligns with sustainable consumer habits.
ii. **Sustainable Agriculture**: Traditional farming practices such as organic farming, crop rotation, and Ayurvedic agriculture* are eco-friendly and ethical
iii. **Circular Economy in Ancient India**: The reuse-recycle-reduce principle was embedded in ancient lifestyle choices, influencing modern zero-waste movements.

NEP 2020 and Sustainable Consumer Behaviour

i. **Education for Sustainability**: NEP 2020 integrates "environmental studies and indigenous knowledge into school curricula".
ii. **Vocational Training in Ethical Sectors**:NEP promotes "entrepreneurship in sustainable industries, including organic food, Ayurveda, and eco-tourism".
iii. **Promotion of Ethical Branding**: NEP fosters awareness about *ethical business models, encouraging responsible consumerism.

Comparative Analysis of consumer behaviour in traditional versus modern Indian Markets

A comparative analysis of consumer behaviour in traditional versus modern Indian markets reveals significant shifts influenced by economic growth, technological advancements, and changing cultural dynamics. Below are key statistics and insights highlighting these trends:

i. Shift from Traditional to Modern Retail Formats:

Historically, India's retail sector was dominated by traditional formats such as local "kirana" (mom-and-pop) stores.The share of modern retail formats, including supermarkets and hypermarkets, has been increasing, particularly in urban areas. This shift is driven by changing consumer preferences for convenience, variety, and a better shopping experience.

ii. Urban-Rural Consumption Patterns:

The rural consumer spending is growing at a faster rate than urban spending. In 2023/24, rural per capita spending increased by 9.55% year-on-year, compared to 8.31% in urban areas. This trend suggests a convergence in consumption patterns between rural and urban consumers. Both urban and rural households have increased their spending on non-food items. In rural areas, non-food expenditure rose to approximately 53% of per capita spending in 2023/24, up from 47% in 2011/12. Urban areas saw an increase to 60% from 57% in the same period.

iii. Digital Influence and Online Shopping:

The proliferation of smartphones and internet access has led to a surge in online shopping, with consumers increasingly preferring the convenience and variety offered by e-commerce platforms. Digital advertisements significantly influence consumer awareness, interest, and purchasing decisions, especially among younger demographics

iv. Changing Product Preferences:

There is a growing demand for health-oriented and organic products, reflecting a shift towards wellness and sustainability.With rising disposable incomes, consumers are increasingly willing to spend on premium and branded products, moving away from solely price-sensitive purchasing behaviors.

v. Regional Variations:

Consumer behavior varies across different regions of India, influenced by local cultures, traditions, and economic conditions. Businesses need to tailor their strategies to accommodate these regional differences.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Sustainable consumption and ethical consumerism are deeply rooted in Indian Knowledge System, and NEP 2020 provides a framework to revive and integrate these values into modern consumer behavior. The principles of sustainable consumption and ethical consumerism are deeply embedded in the Indian Knowledge System and find reinforcement in the NEP 2020. By integrating traditional wisdom with modern policies and educational frameworks, India can lead the way in promoting responsible consumption patterns that ensure environmental sustainability, economic resilience, and social equity. The synergy between ancient Indian principles and contemporary educational reforms provides a robust foundation for fostering a sustainable future.

Recommendations

i. Education Reforms: Strengthening NEP's focus on sustainability and IKS-Based Business Models.

ii.**Government Support:** Policies promoting eco-certifications, fair trade, and sustainable entrepreneurship.

iii. **Corporate Initiatives:**Ethical branding, green marketing, and CSR programs that promote sustainable consumption.

iv. **Consumer Awareness:** Campaigns that highlight the benefits of ethical consumerism and sustainable living.

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