Awareness of and Behaviour in Sustainable Consumption

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What is Sustainable consumption (SC)?

• 1994 Oslo Symposium defined SC as
  ➢ Use of services and related products respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life (wisely consume)
  ➢ Minimize negative environmental impacts (use less natural resources, generate less toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants) over the life cycle of the service or product
  ➢ Not to jeopardize the needs of future generations

• SC ≠ No consumption; SC ≠ Consuming less; SC ≠ Poor economy; SC ≠ Lower quality of life
• SC = Wise/Smart consumption; SC = Use more efficiency and less polluting goods
• Targets everyone, from individual to governments and multi-national conglomerates
Why do we need SC?

• Human consumption continuously and significantly impacts upon the environment
• In last 50 years, global population has consumed more goods and services than combined total of all previous generations that foster economic growth, improve quality of life BUT cause environmental degradation, depletion of natural resources, global warming, climate change…….

Population growth
Globally consumers are expected to rise from 7 billion to 9 billion by 2050

Economic growth
Increased production and consumption of goods
Bigger homes
More energy use

Lifestyle choices
Meat and meat products replacing vegetables
Throwaway society
Greater leisure travel
How to achieve SC?

• Increase in efficiency of consumption, achieve by
  ➢ Technological improvements
  ➢ Eco-efficient support

• Changes in consumption patterns and reductions in consumption levels, especially in industrialized countries, requires
  ➢ Attitude and behavioral changes: many consumers are well aware of the importance of SC and care about environment, but most do not translate their concerns into actions, due to high prices; lack of awareness, information, support; traditional habits………..
  ➢ Changes in infrastructures

• Essential to understand how consumers behave and to nurture their SC behaviour
  ➢ Are SD, SCP and SC in Hong Kong? Any voice? Any agenda?
Consumer Council: 1st Questionnaire Survey and Focus Group Discussion

Undertaken August – September 2015 to understand Hong Kong Consumers’ Attitude and Behaviour towards SC

To develop a baseline picture of Hong Kong consumers’ awareness, behaviour and readiness towards SC

To understand to what extent and which aspects of sustainability influence consumers’ current purchasing decisions, and their current status of behaviour
Framework for the Survey

Consumers’ awareness and attitudes towards environmental protection and SC

Consumers’ behaviour in relation to SC

Consumers’ readiness towards SC

Telephone interview: 1000 Cantonese-speaking HK people (age: 15-64), each lasted 20-30 minutes
Discussion forum
Consumers’ Awareness

• Concern for the environment & adverse impact of people’s consumption
• Understanding of the concept of SC
• Relationships between SC and other issues
• Impact on consumption behavior to environment
• Preference for sustainable products
• Attitudes towards energy conservation and waste separation
Concern over the environment

• 38% concerned over the environment
  BUT
• 22% said NOT concerned
• Younger (aged 15 to 29), better educated (tertiary) and higher income people (monthly salary >HK$20000) tended to be more concerned
Impact of consumption pattern upon environment

- Similar to Q(i), 38% considered their consumption had big impact upon the environment.
- Also younger, higher income people tended to think their consumption had more impact.
- However, around 22% thought little or no impact.
Understanding of the concept of SC

- 44.2% did not quite understand or fully failed to understand the concept of SC
- Out of those fully fail to understand/not quite understand:
  - 51% aged 45 to 64
  - 63% were Retired Person

Majority (94.3%) indicated that the survey enhanced their understanding upon SC
What does “SC” mean to you?

Close to UNEP’s definition

Top 3 issues are:

- Thinking about the future generations (76%)
- Looking after the environment (75%)
- Society having to consume more efficiently (65%)

Only 39% felt “You need to consume less”!!
Top 3 related issues are:

- Reducing waste (75% support)
- Using energy efficiently (70%)
- Avoiding using harmful substances and production method (66%)
Summary on consumers’ awareness

• HK people’s intuitive understanding of SC is close to UN’s official definition
• Agree that SC is pivotal and powerful to SD
• BUT few people felt they should consume less
• Most strongly embrace SC ideas related to their own daily experiences, i.e., issues they face everyday
  - Waste reduction/recycling
  - Energy conservation
  - Avoid harmful substance
• Less concerned with remote issues, e.g. fair trade, animal welfares
Consumers’ Behaviour

- Purchasing behavior: habits being practiced
- Conservation behaviour
- Recycling behaviour
Purchasing behaviour: to what extent do you agree with followings about your purchasing behaviour?

**Significant agreement (over 60%)**

- Buy energy-efficient appliances
  - Strongly agree: 19
  - Agree: 59
  - Neutral: 18
  - Disagree: 31
- Carry your own bag and stop using plastic bags
  - Strongly agree: 23
  - Agree: 46
  - Neutral: 23
  - Disagree: 6
- Refuse to eat meat from endangered animals
  - Strongly agree: 28
  - Agree: 36
  - Neutral: 26
  - Disagree: 9
- Buy water-efficient products
  - Strongly agree: 17
  - Agree: 52
  - Neutral: 21
  - Disagree: 8
- Refuse to purchase clothes made from endangered animals
  - Strongly agree: 25
  - Agree: 37
  - Neutral: 25
  - Disagree: 10
- Repair broken domestic appliances and continue to use it
  - Strongly agree: 12
  - Agree: 52
  - Neutral: 28
  - Disagree: 8
- Bring your own bottle to consume less bottled drinks
  - Strongly agree: 17
  - Agree: 42
  - Neutral: 29
  - Disagree: 9
- Avoid buying single-use products
  - Strongly agree: 11
  - Agree: 45
  - Neutral: 35
  - Disagree: 8
- Plan what you are going to buy before shopping
  - Strongly agree: 12
  - Agree: 42
  - Neutral: 34
  - Disagree: 9
- Borrow seldom used items from friends or neighbours
  - Strongly agree: 12
  - Agree: 41
  - Neutral: 32
  - Disagree: 12
- Buy new products with green technology
  - Strongly agree: 10
  - Agree: 40
  - Neutral: 36
  - Disagree: 11
- Buy food with green labels
  - Strongly agree: 6
  - Agree: 29
  - Neutral: 43
  - Disagree: 17
  - Strongly disagree: 5
- Purchase unnecessary items
  - Strongly agree: 6
  - Agree: 29
  - Neutral: 37
  - Disagree: 22
  - Strongly disagree: 6

**Higher support:**
- Bring about economic efficiency

**Lower support:**
- Expensive such as green labelled products
Conservation behaviour:
Do you usually practice the following?

Support activities simple to execute:
• Turn off light
• Use energy saving light bulbs
• Conserve water

Older people although less concerned with environment, more likely to do the above

Lower Support:
• Need more effort/planning
• Give some discomfort, e.g., reduce the use of air-conditioner, lower the curtains to prevent heat loss
Conservation behaviour: Do you usually practice the following habits?

For those save money and convenient:
- Usually walk or use public transport
- Pack uneaten food
- Recycle

Not those:
- Require behavior / lifestyle change
- Need more effort / planning
- Give some discomfort, e.g., reduce travel by plane

Particularly younger generation, they should learn more and adopt environmental behaviours more vigorously.
Summary on consumers’ behaviour

- Still much room for HK people to enhance their SC behaviours to become an “always” habit rather than “usually” or “sometimes”
- Older people, although they were less concerned about the environment, were more likely to support SC (recycle and pack uneaten food)
- Younger people could learn from their elders
- People need to be helped to convert good intentions into actions through
  - Better education
  - Better infrastructure
  - Better information
  - Wider range of suitable sustainable produce choices
Consumers’ Readiness

- Willingness to pay extra for eco-friendly products and consideration of SC
- Consumers’ motives towards SC
- Consumers’ support / commitment for SC
How much more would you be prepared to pay more for the following products?

- Large majority (75%) prepared to pay more price premium for more sustainable product, esp. if they provide greater safety or economy in-use
- More true for consumers earning >HK$20,000
- BUT
- Less true for older and retired consumers
- 25% NOT prepared to pay a price premium for more sustainable products

Remarks: The sum of the percentages may not equal to 100 due to rounding.
Motives for making environmental or sustainable purchases?

Top 3 reasons:
- Environmental Protection
- Energy Conservation
- Future Generation

Students: Protecting environment and energy saving

Employed people: Waste reduction and less harmful materials

Retired people: Consideration for future generations
Motives for not making environmental or sustainable purchases?

Top 3 reasons:
- Lack of suitable information
- High prices
- Lack of suitable product

People are not opposed or uninterested in SC
BUT
There are obstacles (may be overcome by Government and businesses)
High proportion of respondents are prepared to support SC but:

- Require more information
- Government to drive, formulate right regulations and infrastructure
- In-line with lifestyle

**Remarks:** The sum of the percentages may not equal to 100 due to rounding.
Summary on consumers’ readiness

• Only about half of respondents said they usually purchased sustainable products.

• Younger consumers and students claimed they would be prepared to pay more BUT did not translate into actions.

• Lack of information and high prices are main factors holding consumers back.

• Reasons towards SC:
  - Concern for environment
  - Energy conservation
  - For next generation, particularly retired people
Sustainable Consumption Index (SCI)

Based on framework, three indexes were constructed from 9 constituent parts, awareness-behavior-readiness

Consumers’ awareness and attitudes towards sustainable consumption
- Concern of product information
- Attitudes towards energy conservation
- Attitudes towards waste separation

Consumers’ behaviour in relation to sustainable consumption
- Purchasing behaviour
- Conservation behaviour
- Recycling behaviour

Consumers’ readiness towards sustainable consumption
- Consumers’ willingness to purchase products in consideration of sustainable consumption
- Consumers’ support towards sustainable consumption
- Consumers’ motives towards sustainable consumption
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- Consumers are fairly concerned and aware about SC and their consumption can impact environment **BUT**
- Have to be motivated to take further action (a gap between action and expectation)
Summary of First survey

• A high level of awareness of and concerned of SC amongst HK people
• Support most strongly for issues they can directly experience such as waste reduction and energy conservation
• Action is greatest only for simple behaviour such as switching off lights BUT not for things less convenient or require more effort, like turn off air-conditioner or less air-travel
• Beliefs and agreements do not translate into actions

SO
• Need to strengthen people’s support and action
• Need to enhance their understanding of SC through education
• Need to instil the belief that consumers can influence business and government
Challenges Ahead

4 Stakeholders

• Consumers

• Consumer Council & NGOs

• Government

• Business Sectors
Challenges for Consumers

Citizen Responsibility:
• Make themselves informed of consumption impact to environment

Take Action:
• Make purchases & take actions consistent to beliefs and awareness

Lifestyle Change:
• Not merely small and simple changes, but take on more significant and challenge changes
Challenges for Consumer Council & Other NGOs

**Behaviour Change:**
- Use various communication vehicles to educate and influence SC behaviour of consumers

**International Cooperation:**
- Engage with international and regional consumer bodies to monitor global measures and to explore collaboration

**Communicate Consumer Viewpoints:**
- Understand consumer priorities and concerns on SC issues and feed into stakeholders

**Co-ordination among stakeholders:**
- Act as an active co-ordinator among the 4 stakeholders; organizing activities; supporting initiatives
Challenges for Government

Synchronised Action:
• Well co-ordination among bureaux and statutory bodies

Effective Planning:
• Collect, analyze and disclose data; perform strategic planning

Targeted Product Charges or Subsidies:
• Influence consumer purchases through carefully targeted product charges or subsidies to drive SC choices

Incentivising More Energy-Efficient Purchases:
• Consider incentive or support schemes to encourage take-up of energy-efficient products

School curriculum:
• Encourage experimental learning and provision of information
Sustainability Performance of Products:

• Provide high-quality, pertinent and trustworthy information; use of sustainability certification schemes

Anticipation of Consumer Demand:

• Take proactive action to bring sustainable products to local market

Environmental Social and Governance (ESG) Reporting:

• Improve quality and level of disclosure to provide meaningful data on business performance
The way forward
The Council’s next three year strategy
Work in Partnership with Stakeholders to...

- Advocating and promoting the key messages and behaviours on sustainable consumption to the general public
- Enhancing consumers’ capability to understand ecolabels
- Including sustainability aspects in the Council’s testing and survey projects to enhance consumer information
- Monitoring consumer needs and demands on sustainable consumption
Sustainable Consumption Behaviour Survey

- Baseline survey conducted in Sep 2015
- Whether consumer attitudes have changed over the recent few years
- Any changes in consumer behaviour e.g. purchasing habits, conservation and recycling actions, willingness to pay following the lead by Government and businesses
Ecolabel Products

- Wide range of rival voluntary labelling schemes to market the sustainability characteristics of their goods e.g. fair trade, organic, low energy, low emission, sustainable harvesting etc.
- To develop useful tool to help consumers understand the meaning behind different labels before making choices
Promote Sustainable Lifestyle

• Work with overseas counterparts to understand benefits and implications of peer-to-peer consumption to consumers, and advocate for the right safeguards

• Repairing / Reconditioning of goods i.e. reduce waste from production by repairing or restoring old or defective items
Long March of SC, Starts from Me

民、會、政、商  衷誠合作

千里之行 始於足下
可持续消费 從我做起
Thank you!