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## **Incentives and Inhibitors of Sustainable Consumption: A qualitative study among Urmia informants**

*Abstract:* Sustainable consumption in Iran needs serious attention. The present study, using the qualitative approach, studies the status of sustainable consumption among Urmia citizens as well as the incentives and inhibitors affecting this behavior. The data was collected through semi-structured deep interviews. Data analysis showed that the simultaneous effect of incentives and inhibitors of consumer behavior has led to the emergence of a “Paradoxical Sustainable Consumption” among the informants. It means that on one hand, individuals with health-oriented, economy-oriented, and nature-oriented incentives which are incentives of sustainable behavior show sustainable consumption behavior, but on the other hand due to informants’ dissatisfaction with institutional and social structures that have a deterrent role in the formation of the sustainable consumption behavior they show an unsustainable consumption pattern.

*Keywords:* sustainable consumption (SC), paradoxical sustainable consumption, incentives, inhibitors, social structure

### **Introduction**

Understanding consumer behavior is a prerequisite of perceiving how to stimulate or encourage consumer environmental behavior. Consumer behavior is the most important key in society’s impact on the environment. That is, people’s actions and their choices have the same impact on the environment as they affect their personal and collective well-being. Sustainable Consumption (SD) is at the center of national and international policy attention (Jackson 2005), and is considered as a practical strategy for sustainable development (European Environment Agency 2007). Pape (2011) believes minimizing unsustainable consumption patterns and making changes in people’s lifestyles play a pivotal role in turning into sustainable development expansion. Literature of sustainability (Pape 2011; Kim et al. 2012) shows us in modern life, individual consumption behavior determines effective strategies in the shifting to sustainability.

Generally, SC refers to every decision about to purchase or not a service or goods in order to contribute in the protecting and preserving the environment (Axelrod and Lehman 1993; Young et al. 2010). The formal definition of SC raised up from Oslo Symposium

(1994) and refers to the use of products and services to meet basic needs along with minimizing resource depletion and toxic materials such a way that does not jeopardize the need satisfaction of future generations. It is a kind of new consumption pattern simultaneously follows up material need satisfaction and environmental protection. According to Mont and Plepys (2008), SC aims human needs, equity, quality of life, resource efficiency, waste minimization, consumer sovereignty and etc. Regarding the literature of issue Seyfang (2009), proposed a definition of SC which included social and economic indices along with environmental. He argued SC has five criteria such as; Reduction of ecological footprint, localization, community building, collective action and construction of new infrastructure of provision.

Research in the field of sustainable science declares environmental impacts of production and consumption must be deduced and consumers' patterns have a remarkable role in this task. Regarding Stern (2000) in general, there are three main ways for consumers to have sustainable environmental behavior: increasing energy efficiency, using less energy, and replacing goods having a negative environmental impact with goods having a positive environmental impact (Mathews 2012). Researchers divided effective factors on consumer behavior into internal and external approaches. Internal factors are related to psychological aspects such as attitudes, habits, and personal abilities whereas external factors argue environment has a remarkable effect on the behavior. Stern (2000), argues four variables which determine sustainable consumption behavior are attitudinal factors, external/contextual factors, personal capabilities, and habits and routines.

Sustainable consumption behavior is one of the less focused topics in the Iranian context. Iran is a developing country and in recent years, the environmental problems of the country have become more intense. Drying lakes and rivers, water scarcity, air pollution, increasing waste production and incorrect ways of disposal, interest in luxury lifestyle, over-consumption, extreme use of plastic materials, and production of large amounts of household waste are all examples of the environmental destruction in Iran. Although attention to many of these issues can be addressed in the context of large-scale decision-making, one of the areas in which the citizen-consumer role can be highlighted is encouraging people to choose environmentally friendly products, avoid consumption of disposable plastic materials and high-energy products, consume less polluting goods, use healthy and organic food products. Along with structural reforms and technical modernization, informing people about the consequences of individuals' practices regarding consumption and conducting research in the field of sustainability and the role of consumers are some of the practical strategies moving towards a sustainable society. Studies have found despite innovations in policy, law, and regulation, sustainable development would not be achieved if consumers do not revise current consumption practices (Qu et al. 2015). In other words, consumer encouragement is an efficient method in achieving sustainability. National research shows, Urmia, has had a great ecological footprint among the other cities in Iran. According to Aghayari et al. (2016), part of this problem stems from inhabitants' daily consumption patterns. The main motivation for studying the subject is related to the fact that according to local reports (Governor's site 2014), inhabitants of Urmia produce more than 500 tons of waste a day which means that one person produces about 750 grams of waste per day. Irregular consumption pattern which one of the Iranian social scholars (Mostafavi 2012) called

“mal-consumption” tendency is one of the most prominent features of the consumption status in Urmia and it confirms why their ecological footprint is larger than other Iranian cities.

Therefore, the research aims to discover the SC status in the daily consumption and purchasing activities among Urmia informants. Furthermore, identifying incentives and inhibitors factors of the un/willingness towards sustainable consumption behavior is another objective. These aims will be done through interviews with self-declared SC from volunteer consumers. Regarding the aims, the research questions are as follows:

- What place does sustainable consumption have among people?
- What are the sustainable consumption behavior incentives?
- What are the inhibitors of sustainable consumption behavior and how do they affect consumer behavior?

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The following section describes the empirical background of the concept of sustainable consumption. The method of research and sample features are presented in the next section. The incentives and inhibitors of sustainable consumption are discussed in the fifth and sixth sections. In the seventh section, conclusions are drawn and some strategies to strengthen sustainable consumption in the context of the study are given in the last part of this section.

### **Empirical Background**

Researchers have identified three sets of variables which seem to be effective in classifying a sustainable consumer; social and environmental values, socio-demographic variables, and psychological factors (Gilg et al. 2005). There is still a stereotype, though not entirely correct, that green consumers are women, educated, liberal, wealthy and young people (Hines et al. 1987). This claim is partly supported by special studies which assessed the effect of age (Roberts 1996; Hallin 1995; Olli et al. 2001), gender (Roberts 1993; Olli et al. 2001), education (Olli et al. 2001), political dependence (Dunlap 1975) and long hours of work (Sanne 2002).

Stern et al. (1995) examined Schwarz's value orientations and found attitudinal factors such as values, beliefs, and norms affected sustainable consumption behavior. Thogerson and Olander (2002) tested the relationship between individual value priorities and sustainable consumption. Karp (1996) suggests that people who participate in green activities are more likely to have altruistic values. More convincing evidence about psychological factors is obtained from studies by Chan (2001) and Roberts (1996). Chan proposed a theoretical model and declared that people who consistently bought green products and spent more on green products were more likely to get a higher score in the biomarker test that relates to human-nature orientations. Roberts also showed that those who scored high on the “Ecologically Conscious Consumer Scale” are more likely to believe in “limits to growth” a “spaceship earth” and “equality with nature” (cited in Gilg et al. 2005). Results of Leary et al. (2014) research showed sustainable consumption behavior is affected by environmental concern. Based on the above research, it is obvious that environmental norms, values, and concerns are the main factors that affect consumers' sustainable development.

Sustainable consumption and the impacts of individuals' consumption behavior on society and environment have been very neglected in Iran. Among the few experimental studies of sustainable consumption in Iran, a quantitative research about the green consumption behavior conducted by Salehi et al. (2015) among Mazandaran province. The study was a quantitative and the results indicated education and knowledge of energy consumption do not have a significant relationship with the green consumption behavior, while the place of residence, age, and attitude towards energy consumption had a significant relationship with the green consumption behavior. Another study with an emphasis on energy consumption in the field of environmentally friendly behavior is the study of Karimzadeh (2010), which was conducted among 380 Urmian citizens. The results of this study show that unlike the initial predictions the environmental knowledge and the knowledge of energy do not play a role in explaining the energy consumption behavior whereas institutional trust plays the main role in explaining the energy consumption behavior. Based on linear regression analysis, the three variables of institutional trust, environmental attitudes, and environmental value explained about 11% of energy consumption behavior.

### **Methodology and Sample Features**

This is a qualitative study and the data collecting technique was an in-depth semi-structured interview. There were two main reasons for using the qualitative method and interview technique. The first one was that the qualitative method and the exploratory approach could be efficient in understanding real life and uncovering hidden dimensions of consumers' behavior (Sinkovics, Penz & Ghauri 2005). The second reason relates to the subject of the study. Consumption patterns and consumerism tendencies among Iranians are not classified in literature and researchers could not find any systematic information or contextualized analysis in this field during the pre-study steps. Given these reasons, the authors decided to collect verbal data and used the semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interview enables authors to obtain a clearer and accurate picture of informants' justifications of their consumption behaviors. The interviews took place in Urmia in the summer and fall of 2017. Informants of the study included 20 to 60-year-old women and men. Samples studied in qualitative research are not usually predetermined. The samples were chosen through the purposive sampling method issue (Gruber 2012). In this method, people who have the most information on the subject of the research are selected. This means authors chose informants who considered themselves informed about the research issue. The authors chose participants with diverse demographic backgrounds and also diverse consumption patterns and habits. The selection of informants was based on snowballing. It means that interviewees were asked whether they know other informants with a specific level of consumption patterns. In positive cases, the next interview was done with the recommended person. To reach theoretical saturation, 24 face-to-face interviews were conducted. Interviews were conducted in 4 weeks in March and two weeks May 2018 in Urmia. The interviews were conducted in informants' homes or in public places such as a park or any specific place where an interviewee was willing to be interviewed. Every interview lasted between 35 to 80 minutes. Interviewees' statements were recorded and transcribed completely. Before ev-

ery interview, the participant was advised that there is no right or wrong answer to the questions and they can express their ideas openly and honestly. The interview guide was based on some principals of Jackson's (2005) sustainable consumption principles as follows:

- using the appliances with high-energy efficiency,
- water and energy conservation,
- recycling household waste,
- purchasing organic products,
- purchasing second-hand goods,
- reducing material consumption.

Before entering the minor cases, more general issues were discussed about the environment, consumption, and attitude of informants towards the importance of the environment and individual actions in improving conservation methods. After discussing these issues, the main purpose of the interview was revealed and discussed. Interviews were continued until no new information was added to the previous data. The data generated from this method provides a rich and detailed description of the informants' consumption practices and the reasons which encourage or inhibit them to consume sustainable or not. Before data analyzing it is worth noting that overall, from 24 informants who were interviewed 14 were women and 10 were men. Among the interviewees, the youngest respondent was 22, and the oldest was 60 years old. The education level of the interviewees ranges from the elementary level to the master's level. 2 of the interviewees had elementary education, 3 had high school education, 7 had a diploma, 9 had a bachelor's degree and 3 had a master's degrees.

## Insights from the Study

### *Sustainable Consumption Behavior Incentives*

In the present research, the data interpreted during open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. We did it to develop a simple story that covers all informants. In the grounded theory, it is believed that there is always a core concept that other things are based on (Strauss & Corbin 1990). When explaining environmental behaviors, the literature has often examined the role of environmental factors in sustainable behavior and usually ignored the role of the commonly used living standards, such as economic factors. In other words, the consumer's responsibility in environmental protection and sustainable maintenance has been studied several times, while few studies have been conducted on consumer's rights in this process. The new paradigm of sustainable/green consumption should not require the consumer to take on responsibility and difficulty but it should focus on consumer rights including selection and delivery of sustainable and green products compatible with the environment and their willingness to pay for these products. Recently, it has been argued that to follow environmentally friendly consumption, consumer benefits must be identified as environmental benefits and then consumers should be informed (Kim et al. 2012).

In this paper, we are trying to classify the different orientations that lead to sustainable consumption behavior among the informants, and ultimately, in line with the main

feature of the grounded theory, a theoretical model is designed to show the multiple and sophisticated nature of sustainable consumption. The interview data shows that almost all informants, either intentionally or unintentionally, consume in a sustainable way. In general classification, the incentives of sustainable lifestyle behaviors are:

- Health-oriented sustainable consumption
- Financial-oriented sustainable consumption
- Nature-oriented sustainable consumption.

In the following sections, we will review the results of the interviews in relation to each of the above categories.

### *Health-oriented Sustainable Consumption*

One of the main incentives of informants to adopt actions consistent with a sustainable lifestyle in the private sphere is the health incentive. Health-oriented incentives are mainly related to the dietary habits and nutrition of the respondents. A 29-year-old businessman said:

*“since the cancer rate in Iran has risen, I pay attention to eating organic food. I try to eat local food, not processed food. If I want to eat fast food, I even buy the organic one. I figured processed foods which are in supermarkets and have a long expiration date are not good for my health and I try to avoid them. I think it is better for my future, isn't it?”*

Sajad's quotations' explained his mind and actual consumption practice in relation to organic food. He illustrated why he purchases local products. Another informant had the same opinion as him:

*“I usually try to buy local and fresh food, not packaged one, said Reza, a 23-year-old student of architecture. One reason is that the quality of these products is much better and they are not harmful to my health. There are many illnesses around us which stems from bad nutrition. I think we have to back our traditional food habits and prepare our needs as much as possible from local foods. I stand for it.”*

Elham, 29, a teacher, said, *“If I buy organic products, it is for the sake of my health, not the environment. My family and I health is more important for me than protecting the environment or the next generation. Maybe my practice has advantageous for the environment but it is not my priority. Being healthy is my priority .”*

Maryam, 34, a housewife said: *“I always buy organic and local food, my husband and I are sensitive and we do not buy processed food at all... Of course, this is because of our health. We do want to know what we eat and what they are made of. My dad died because of gastrointestinal disease and I don't want to have this situation again in my family. Therefore, I seek local and un-packaging food.”*

These quotations illustrate that health concerns are a significant motivation for sustainable consumption amongst the informants. This means that the awareness of problems caused by packaged and processed food and its effect on health has increased, then attention is paid to this issue as much as possible. Informants expressions show they are not sure about the quality of Furthermore, the prevalence of diseases and less awareness of the quality of raw materials and the production process are the other health-oriented stimuli that motivate informants to choose organic and local products.

### *Financial-oriented Sustainable Consumption*

In this research, financial-oriented consumption is mostly "driven by economic incentives". Along with the physical health motivations that encourage informants to have environmentally friendly behaviors, the economic and financial situation of the informants is also contributing to this behavior. It is necessary to note regarding the context of the community studied in a developing country like Iran, sustainable consumption is not a familiar and normal subject for citizens in practice. When they were asked for example about energy consuming pattern or purchasing second-hand goods their priority was their budget rather than sustainability. It is not SC, but in a developing country like Iran that SC is an uncommon issue, this practice, in a short time and in the invariant financial situation, could have similar results as sustainable consumption behavior. Noura, 22, said: *"I do not care about the environment in my shopping, but I use the second-hand goods, recycled and refurbished ones. Several times I could find a useful thing in the second-hand market and their prices are more suitable for me. Sometimes I give my appliances to others. I also try to buy everything as much as I need... I do not want to waste away my money."*

The other 35-year-old informant says, *"I try to use my home appliances as long as possible. I also give my clothes to the poor. Energy is also very intriguing to use less. Usually, because of the high cost of electricity, I buy the appliances with low energy usage labels."*

Maedeh, 39, a bachelor, says: *"I'm very fond of shopping ... but I do not do this, I buy the things as much as I need. It's because of the budget and lack of it, not for the sake of the environment."*

*"I don't care either the water or electricity. Water cost is low and I have used energy saving light bulbs in my workplace, so I do not have to pay a huge fee,"* said Poya, 23, a senior educator and salesman.

Ali, 45, also says: *"I'm using a low-energy bulb at home since the cost is more important to me. I know that they are harmful though they are cheap. Buying the home appliances, I also pay attention to the energy saving label since economic cost is important here. I set the cost of the bills with the subsidy money that the government gives us."*

The above-mentioned statements suggest that the incentive to lower economical costs puts consumers on the path of unintentional sustainable consumption. In these quotations, saving money is more important than saving nature. Although economic-oriented consumption is very similar to sustainable consumption, it is not reliable in the long term. This kind of consumption is self-centered and there are not any justifications of protecting nature. As mentioned previously: any betterment of the financial status may lead to unsustainable consumption.

### *Nature-oriented Sustainable Consumption*

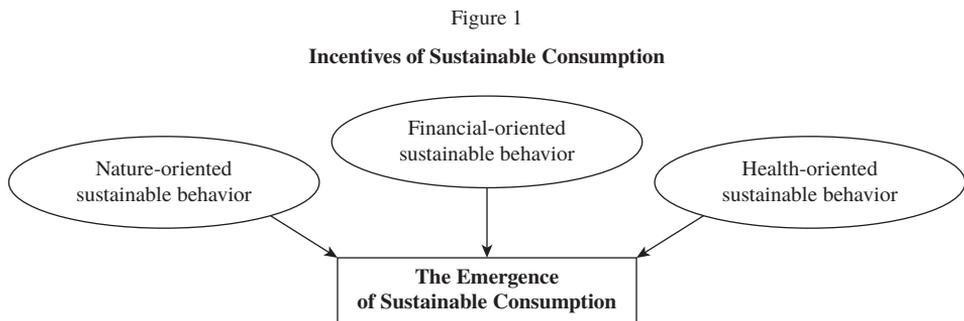
The third incentive guiding the informants to consuming in a sustainable manner was nature-oriented attitudes. In this category, motivations that are precisely motivated by the environmental attitudes and behaviors which are conducted in support of its sustainability have been considered.

Arezou, 23, said: *“I will pay attention to my shopping behavior as much as I can. I do not follow the things that are made of plastic or glass because I think its recycling takes a long time. We should get used to not being consumerist. We don’t need to consume the goods so much because it is contrasted with sustainability. I’m trying to get the least amount of garbage and try to buy durable goods. I buy a little because all of them finally become waste and pollute the environment.”*

Parisa, 42, says: *“I try not to use the plastic in packaging the meat, vegetables and even in shopping as far as possible. I put the small items in my bag and don’t use the plastic and I never consider it a disrespect to myself. I try to use fewer bags and don’t leave it in nature, but what I think about it all is that in our ritual ceremonies that are held in charities people waste plastics a lot. I think this is a disaster. By doing so, we get back a few years back.”*

Sarah, 32, says: *“Nature is so much valuable and respectful to me. I am trying hard not to add man-made items to nature. Water and energy must be used properly. Until today, nature has been sufferings due to us and it should not continue so long.”*

The nature-oriented sustainable behavior category illustrates a kind of consumption that is stemmed from environmental concerns rather than the other incentives. Informants declare the significant factor which motivates them to consume in a pro-environmental way is the importance of nature and the environment. In this vein, behaviors are sustainable not because of the non-environmental incentives, but the main reason for being sustainable is protecting nature and its importance. **Figure 1** depicts the incentives of SC in a scheme.



This triple categorization suggests that the consumer, in general, takes into account physical, economic and environmental incentives and follows a sustainable or environmentally friendly consumption style. It suggests that informants behave pro-environmentally because of one of these categories. All incentives are not directly related to environmental protection but have similar principles to sustainable consumption behavior.

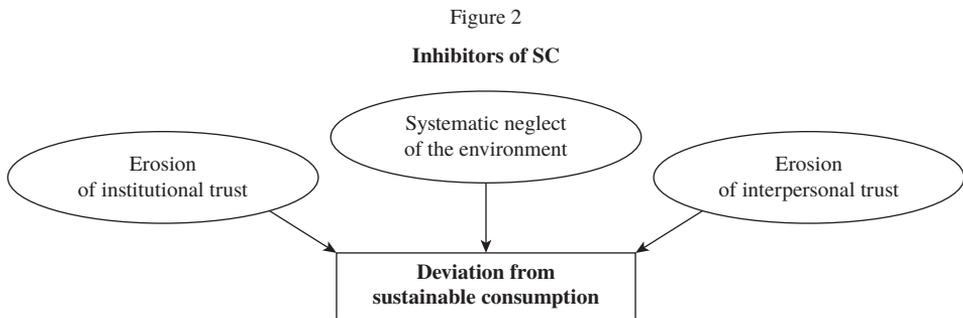
### **Sustainable Consumption Behavior Inhibitors**

In their daily lives, individuals are influenced by their choices in social structures; food, clothes, cars all come out of a production system that is to impose itself on the consumer as likely as possible (Spaargaren & Oosterveer 2010). When we look at the aspects of sustainability from the perspective of goods and services, we notice the huge effects of

the social structure on the lifestyle of citizens and their tendency towards sustainable ways of consumption in their daily lives. The concept of lifestyle, used by Giddens, refers to a series of habits that result from an individual's participation in a set of daily routines shared with others (Ibid, 9). It can be said that every person's lifestyle is made up of a set of structures related to their social practices in their daily lives. Giddens describes the lifestyle of a person as a set of social practices accepted by them (Giddens 1991: 81). These practices in the field of consumption are housing, clothing, food and nutrition, travel. Giddens argues that consumption is a set of social functions, which on one hand is influenced by social norms and lifestyle and on the other hand, it is affected by social institutions and structures (Jackson 2005).

All of the issue mentioned in this section are revolved around distrust and suspicion. Informants' dissatisfaction with the existing social and economic structures that are in contrast with individuals 'demands, easily prevent them to consume sustainably. They mentioned a kind of intended ignorance from their side to be a sustainable or a pro-environmental and pro-social consumer. They believed, even if they want to be a sustainable consumer individually, the social condition does not let them be. It is a very common issue in Iran. There is a gap between nation and state as same as between upper class and other socio-economic classes that brings social mistrust. This condition is a favorable context for irresponsibility taking. According to the foreword, effective barriers to sustainable consumption behavior can be summarized into three following categories which are depicted in figure 2.

- Erosion of interpersonal trust,
- Erosion of institutional trust,
- Systematic neglect of the environment



In the following, we will review the results of the interviews in relation to the above categories.

Sajad, 29, believed: *“I do not trust the recycling in Iran. They do not work honestly at all and the energy labels on the Iranian appliances are not real either. I am working in this field and I know what they are really doing.”* About boycotting, he added: *“I think in Iran nothing can be banned because it leads to boycotting anything. Is there any option in Iran worse than the cars damaging the environment? If we (the Iranians) are told to stay away from something, we do a race to get it.”*

Reza, 36, is a businessman and believed: *“if a seller, for example, tells me something is organic, I don't trust him. It is impossible for a manufacturer to spend such a long time and*

*offer an organic product to the market. People do tell lies for their economic interests, so I do not try to buy organic and natural items and never waste money on unknown things.”* He raised the issue of distrust of others and told: *“I do not believe any organic items ... we do tell lies a lot, we ... nobody can follow it up. I don’t believe the food industry. Expired packaged food is taken by them and after mixing with other products, they release them in the market. I cannot trust them at all.”*

A retired woman, 62, told about the accountability of the bureaucracy and the administrative system in Iran: *“You see how much paper is used in governmental offices for issuing unnecessary various booklets. The papers are made from a tree. All the bills can be sent us as a phone message. Well, the government has not been able to run this policy and then tells us to use less paper. It is their fault. We have some basic problems and can do nothing for that. If they invite us to be green, start themselves. Iranians sustainable consumption behavior strongly depends on the market. Our market is full of unsustainable products and our laws support them. There is deliberate neglect of the current situation both by the government and by the people so...”*

*Elham was a clerk woman and clearly asserted nobody cares about the environment so I do. All of us know we have water shortage due to the infrastructure problems. The domestic use of water is not so much to cause a drought in our country. Look at the street traffic, the air pollution. Well, if someone decides to commute by bike, what should he/she do on this street? Which routes should he travel? In urban planning, bike riding has not been considered. It is the government responsibility to encourage us to use the bike. When the environment is not much more important, well, nobody forces himself to behave properly.”*

According to Long (2010), these categories refer to two vital social subjects that have a significant role in the formation of sustainable consumption; trust and the governance. Distrusting other individuals in social life, producers, and governmental policies lead informants to behave in a way far from SC and deviating from sustainability.

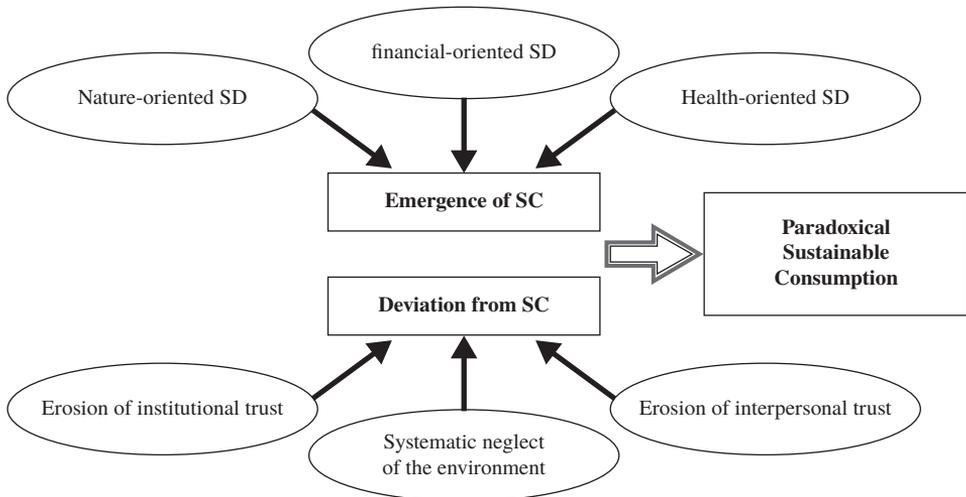
The informants believed unsustainable behaviors are not their fault. The roots of being unsustainable are located in the society, behaviors of other individuals and the governmental policies. To summarize, the results of the interviews show that along with the sustainable stimulants referred to in the previous section the daily consumer behaviors are strongly influenced and determined by social structures. Informants strongly believed being a sustainable consumer is useless. Because there are always external causes that can affect these kinds of behavior and therefore informants prefer ignoring pro-environment actions.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

Existing study presents a new concept of “Paradoxical Sustainable Consumption” regarding sustainable consumption behavior in the studied community. This is a kind of consumption orientation which has risen from a combination of agent and structure interactions. Literature of consumption studies shows a wide range of Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) models of reasoned action and planned behavior were dominant in the explanation and prediction of consumer behavior. These theories have stemmed from a psychological point of views to explain human behavior. When these models, called attitude-behavior models, entered

consumption studies they used individual attitudes or norms to predict the true behavior of people. But the results of this study indicate that sustainable consumption behavior is clearly influenced by factors other than psychological variables. The sociological model of this study is completely different from the psychological models of behavior-attitude in the field of consumption (see figure 3). Two kinds of categories have been mentioned in the existing study regarding the un/willingness to sustainable consumption. These categories are individual and structural. We believe individual motives such as physical, financial, and environmental orientations, as well as structural constraints such as erosion of institutional and interpersonal trust, along with systematic neglect of environment are factors which have determinant role on the shaping of sustainable consumption. Aligning with the finding of previous research on moral consumption (Karimzadeh 2018), this study found “nation-state” gap plays a significant role in the unwillingness to sustainability. What that leads to the paradoxical behavior exactly origins from the overlapping of the individual and structural factors or their contradictions. If the individual factors are consistent with the structural factors it may lead to sustainable consumption behavior in the individual domain. But when these two domains are in contrast there will be a paradox in consumer behavior. The contribution of the current study to that existing insight is the demonstration of the unwillingness to sustainable behavior. Notably, this reluctance origin from social dissatisfactions. In the most optimistic view, informants just consume pro-environmentally in some situations that meet their personal or family interests. Figure 3 shows the model of interview results in a differentiated manner.

Figure 3  
**The Conceptual Model Derived from the Research Data**



The data shows that one of the independent factors that plays stimulus role in the emergence of sustainable consumption behavior is the intrinsic importance of the environment. The findings of this research show that apart from the other factors, the nature-oriented factor can influence sustainable consumption behaviors among individuals. In this sense,

the consumer without taking into account other factors influencing behavior consciously follows sustainable consumption behavior due to the importance of the environment. Compared to the other factors emphasized by the informants, the importance of the environment and the role of humans in protecting it was emphasized by a few people. This means that out of the total number of interviewees, a few people have sustainable consumption behavior just because of the environmental value. Among the three main drivers of the emergence of sustainable consumption behavior in this research, the role of the economic-oriented factor is more important than the health-oriented and nature-oriented factors amongst the informants. That is a financial intention and the willingness to decrease costs both consciously and unconsciously make consumer choices pro-environmentally. The economic factor can be a strong motivator because the management of the cost of living is important for individuals and whenever material costs are involved, people have a strong desire to make choices and behave to reduce the costs. In some areas of energy consumption behavior, this behavioral approach can lead to sustainable behavior, but in the context of organic and green food behaviors, which are certainly more expensive than factory products, this cannot be a strong stimulus in forming sustainable behavior.

Figure 3 shows that attention to “health” issues, “financial” issues, “systematic neglect of the environment,” “erosion of institutional and interpersonal trust” are categories which have effects on the un/willingness of consumers in turning into un/sustainability. Paradoxical essence of consumer behavior comes from this point. The results show that the health-oriented and economic-oriented factors, as strong incentives for individuals to show sustainable consumption behavior and strengthen the sustainable lifestyle, lead people to have sustainable consumption behavior. Due to these factors, people show sustainable consumption behavior, but it is not a real sustainable behavior and it does not stem from the importance of nature-protecting for present and future generations rather come from personal and short-term interests. This form of sustainability reinforces the idea when the financial issue is not the first priority of the consumers, sustainable consumption easily becomes pale. In terms of health-oriented SC, there is a similar situation. Organic food is important for people because of individual health and potential does not come from a sustainable behavior.

About the sub-elements of structural factors that play a deterrent role in the emergence of sustainable consumption behavior, we can say that the “systematic neglect of the environment” and the consumer awareness of this fact, along with “the erosion of institutional and interpersonal trust,” cause people to be less willing to participate in sustainable consumption behavior. The paradox of consumer behavior is due to the fact that the effects of sustainable consumption behavior are directly related to individuals and people show sustainable behavior for the sake of personal interests. In this case, SC becomes a personal and interest-based practice that have a capacity to disappears in any different living situation. In the lack of consumers’ tendency towards sustainable consumption behavior, main factors are social and institutional structures, and people’s claims that the existing socio-political and socio-economic conditions do not allow them to have sustainable consumption behavior and the situation forces people to consciously demonstrate a retaliatory strategy against the structure. In justifying unsustainable consumption behavior, informants refer to structural and institutional factors and mention some trans-personal factors and claim that when

the government does not have a serious environmental concern, its policies are not in line with environmental and social issues and do not provide social facilities in this direction, so consumers do not consider themselves obliged to become environmentally responsible. Of course, along with the structural factors and the paling interpersonal trust, the vulnerability of individual relationships and the pessimism of individuals towards others, referred to in this research as the erosion of institutional trust, are among the factors that prevent the strengthening of sustainable consumption behavior.

Authors believe, by summing up the raised issues and the current situation of the studied community, two structural policies of coordinating the authorities with the people in protecting the environment and strengthening institutional trust and consequently interpersonal trust can be a significant contribution to the emergence of sustainable lifestyles and environmentally friendly behaviors at the studied community. In many cases, interviewees stated that the existing structural conditions prevented the emergence of some sustainable consumption behaviors. It seems that drafting new environmental laws to strengthen the belief that the environment is one of the concerns and policy priorities of the social community, can motivate the citizens to demonstrate environmentally-friendly behavior. According to the findings, the authorities' problem with accepting the critical situation of the environment along with the lack of urban services is one of the important issues that make citizens unwilling to adopt sustainable consumption behavior. In order to broaden environmentally friendly behavior, urban authorities are required to improve their performance and restore the lost institutional trust, because this situation has led to serious social and environmental damage in the city. The data show that being suspicious of domestic and recycled products, organic food, as well as dissatisfaction with the public-sector facilities have led people to believe that the decision-making system itself should address environmental issues and then persuade people to adopt sustainable behavior. By restoring institutional trust, more people will be engaged in sustainable consumption behavior and it will change into public discourse.

The novelty of this research is the subject of the study in the country. Both the government and the public in Iran well aware that the current dominant lifestyles regarding consumption patterns and its consequences on the environment and society are not in a sustainable way. Sustainable consumption is not a familiar issue in the Iranian context and national or local researchers have not presented findings of research about sustainability in everyday practices of the people yet. This research contributes significantly toward giving a general view of the issue in Iran. But strongly believed that larger sample size can provide a broader point of view. Furthermore, specifying the type of consumption is another important point for future studies. In the existing research, authors cover all consumption activities in the day, whereas, researching about one type of commodity gives a deeper awareness about the justifications and willingness.

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