



CONSUMER AWARENESS TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS

Tanuja S.¹ and Dr. P. M. Shiva Prasad²

¹Research Scholar, Teresian College Research Centre, (recognised by University of Mysore), Mysuru – 570 011,

²Assistant Professor and Guide, Teresian College Research Centre, (recognised by University of Mysore), Mysuru – 570 011,

ABSTRACT

Consumer awareness towards sustainable menstrual products is becoming increasingly critical as environmental sustainability and health-conscious choices gain momentum. This study delves into the level of awareness, perceptions, and purchasing behaviour of consumers concerning sustainable menstrual products. By analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data, the research identifies key drivers, barriers, and trends in the adoption of eco-friendly alternatives, such as reusable pads, menstrual cups, and biodegradable tampons. The study also evaluates the effectiveness of awareness and the role of social, cultural, and economic factors in shaping consumer preferences. The results highlight the essential for targeted education, improved product accessibility, and policy interventions to enhance the adoption of sustainable menstrual products, offering valuable insights for stakeholders in promoting a more sustainable approach to menstrual health.

KEYWORDS: Consumer awareness, sustainable, reusable, menstrual products.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing focus on environmental sustainability and health-conscious living has brought attention to the need for sustainable menstrual products. Conventional menstruation products, including disposable menstrual pads and tampons, can lead to significant pollution in the environment due to being made from plastic and having to go through real challenges when it comes to disposal. The environmental impact is immense due to millions being earned through the usage and discarding of these products, worsening problems like landfill waste and water pollution.

The need for sustainable solutions to environmental issues is necessary thus raising awareness about eco-friendly menstrual products. There are some sustainable options like reusable menstrual cups, cloth pads and biodegradable tampons are just a few of the choices to deliver effective periods while minimizing waste and reducing your ecological footprint. However, despite their advantages, these products are not widely adopted due to limited awareness, accessibility challenges and cultural stigmas associated with menstrual health.

Educating consumers about the environmental impact of traditional products and the advantages of sustainable alternatives can lead to a change in consumer behaviour. Awareness initiatives can also help clear up misconceptions, reduce stigmas, and promote informed decision-making, empowering individuals to make choices that benefit both their health and the environment.

Furthermore, spreading awareness is not just about individual decision-making—it carries broader significance for public health, economic growth, and social inclusion. By promoting sustainable menstrual products, we can contribute to a reduction in the carbon footprint, support local economies through the production and sale of eco-friendly products, and ensure that menstrual health is approached in a way that respects both the environment and individual rights

In this context, this article aims to emphasize the vital role of consumer awareness in the adoption of sustainable menstrual products. This research article provides valuable insights into the factors that influence consumer preferences when purchasing menstrual products. This framework is important not only for product development and marketing strategies but also for understanding the elements that enhance consumer awareness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer behaviour as a complex interplay of emotional, mental and social influences that determine purchasing decisions. The study stresses the importance of understanding consumer needs and behaviours in a current market (Kumar, 2019). Highlights that menstrual hygiene management (MHM) remains a neglected issue in many developing nations, significantly impacting menstruating individuals. Challenges such as social exclusion, mobility restrictions, and inadequate waste management persist due to deep-rooted cultural norms. The article underscores the environmental, health, and social implications of MHM and calls for research-driven solutions to improve sustainability and women's well-being (Mishra, 2024). Consumer preferences are shaped by expectations, marketing strategies, product features, brand knowledge, and social influences. These factors collectively impact purchasing behaviour and product loyalty (Alex, 2019). Psychological factors, including personality, taste, attitudes, and lifestyle, influence consumer preferences. Demonstration effects further shape purchasing decisions, particularly during significant life events (Singh, 2018). The socio-economic impact on adolescent health, noting that lower socio-economic groups prioritize health education less than their higher-status counterparts. Menstrual stigma persists across cultures, fuelled by taboos and myths, despite scientific advancements (Parvin, 2016). Simultaneously, the impact of professional, personal, and social roles on menstrual product purchasing behaviour. Income disparities also contribute to variations in consumer choices (Hemanth et al., 2014).

Taboos and misconceptions surrounding sanitary napkins, particularly in rural areas where affordability and accessibility remain barriers. They recommend eco-friendly alternatives such as banana fibre sanitary pads and suggest aligning packaging and advertising strategies with rural consumers' needs to increase demand and sustainability (Lather and Singh, 2023).

Women's perceptions of organic menstrual products, identifying comfort, availability, and cost as key determinants of preference. The study reveals a significant lack of awareness, which hinders widespread adoption. (Jain et al., 2023). Women exposed to menstrual cups through educational or media initiatives show greater acceptance, particularly in urban areas where stigma around vaginal insertion is lower (Babbar, 2023). Environmental and health risks of disposable menstrual products, emphasizing their synthetic composition, slow decomposition, and potential health hazards from manufacturing processes (Borowski, 2011).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article focuses on extensive review of literature of secondary data collected from various books, national and international journals, publications from online journals which focused on various context of consumer awareness towards menstrual products.

SUSTAINABLE MESTRUAL PRODUCTS

This article on consumer awareness regarding sustainable menstrual products emphasizes the variety of choices available to individuals. Sustainable menstrual products are designed with environmental factors in mind, aiming to reduce waste, lower carbon emissions, and provide a safer, more eco-friendly option for managing menstruation. These products serve as green alternatives to traditional menstrual hygiene items like disposable pads and tampons. These products are environmentally designed to minimize waste, reduce carbon footprints, and offer a safer, more sustainable solution for menstrual management.

Examples of sustainable menstrual products include:

1. MENSTRUAL CUPS

Menstrual cups are reusable devices made from medical-grade materials that collect menstrual fluid instead of absorbing it, presenting an eco-friendly option compared to disposable products. Usually crafted from medical-grade silicone, rubber, or elastomer, these bell-shaped cups are inserted into the vaginal canal, creating a secure seal against the vaginal walls to prevent leaks.

Environmental and Economic Benefits

Menstrual cups greatly decrease menstrual waste, as they can be reused for several years with proper maintenance. In contrast to disposable pads and tampons, which contribute to landfill waste and ocean pollution, menstrual cups provide a long-term sustainable solution. Their durability also makes them a cost-effective option, alleviating the financial strain of buying disposable products every month.

Health and Safety Considerations

Menstrual cups are free from harmful chemicals, fragrances, and bleaching agents commonly found in conventional sanitary products, thereby reducing the risk of allergic reactions, irritation, and exposure to potentially toxic substances. Moreover, unlike tampons, menstrual cups do not disrupt vaginal pH levels or cause excessive dryness, preserving the natural microbiome. When used correctly and cleaned properly, menstrual cups have been found to have a low risk of infections, including toxic shock syndrome (TSS), a rare but serious bacterial infection associated with tampon use.

User Acceptance and Challenges

Menstrual cups do not contain harmful chemicals, fragrances, or bleaching agents often found in conventional sanitary products, which helps minimize the risk of allergic reactions, irritation, and exposure to potentially harmful substances. Additionally, unlike tampons, menstrual cups do not alter vaginal pH levels or cause excessive dryness, helping to maintain the natural microbiome. When used and cleaned correctly, menstrual cups have a low risk of infections, including toxic shock syndrome (TSS), a rare but serious bacterial infection linked to tampon use. However, initial discomfort, the learning curve involved in using and removing them, and limited access to clean water and sanitation facilities present challenges, especially in low-resource environments.

Menstrual cups offer a sustainable and cost-effective alternative to traditional menstrual products, providing notable environmental, economic, and health benefits. By raising awareness, enhancing accessibility, and tackling socio-cultural barriers, we can promote the broader use of menstrual cups, which will aid in both menstrual health management and environmental sustainability.

2. REUSABLE CLOTH PADS

Reusable cloth pads serve as an eco-friendly alternative to disposable sanitary pads, designed to provide a sustainable and cost-effective option for menstrual management. Typically made from layers of absorbent materials like organic cotton, bamboo, or hemp, these pads can be washed and reused multiple times, helping to reduce waste and lessen environmental impact.

Environmental and Economic Advantages

In contrast to disposable pads, which significantly contribute to landfill waste and ocean pollution, reusable cloth pads present a sustainable solution by cutting down on single-use plastic waste. Their durability allows for long-term use, often lasting several years with proper care, making them a cost-effective choice compared to commercial disposable products. This affordability is especially advantageous for individuals in low-income communities who may struggle to afford menstrual hygiene products.

Health and Comfort Considerations

Reusable cloth pads do not contain synthetic chemicals, fragrances, or bleaching agents commonly found in disposable pads, which lowers the risk of skin irritation and allergic reactions. Their breathable fabric helps to prevent excessive moisture buildup, reducing the chances of bacterial growth and infections. Many users find them more comfortable than disposable options, as cloth pads offer a softer, more natural feel against the skin.

Challenges and Adoption Barriers

Despite their benefits, the uptake of reusable cloth pads is affected by factors like awareness, cultural attitudes, and access to proper sanitation facilities. In certain areas, menstrual taboos and social stigmas hinder open conversations about sustainable menstrual practices. Moreover, having sufficient access to clean water and hygiene infrastructure is crucial for the proper care of cloth pads, which presents challenges in resource-limited environments.

Reusable cloth pads offer a practical, eco-friendly, and cost-effective alternative to disposable menstrual products. While they provide significant environmental and health advantages, broader adoption necessitates enhanced awareness, education, and better access to water and sanitation facilities.

3. BIODEGRADABLE TAMPOONS AND PADS

Biodegradable tampons and pads serve as sustainable alternatives to traditional disposable menstrual products, aimed at reducing environmental impact. Unlike conventional pads and tampons, which are made from synthetic materials and plastics that contribute to long-lasting waste, biodegradable options are crafted from natural, plant-based materials like organic cotton, bamboo, and cornstarch-derived bioplastics. These materials decompose more rapidly, helping to lessen landfill waste and environmental pollution.

Environmental and Economic Benefits

Traditional menstrual products can take centuries to break down due to their plastic content. In contrast, biodegradable pads and tampons can decompose within months or years, depending on the materials and disposal conditions. By opting for biodegradable choices, individuals can significantly lower their carbon footprint and aid in waste reduction efforts. Although biodegradable menstrual products are often pricier than conventional options, their environmental advantages make the cost worthwhile for many consumers, and rising demand may lead to better affordability in the future.

Health and Safety Considerations

Biodegradable tampons and pads are typically free from harmful chemicals, synthetic fragrances, and bleaching agents, making them a safer choice for menstrual health. In contrast, conventional products may contain pesticide residues and dioxins from the bleaching process, which have been associated with potential health risks. By using organic and biodegradable materials, the likelihood of skin irritation, allergic reactions, and chemical exposure is reduced. Furthermore, these products offer good absorbency and comfort, ensuring effective menstrual protection without compromising safety.

Challenges and Adoption Barriers

Despite their benefits, biodegradable tampons and pads encounter challenges in gaining widespread acceptance. The higher production costs lead to increased retail prices, which can make them less accessible for individuals in low-income communities. Additionally, proper disposal infrastructure is crucial to ensure these products biodegrade effectively. Insufficient composting or waste management systems may hinder decomposition, limiting their environmental advantages. Raising consumer awareness and education is also vital, as many people are still unaware of the benefits and proper disposal methods for biodegradable menstrual products.

Biodegradable tampons and pads offer a promising solution for reducing menstrual waste and minimizing environmental impact. While they provide significant health and ecological benefits, broader adoption requires making them more affordable, improving disposal systems, and increasing consumer awareness. Future research should aim to enhance biodegradability, optimize costs, and develop policies that promote the shift to sustainable menstrual products.

4. PERIOD UNDER WARE

Period underwear has become increasingly popular as an innovative and sustainable option for managing menstruation. Often called menstrual panties, period underwear utilizes advanced fabric technology to deliver leak-proof, absorbent, and reusable protection against menstrual flow.

Environmental and Economic Benefits

Period underwear provides notable environmental advantages by decreasing the dependence on single-use menstrual products like tampons and pads. Conventional disposable items generate substantial waste due to their non-biodegradable components and packaging. In contrast, period underwear is reusable and intended for long-term use, which helps to reduce waste production. This eco-friendly choice lessens the environmental impact linked to menstrual hygiene products, reflecting the increasing global focus on waste reduction and sustainable alternatives.

From an economic standpoint, while the upfront cost of buying period underwear may be higher than that of disposable products, it leads to savings over time. Period underwear is robust and can endure for several years with appropriate care. This longevity diminishes the need for frequent purchases of disposable items, resulting in considerable financial savings. For those who menstruate for many years, investing in reusable period underwear proves to be a cost-effective option.

Health and Safety Considerations

Period underwear offers various health benefits compared to traditional menstrual products. Disposable pads and tampons often contain chemicals, fragrances, and synthetic materials that can irritate the skin or trigger allergic reactions in some users. In contrast, period underwear is generally crafted from natural and hypoallergenic materials, such as cotton or bamboo, which are gentler on the skin. This can significantly lower the chances of irritation, rashes, or other skin issues commonly linked to disposable products.

Additionally, period underwear is free from harmful chemicals like dioxins, which can be present in some traditional menstrual products. This absence of toxic substances provides a safer alternative for menstruators, especially those with sensitive skin or health issues. The breathable materials used in period underwear also promote better airflow, which can help reduce the likelihood of fungal infections or discomfort that often comes from the moisture retention found in pads or tampons.

However, maintaining proper care and hygiene is crucial to avoid any potential health risks. Period underwear should be washed regularly and in accordance with the manufacturer's guidelines to ensure its effectiveness and to prevent bacterial growth. Neglecting this could result in skin irritation or other health problems.

User Acceptance and Challenges

Despite the benefits, there are several obstacles to the widespread use of period underwear. One significant challenge is the initial cost. The upfront expense of purchasing high-quality period underwear can deter some individuals, particularly when compared to the lower initial price of disposable menstrual products. However, as previously mentioned, this cost is balanced out by the product's durability, making it a more economical choice over time.

While awareness and demand for sustainable menstrual products are on the rise, some individuals may hesitate to transition to period underwear due to unfamiliarity or cultural taboos surrounding menstruation. In many cultures, menstruation remains a stigmatized topic, and the concept of reusable menstrual products may appear unconventional or socially unacceptable to some. This can limit the appeal of the product, especially in regions where disposable menstrual products are more readily available or socially accepted.

Another challenge is the different levels of absorbency that period underwear provides. While many styles are designed for light to moderate flow, those with heavier menstrual flow might find that period underwear alone doesn't offer enough protection. In these situations, users may need to pair period underwear with other menstrual products, like menstrual cups or tampons, which could impact the convenience and overall effectiveness of the product.

Many people are not aware of period underwear or its benefits, so widespread education is crucial for changing perceptions and encouraging more people to try it. Improving access to accurate information about the advantages of period underwear, including its environmental and health benefits, is essential for reducing stigma and promoting its use.

Period underwear presents a strong alternative to traditional menstrual products, offering significant environmental, economic, and health benefits. Its potential to decrease menstrual product waste, along with long-term cost savings and the use of health-conscious materials, makes it an appealing choice for many consumers. However, challenges such as initial costs, user acceptance, and limitations in absorbency still exist.

CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes the importance of raising awareness and promoting the use of sustainable menstrual products for the benefit of both the environment and personal health. It identifies challenges such as limited awareness, cultural obstacles, and high costs that need to be tackled to motivate women to opt for eco-friendly alternatives. Key strategies to encourage the widespread adoption of these products include enhancing educational initiatives, increasing their availability, and implementing supportive policies. By fostering collaboration across various sectors, we can improve access to these products, making them a common choice and contributing to a healthier, more sustainable future.

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