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The Need for Living Sustainably in an Urban City

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Abstract: Sustainability of lifestyle is an important need of the time as Earth's resource deplete with the present unsustainable rate of the use of resources. For ensuring sustainable development and attaining the sustainable development goal including that of the 12th SDG to ensure sustainable consumption and production, encouraging the adoption of sustainable lifestyles is important. This study develops on this concept by review of relevant literature and observation and survey of people in the urban city of Delhi, India.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, SDGs, Sustainable lifestyle, Sustainable consumption

I. Introduction

The modern world has seen an increased prominence of sustainability in multiple aspects.

In 2015 all nations a part of the United Nations (UN) adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that consists of 17 interlinked goals to foster a balanced development comprising of social, environmental, and economic sustainability and is presently envisioned to be achieved by 2030 and its achievement has a role for many to contribute including individuals. (United Nations Development Program, n.d)

According to the Global Footprint Network, humans presently use resources and contribute waste that requires an equivalent of 1.6 Earths to maintain and this unsustainable usage per year has shown an increasing trend. (Global Footprint Network, n.d)

There is also an emergent need for people to live their lives sustainably. The present unsustainable use of the Earth's resources contributes to numerous problems including wastage, climate change, etc. and is attempted to be targeted specifically by the 12th SDG to ensure sustainable consumption and production (United Nations, 2020)

Hence, it is an important need for individuals across the world to practice a sustainable lifestyle. To have a sustainable lifestyle may involve continuing pre-existing consumption practices but while also evaluating environmental and social effects while identifying particular items to purchase or else by lowering existing levels of consumption such as by using shared items etc. (Longo, Shankar, and Nuttall, 2016) However often a gap exists between concerns of the environment and the actual practice of adopting environmental-friendly modes of living (Miller and Bentley, 2015).

A major aspect of sustainable consumption and production (SCP) is to consider the impacts at each stage of the life-cycle of the production and consumption process (United Nations Environment Program, 2011)

The prominent environmentalist, Lester R. Brown defines sustainable living in present times as "shifting to a renewable energy-based, reuse/recycle economy with a diversified transport system." (Brown, 2007)

II. Research Methodology:

This research is an exploratory study on a sustainable lifestyle through both a review of existing literature on this topic and the use of observation and survey of people in an urban city to gain an understanding of the current state of sustainability of lifestyles of people and the challenges they face in adopting such a lifestyle.

This method focused on both observations and surveys of people to identify various existing prominent practices in the city of Delhi, India, and various recommendations to encourage the adoption of a sustainable lifestyle. The survey and observations were considered by convenience sampling. The focus of this study is to evaluate the general thinking of people relating to all stages in the consumption process in this perspective of a sustainable lifestyle.

Furthermore, recommendations for business organizations and governments are made based on observations and surveys of people.

III. Literature Review:

Longo, Shankar and Nuttall(2016) studied the role of additional relevant information and knowledge as a motivation for an individual, who is already aware and practices sustainability, to act sustainably. Their study noted that as an individual's awareness and understanding of information related to sustainability, there is a greater difficulty of taking appropriate decisions to maintain a sustainable lifestyle and a feeling of stress and disillusionment due to a self-perceived inadequacy of an individual's actions in light of the newly acquired information and this may cause a decrease satisfaction of decisions taken or possibility even an inability to take decisions.

Miller and Bentley(2015) analysed the motivators of those attempting to maintain a sustainable lifestyle. They noted that many such people state a moral reason to behave sustainably and also past experiences of witnessing environmental degradation. However, they noted the latter may have inconsistent effects on different individuals. Furthermore, they also analysed the difference in opinions of those residing in areas designed to support sustainable living for residents such as an ecovillage as compared to residents in traditional suburban areas, it was noted that the first category of people appreciated the support of a conducive surrounding sustainable environment, while the second category was enthused by attempting to live sustainably in an unconducive and unsustainable environment possibly indicating in personality characteristics influencing their opinions.

Cheng, Long, Chen and Yang(2019) analysed the influence of various factors including the conviction to follow a sustainable lifestyle. It was noted people who had a preference towards the environment had an enduring decision to live sustainably as compared to those who preferred their comfort first. Decisions made by those having a preference to seek information made transient choices of following a sustainable lifestyle. This was indicative that customized communication has to be made for different groups to pursue them to engage in a sustainable lifestyle. Overall, a group tends to adopt such a lifestyle when benefits exceed the cost and a herd mentality can also play some role to encourage people to behave sustainably and may be leveraged appropriately.

Lawrence and McManus(2008) studied the influence of programs conducted to encourage and educate people to live lives sustainably by reducing their consumption of water. They noted that participants stated that their predisposition and behaviour improved to practices more congenial to the environment after the programs, however, there was no clear pattern of actual reduction of the consumption of water possibly due to other factors such as technological and infrastructure limitations.

White, Habib, Hardisty(2009) noted that marketing can play a role in encouraging consumers to adopt more sustainable behaviours and they developed a broad framework to include various aspects that may influence consumer to adopt a more sustainable behaviour such as influence of other people, positive associations with self-etc. They noted there is no unique solution that will be applicable in all cases and the existence of many highly specific situations hinder generalizability.

IV. Observation and study of households in the urban areas of the city of Delhi:

It was found that many people expressed concern for the environment and its degradation. Common practices stated by people towards attempting to maintain a sustainable lifestyle include:

1. **Reducing consumption and/or increasing efficiency by alternatives:** Purchasing energy-efficient appliances and lights, minimizing the use of electricity when not in use, using public transport, using cloth bags, etc.
2. **Recycling and reusing:** Recycling material such as newspapers, certain containers, and packaging and reusing old items for novel purposes.

However, only a few people stated that they specifically consider the environmental and social impacts of all their consumption activities. The level of present consumption was mostly stated to be influenced by need and price rather than sustainability concerns of environment and social concerns.

In addition, the practices followed are mostly connected with the generally known environment-friendly practices and there was the realisation that there is possible scope for incorporating more environmentally friendly practices.

The Common challenges stated by people for maintain a sustainable lifestyle include:

Challenges to reducing consumption and increasing efficiency

1. The higher price of many products stating to be environmentally friendly.
2. Lack of trust of environmental-friendly claims
3. Lack of present viable alternatives of many commonly used items such as fuel for the vehicle.

Recycling and Reusing:

1. Lack of options known to them to dispose of certain items such as e-waste (old CDs, pen drives), plastics
2. Difficulty in finding local recycling centers for certain items.

By enquiry and observation of household's certain possible recommendations to help encourage adoption of a sustainable lifestyle include:

Recommendations for people:

1. Consider after an occasional period if an item is purchased is still actually required and if better alternatives are now available.
2. Identify non-toxic environmental-friendly products to also consider when making purchase decisions.
3. Enquire from companies for options to recycle old appliances and also seek information on recycling services available in an area from authorities.
4. Avoid the use of excessive pesticides for gardening and consider composting natural manure from household biodegradable waste.
5. Consider simple and easy measures such as repairing leaking water pipes and taps, using a bucket instead of pipe to water plants or wash the vehicle, maintaining existing appliances to avoid loss of efficiency, etc.

Recommendations for business organizations

1. For business, considerations should be given to address sustainability concerns such as the lack of recycling centres for old products, and this may also be used as a competitive advantage. This also helps businesses to be more resilient and competent to meet new emerging developments.
2. Effective communication of information relating to the environment and social concerns should be facilitated to customers with actual examples of practices wherever possible to increase trust.
3. Research and development should be directed towards innovation to enhance sustainability-related attributes of offered products and services.

4. Where applicable processes to help recycle or reuse old products should be developed and procedures can be communicated through consumers such as through the website.

Recommendations for government:

1. Pre-existing environmental concerns can be leveraged to increase awareness of environment-friendly practices and alternatives such as through community awareness campaigns.
2. Development of an efficient and effective mechanism to facilitate recycling and to reduce wastage should be developed including infrastructure and accessibility of such centres.
3. Incentives should be provided to encourage the adoption of sustainable lifestyles.
4. Local community involvement should be fostered to innovate and develop means for sustainability in daily lives.

V. Conclusion:

Given present concerns for the need for sustainability, it is the need of time to encourage the shift of people towards moving to more sustainable lifestyles. This will not only help ensure that resources such as clean water, minerals, energy, trees, etc continue to exist and be sufficient for future generations and but also allow a better quality of life for many people in the world at present, who face numerous problems due to the shortages in a contrast to the overuse of resources in other places.

There is significant scope of research to further focus on sustainable lifestyles and to have a measurement of sustainability such as through ecological footprint analysis etc and to examine specific attributes of what is used more or less in a nation to inform policymakers and also to help educate people of carrying capacity, overconsumption and the need to change personal behaviour.

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