

# Proper Implementation of Green Practices for Sustainable Consumption

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## Abstract

The purpose of this article is to analyze how a proper implementation of green practices can be verified and controlled. At the same time, we will observe the role of consumer behavior in these practices. We will make a comparative study of a practice recently introduced in Romania to improve recycling and similar practices in Germany, part of the European Union, and Switzerland. The observations show positive results in the actions of the consumers and a change for the better in Romania and what differentiates it from the other two. Sustainable consumption has become essential and in order to achieve it we need to make sure that the practices we use to are implemented properly and can show improvement results. This study is relevant to create a future method of assessment for green practices while carefully keeping an eye on the consumer behavior.

## Keywords

Sustainable consumption, consumer behavior, green practices, recycling.

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## Introduction

Consumption has become part of our lives, and we cannot avoid it. The problem is that we tend to overconsume even though our main needs have been already satisfied. If there are not any practices to help us deal with the potential waste that is generated by overconsumption, we will deplete our resources and arrive at a point where our lives can be hugely impacted. There are various studies about consumer behavior and consumption, but they do not focus on current situations. We are living in a complex world with diverse activities and population. Therefore, there is a great variety of choices when it comes to how to conduct our lives.

There are various practices and initiatives all around the world that aim to help to achieve certain objectives regarding sustainability. But there is a difference between a practice that is said to be implemented and a practice that is implemented and gives results. In the end, this is what shows how well a practice is implemented, by the results that rise to the expectations.

The paper covers the literature review and then punctually analyzes some green practices that improve sustainability in Romania, compared to other countries, seeing the different perspectives and why the implementation methods and results have been the way they are.

Sustainability is the idea that environmental objectives are compatible with the ongoing economic prosperity (Grant, 2007, p.2). The actions a person takes during their lifetime are imposed by the necessity of satisfying their own needs (Gherasim and Gherasim, 2022). For sustainable development, it is needed to build-up initiatives, measures, assessment and monitoring production processes that may cause environmental, social and economic impacts on society. The contribution to the reduction of these impacts could increase the prominence of sustainability (Alves, Silva and Rodrigues, 2020).

## 1. Review of scientific literature

### 1.1. Needs, consumption, and consumer behavior

The actions a person takes during their lifetime are imposed by the necessity of satisfying their own needs. According to Kotler the need is the state of realization of a sensation that something is missing. At the same time, Maslow affirms that unsatisfied needs are the ones that explain the behavior of individuals. People are more preoccupied by covering their consumption needs, rather than being preoccupied by production. We need to consider the stakeholders in this picture. A consumer is any person that consumes products to satisfy personal needs or the needs of the group they belong to. A buyer is defined as the person that buys a product (Gherasim and Gherasim, 2022).

Consumption and production are constantly in balance because they reflect supply and demand. Capitalist goods production aims for profit (the sum that remains when from the initial money we deduct the gains). Seems like in our current state, what primes is the profit, more than anything else such as environmental concerns.

When it comes to consumer behavior, we need to consider the following: the past and prognosed purchase behavior, the motivation of purchase or not purchase, and the attitudes and characteristics of the consumers (Cătoiș and Teodorescu, 2004).

Consumer behavior differs from region to region based on local customs and preferences. For this reason, it is important that the communication between the business or the industry and the consumer is adapted according to the current market needs.

The factors that influence the behavior are the following: personal (sex, age, occupation, lifestyle, self-image, personality), psychological (perception, motivation, attitudes, learning), social (social class, groups, family, social status and roles), cultural (culture, customs, religion, education), demographic (population, geography, ethnicity), economic (average income, prices, inflation), and situational (time pressure, the occasion and environment of purchase (Gherasim and Gherasim, 2022).

### 1.2. Green practices, sustainability and marketing

For this study is relevant to analyze the practices industries, companies, and businesses have because through these practices we can see the impact they have over the market and the society. Good practices are also sustainable and effective long term. These ones are better known as green practices.

According to the European Union website 'good practices' can be defined as "strategies, approaches and/or activities that have been shown through research and evaluation to be effective, efficient, sustainable and/or transferable, and to reliably lead to a desired result".

Wakkary et al. (2013) observes that motivations, practices, and experiences of individuals and concludes that sustainable behaviors and decisions are mainly a matter of personal choices as well as circumstances and surroundings.

For sustainable development, it is needed to build-up initiatives, measures, assessment and monitoring production processes that may cause environmental, social and economic impacts on society. The contribution to the reduction of these impacts could increase the prominence of sustainability (Alves, Silva and Rodrigues, 2020).

We cannot avoid consumption, but we can reduce it or approach it differently. Consumption covers even basic needs such as hunger. To give an example, we consume food because we are hungry, but where do we stop in order to avoid consuming more than we need and inevitably produce waste. This is where sustainable consumption comes into the equation.

Sustainability is the idea that environmental objectives are compatible with ongoing economic prosperity. (Grant, 2007, p.2). Over the past years the need to become more sustainable has emerged. Not only for the consumers, but also the industries, because of the big imbalance of resource consumption without critically thinking about the future and possible needs of the future generations. Some people are not fully aware of why this change is needed and what needs (both personal and of groups) will cover. Many word associations have been made with sustainability such as "being green". Nowadays has become common to identify being sustainable as being green as in caring for the environment. This is only one of the branches that sustainability covers but of course it has many more.

One question we should ask is: what do the consumers care about when it comes to green practices that help sustainable consumption? This requires qualitative research on top of the quantitative one that analyses the way of thinking of the consumers and what are their motivations.

Green marketing (also known as ecological or environmental marketing) compared to the traditional one, wants to increase the ecologic consciousness of the consumers (Danciu, 2004). According to Polonsky (1994, p.3) there are five main reasons for which companies utilize increasingly green marketing approaches: the occasions, the social responsibility, pressure from the authorities, competitive pressure, and cost and profit problems.

Is not new information that overconsumption generates waste that is very hard to manage. We cannot drastically change the consumer behavior, therefore what we should do is adapt to their needs without pressuring them. Every person has their own consumption habits based on various factors as previously mentioned. The consumers are the stakeholders that are needed to be targeted and the approach needs to be general, not niched.

Sustainable development is a very trendy term. We hear it all around since is a hot topic everyone tries to keep up with. No wonder is an important topic since it covers many issues that we face as a society on environmental, social and economic plans. Obviously, it is essential not to forget the economic side of things, since it plays a huge part in this process.

In his book, Grant says that green marketing is supposed to be:

- ➔ Intuitive – making better alternatives accessible.
- ➔ Integrative – combining commerce, technology, social effects and ecology.
- ➔ Innovative – creating new products and new lifestyles.
- ➔ Inviting – a positive choice
- ➔ Informed – lack of knowledge is what most distorts people’s behavior.

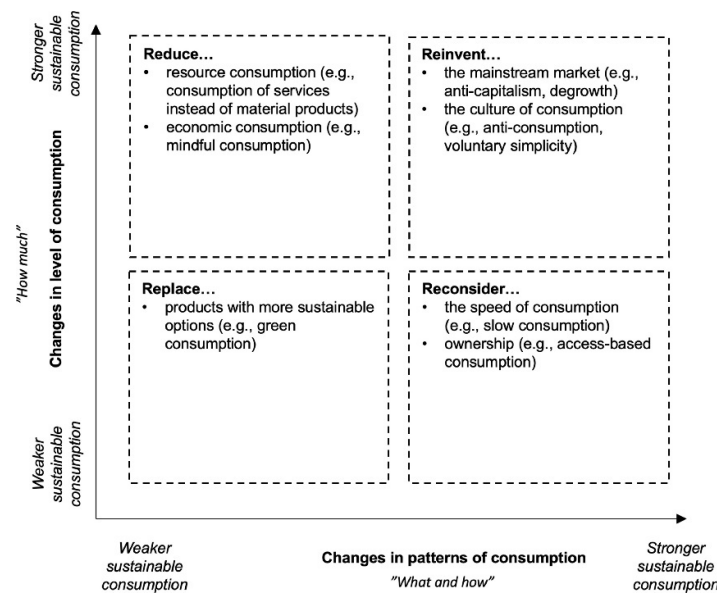
**Figure no. 1. The 5 I’s of green marketing**

Source: Grant, 2007

### 1.3. Sustainable consumption

In Sipilä, Tarkiainen and Levänen (2024), we can observe that “fostering sustainable consumption is essential to address the current climate emergency and public acceptance is a key enabler of this endeavor.

In circular economy there are the 6R’s and according to one of the many definitions they are: refuse, reuse, recycle, rethink, repair, recover. Taking them into consideration when making purchase decisions but not only will be helpful to improve conscious consumption.

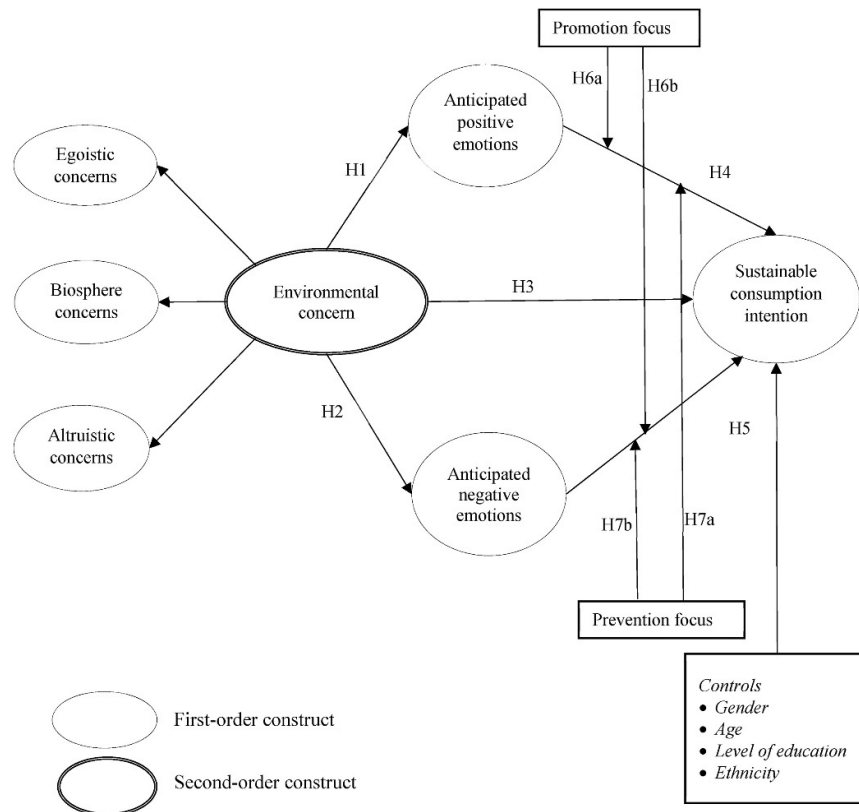


**Figure no. 2. Changes in consumption**

Source: Sipilä et al.

There are changes that allow a shift from weaker sustainable consumption to stronger sustainable consumption (Figure no.2). We need to find the perfect balance between the level of consumption (how much) and patterns of consumptions (what and how). Replacing products with more sustainable options is a starting point, but ideally it would be reinventing the mainstream market and the culture of consumption. Reducing resource consumption and economic consumption and reconsidering the speed of consumption and ownership represent some solutions as well, but still not the most optimal solutions.

The need of sustainable consumption is caused by concerns (Figure no. 3). These concerns that apparently seem environmental can also be egoistic, altruistic or biosphere related. Following there are anticipated positive or negative emotions that with promotion and prevention focus can lead to the sustainable consumption intention.



**Figure no. 3. Relationship between sustainable consumptions and concerns**  
Source: Maduku, 2024

## 2. Research methodology

This research uses a case study approach to look closely at recycling systems. By examining specific recycling programs, we can understand how they work, what problems they face, and what makes them successful. This method helps us learn from real examples, showing what works best and what needs improvement. The goal is to see how well different recycling systems perform and use this information to improve waste management policies and practices.

Having green practices as a business or industry now in the day means keeping up to date with the ongoing changes and needs, as well as aligning to the local and global requirements. In the case of Romania, we need to comply to the national legislation, but as well to the European Union's regulations.

In Romania, since November 2023, there has been implemented a new practice and law when it comes to recycling PET bottles. Brought by RetuRO the Warranty-Return System, in Romanian SGR (Sistemul Garantie-Returnare) is an initiative supported by law that everyone must comply with.

For each PET bottle, or packaging that has the warranty seal (as seen in figure 4 below) the buyer will have to pay a deposit that costs 0.50 bani (approximately 0.10 euros) and that will be given back upon the return of the packaging at the special recycling points. This is a national initiative and applies all around Romania.



**Figure no. 4. The Warranty-Return Symbol**

*Source: RetuRO*

This means that when someone buys a bottle of water, on top of the usual price, they will have to pay an extra 0.50 RON they will get back when they will bring the PET bottle to one of the special collecting centers that can be found in partner stores' locations. So far, during the first months of the programs' implementation months people have been collecting empty bottles and they got their money back for a quite big number of PETs. Even though this is a newly implemented program in Romania, we can see some positive effects and the mobilization of the people. Recycling this way is beneficial both for the environment because it reduces the amount of wasted plastic or not collected accordingly, while brings an economic benefit for the consumers. The aim of this program was not to change the buying behavior of people and stop them from buying bottles, but to encourage them to engage actively in an environmentally friendly activity without feeling like it is a burden or a pressure.

This practice, even though new for Romania, has been going on in Germany for years, especially for the glass bottles from alcoholic beverages. It is called the Pfand System and was introduced in 2003, more than 20 years ago. On the plastic and glass bottles can be found the seal we can observe in figure 5.

An interesting question that usually appears is why Romania doesn't have certain things as in other countries, especially western countries. One big reason would be that culturally we are different and have been used to a specific mentality and way of doing things. It is not feasible to aim to achieve something that is out of reach.



**Figure no. 5. Pfand System symbol**  
*Source: DPG Deutsche Pfandsystem*

Another interesting green practice that exists in Switzerland is that you must pay for the amount of unrecyclable trash you produce while if you recycle you can do it for free at the special centers. Swiss people take seriously recycling and waste management, but this is also correlated with their culture and lifestyle, therefore, having green practices and approaches is easier for them because it something that has become a custom and doesn't look like they are doing something out of the extraordinary.

Good practices can be assessed by addressing specific questions (Figure no.6) and this was the needed characteristics can be determined properly. Knowing the characteristics of good practices is important because it helps ensure that initiatives are effective, sustainable, and adaptable. By understanding these characteristics, organizations can design and implement practices that meet specific needs, involve the right stakeholders, and continue to deliver benefits over time. Additionally, recognizing these traits allows for the replication of successful practices in different contexts, maximizing their impact and resource efficiency. This knowledge ultimately contributes to the continuous improvement and scaling of effective solutions in various fields.

Characteristics of good practices have to answer the following questions:

- Does the practice meet clearly identified needs?
- Does the practice engage stakeholders and target groups?
- Does the practice continue after the initial phase?
- Does the practice attract structural funding, support from new sponsors or generate its own resources?
- Does the practice show potential for replication in different contexts and towards different target groups?

**Figure no. 6. Characteristics of good practices**  
*Source:European Union website*

### 3. Results and discussion

Observing how certain practices and initiatives develop lets us know how sustainable they are in time and how they influence the lifestyle of consumers. These practices appear as a need to solve a certain problem society struggles with, in this case the low percentage of recycling and poor waste management.

Of course, there are limitations because green practices are not perfect from the beginning. In the case of the Warranty-Return System there were problems with the return of the bottles because at the start of this program not all the bottles had the new seal so the process of returning them was a bit more complicated. Even today there are still aspects that need improvement. Not everyone has adapted to this new regulation, both the consumers and the retailers, but it is still the beginning and there are bigger steps to take.

## Conclusions

We cannot fail to notice that people are driven by the need to satisfy their own interests first, rather than the interests of society. From a general point of view, we can see that the economic benefits spark interest within the consumers, regardless of other personal benefits.

Once we establish the key points we should check when we talk about a proper implementation it will be easier to analyze similar practices in Romania and understand how they can be better controlled and involve more the consumer in a benefic way for both sides.

We cannot have expectations to achieve as fast some results other countries have because they went through a different background.

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