HOW DO COUPLES MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT THEIR SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION CHOICES?

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HOW DO COUPLES MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT THEIR SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION CHOICES?

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This research sought to explore the influences and motives that lead to behavioral changes toward sustainable consumption in married couples. Understanding how different influences and motives affect couples,’ consumption can help provide more successful methods to promote behavior towards sustainable consumption. For the purpose of the study, a qualitative method using semi-structured interviews were used to explore individual's sustainable consumption behaviors further. A total of six couples (12 individual participants) provided in-depth qualitative information regarding their sustainable consumption and behavioral patterns and/or changes. Five major themes that were emerged from the interviews include: 1) Meaning of sustainable consumption to consumers and their lack of confidence in their knowledge, 2) shopping decisions regarding sustainable consumption, 3) life events that encouraged or hindered one’s views towards sustainable consumption, 4) motivations gained by choosing to consume sustainable, and 5) product life cycle phases involved in sustainable consumption. Some of the major themes included sub-themes that further explained the participant’s motivations and influences towards sustainable consumption. The study found there to be a lack of confidence in the participants’ articulation of the topic of sustainable consumption at first, but as the interviews progressed, participants’ written and verbal communication indicated that the couples knew more about sustainability and/or sustainable consumption than they articulated. The implications suggest that the industry should use the information in the study to develop more effective marketing strategies to educate their consumers on sustainable consumption.
Keywords: Sustainable consumption, shopping orientation, pro-environmental behavior, Goal Framing theory, Norm Activation theory
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

How Do Couples Make Decisions About Their Sustainable Consumption Choices?

A sustainable lifestyle is a responsible way of living in this day and age. It establishes responsibility for all members of society to change their behaviors and values, to improve and save the Earth’s natural resources. Unfortunately, much of the world does not practice these type of consumption patterns. As of 2007, the world has been exceeding the sustainable level by almost three times, meaning the billions of individuals on this planet are consuming 50% more resources than what Earth is producing (“Current Population is,” 2007). Some believe that the unmonitored consumption practice is going to lead to “environmental, social and economic degeneration” (Hume, 2010).

Sustainable consumption is the process of purchasing products and/or services while limiting the overall environmental impact (Hertwich & Katzmayr, 2003). Despite the topic being incorporated into the research of a number of various fields, the research field of sustainable consumption itself has started to emerge (Reisch & Thogersen, 2015). The gaining attraction of this topic has brought out many methods to promote sustainable consumption, but the focus has been on creating behavioral change. These methods have been poorly implemented and unsuccessful compared to production policies (Mathews, 2012). Pregnancy (Schafer et al., 2010; Noble et al., 2007; Olsen, 2005), life events (Herde, 2007), and relocation (Bamberg, 2008; Thogersen, 2009) have been found by previous studies, to have a positive influence towards sustainable consumption.
The aim of this research is to identify the influences and motives that lead to behavioral changes towards sustainable consumption in married couples. The focus will be on everyday patterns and habits that influence the sustainable behavior at the purchasing phase or product use.

**Statement of Problem**

As the world continues to burn through Earth’s resources, it is becoming more important for consumers to understand the importance of sustainable consumption. The results of this study establish an initial step in identifying motives undertaken by couples during sustainable consumption. Understanding how different influences and motives affect couples’ consumption patterns can provide key input into implementing more successful methods to promote the behavioral change towards sustainable consumption.

**Purpose of Study and Structure**

In response to the problem mentioned above, the purpose of this study is to explore the sustainable consumption behaviors of married, generation Y (born 1977-1995) couples using a qualitative method design. In particular, the ultimate aim of the study is to identify the overall motives, attitudes, and behaviors of consumers in relation to sustainable products or practices; what influences these couples’ sustainable consumption, and what are these individuals’ actual behaviors?

This paper is structured in five main sections, following the introduction, with additional subsections within them. The second section presents the review of literature that covers previous research that relates to the current topic, as well as a brief overview of a theoretical framework. The third section aims to lay out the method that was used to carry out the study, which includes the research design, participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, ethical
consideration, and research schedule. The fourth section gives a detailed overview of the interpretations and discussions found during the study. The final part of the paper includes the conclusion, implications, and limitations of the study.

Research Question

Listed below are the research questions developed for the study:

How do married couples make decision(s) about their sustainable consumption choices?

Definition of Key Terms

The definition of terms used throughout the text are listed in the following section:

**Sustainability**
Refers to meeting the needs of current generations, while not jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their needs (United Nations, 1987).

**Sustainable Consumption**
Refers to “the use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations” (Oslo Sympo, 1994).

**Consumer Behavior**
Refers to understanding how individuals, groups or organizations choose to buy goods and services (Brosekhan & Velayutham, 2013).

**Shopping Orientation**
Refers to the ways in which shoppers styles influence their shopping related decisions (Stone, 1954).
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The review of literature is broken down into six sections and includes the following: (1) sustainable development; (2) sustainable consumption; (3) pro-environmental behavior; (4) consumer behavior; (5) shopping orientation; and (6) theoretical framework for this study.

Sustainability development

Sustainability has become of importance to consumers, by the encouragement of the government and non-government organizations (Weise et al., 2012; Carrigan and de Pelsmacker, 2009). The idea of sustainability, in terms of sustainable consumption literature, is to be mindful of our planet by limiting one’s own environment impact. Some existing literature indicates sustainable practices are influenced by social interaction and seen as a contributor to a sustainable lifestyle at the household level (Mont, Neuvonen, & Lahteenoja, 2014).

Sustainability has been a growing concept for many generations and is also a huge challenge for consumers and corporations. It is a concept that has been around since the 1970s, in the scientific literature, government documents, media promotions for public goods, and commercial advertisements. The foundation and guidelines for sustainability, however, have just begun to emerge in the 21st century (Wu, Guo, Yang, Qian, Niu, Liang, & Li, 2014). A great deal of research on sustainability is presented in the article, The Brundtland Report: A Matter of
Conflicting Goals, which concludes that, “overstressing the environment by our activities is a dangerous, creeping process that has already caused much human suffering and threatens the living conditions of generations to come” (Hueting, 1990, p. 115).

Today, sustainability is generally viewed in terms of three dimensions: social, economic, and environmental (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). Vallance, Perkins, & Dixon (2011), concluded that social sustainability can range from non-transformative provisions of information about the environment and certain services (like recycling) to transformative approaches that challenge fundamental ways in which the environment is socially-conducted (‘re-imagine’ relationship with the environment).

Economic sustainability focuses on the natural resources that provide physical inputs (renewable and exhaustible) into the production process (Goodland, 1995). The Green Paper, established in 2001, by the European Commission introduced the idea of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which by definition is “a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interactions with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis. Being socially responsible means not only fulfilling legitimate expectations but also going beyond compliance and investigating ‘more’ into human capital, the environment and the relations with stakeholders” (Commission of the European Communities, 2001; as cited in Kloviene & Speziale, 2014).

Environmental sustainability is the reducing of harm to the environment, such as the management of pollution, emissions, waste, and conservation of natural recourses (Swaim, Maloni, Napshin, & Henley, 2014). According to Goodland (1995), without environmental sustainability, there would be no social sustainability. The environmental sustainability gives the surroundings for social sustainability to be approached.
The attainment of the goals and objectives of sustainability will require a leadership structure that understands what need to be undertaken. According to Mary A. Fedig (2007), sustainability leadership lies in the hands of anyone who is willing to become responsible for dealing with sustainability challenges regardless of the position that they hold. Leaders that promote principles of sustainability has therefore been described as efforts of anyone who is willing to show up for sustainability and be able to provide an example to others on how to create sustainability in different settings. Sustainable leaders are able to understand the interconnection between biophysical systems and the impact of activities by humans on these systems in the long term. Sustainable leaders will be in a position to understand sustainability, fuel creativity, discover new means of doing activities that promote sustainability, and above all be able to show a good example of activities leading to sustainability. The current world is yet to have important, sustainable leaders who recognize the selflessness in becoming a sustainable leader. This could be partly be explained by the nature of organizations since most of their actions are geared towards the realization of profits. Through sustainable leadership, it is possible for some organizations to set examples on developing sustainability, which would be a springboard to sustainable development in the future (Ferdig, 2007).

Triple bottom line (TBL) is a common accounting framework used to explain the three pillars of sustainability: social, environmental, and financial. It can also be thought of as the three P’s: people, planet, and profit (Slaper & Hall, 2011). Another definition further explains that the triple bottom line, “captures the essence of sustainability by measuring the impact of an organization’s activities on the world… Including both its profitability and shareholder values and its social, human and environmental capital” (Savitz, 2006, p. xiii). Although there have
been many definitions of the triple bottom line, they all share a common interest, sustainable development.

The triple bottom line was created nearly 20 years ago by John Elkington (1994), to help companies understand that the people, planet, and economic outcomes should be of equal importance to businesses (Carbo, Langella, Dao & Haase, 2014). Elkington saw that it had become apparent that businesses must play a certain role in achieving sustainable development. He believed that the triple bottom line would become a major aspect of the business environment for the coming century (Elkington, 1994). Since the triple bottom line was created, more and more businesses realize that they can no longer ignore negative environmental impacts and that it is unsustainable to follow an economic model with a narrow focus on economic gains (Wirtenberg, 2012). This framework has attracted much interest from for-profit, nonprofit and government sectors, to help evaluate performance within the company or establishment (Slaper & Hall, 2011). With that being said, it is not surprising that so many establishments have adopted the triple bottom line approach.

A seminal example, briefly mentioned before, of the adoption of the triple bottom line would be The Brundtland Report: A Matter of Conflicting Goals which concludes that, “overstressing the environment by our activities is a dangerous, creeping process that has already caused much human suffering and threatens the living conditions of generation to come” (Hueting, 1990, p. 115). This was a major recognition by an international community recognized that the environment does not exist without human actions, and the environment is bound to divisions about development and poverty improvements (UNWCED, 1987).
Triple bottom line is a fairly straightforward concept that could be used by communities to encourage the growth of development in a sustainable way (Slaper & Hall, 2011). Without shared responsibility, sustainable development cannot be attained (Rogers & Ryan, 2006). Since the triple bottom line framework is used amongst many disciplines, there is a challenge in measuring progress towards achieving the triple bottom line sustainability. There is not one measure of unit that has been developed. According to Slaper and Hall (2011), “the trick isn’t defining the triple bottom line. The trick is measuring it.” A business and local government agency may gauge environmental sustainability in the same way, by reducing waste that goes into a landfill, but a local mass transit might measure success in terms of miles, while a for-profit company would measure success in terms of earnings per share (Slaper & Hall, 2011). From the example above, triple bottom line framework cannot be measured with one unit, but it must be altered for each situation to allow businesses and governments to gather the necessary information.

*Sustainable consumption*

Sustainable consumption is the process of purchasing products and/or services while limiting the overall environmental impact (Hertwich & Katzmayr, 2003). The term consist of many different issues, such as renewable energy sources, minimizing waste, and lifecycles (Oslo Roundtable, n.d.). To acquire sustainable consumption one must have an “understanding of the impact from our consumption activities, which can be categorized as the food we eat, the homes we live in, how we travel and the stuff we buy” (Scott, Larsen, Osbeck & King, 2009, p. 1). Like other consumption choices, sustainable consumption is done with a decision making process (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006) and takes into consideration social responsibilities and the needs and wants of the consumer.
Previous literature shows that terms green and ethical can be used to interchangeably describe sustainable consumption. “Green” is found to be related to environmentally-concerned consumption and refers to a wide variety of products like food, fair trade products (Gilg, Barr & Ford, 2005), appliances and cars, and renewable energy consumption (Young et al., 2010). “Ethical” consumption is defined as “the purchase of a product that concerns a certain ethical issue” (Dimitrovia, 2010). These “ethical” consumers are concerned about making purchases based on their personal beliefs (Carrigan, Szmigin & Wright, 2004). Although green and ethical consumption can both be defined as a consumption choice that considers environmental impacts, this paper will use the term sustainable consumption throughout to describe this type of consumer behavior.

According to Vermeir and Verbeke (2006), sustainable consumption is constantly being decided by convenience, habit, value money, personal health concerns, hedonism, and social norms, and is very hard to change. Studies have found that when trying to change consumption habits, it is typically done when “individuals actively reflect upon existing cultural norms” (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006, p. 170). The higher the awareness and understanding, the more action is likely to be taken (Paluchova & Prokeinova, 2014). A positive attitude (Ernst & Spada, 1993) and knowledge (Arbuthnot, 2009) is found to be a key stimulate towards sustainable consumption (Chan, 2001; De Pelsmacker et al., 2003; Tanner & Kast, 2003) and positive environmental behavior, while a negative attitude toward sustainable consumption, comes from price, appearance, convenience, and conversation (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006) and restrains individuals from consuming sustainably.

Verplanken and Wood (2006) found that it is hard to change every day consumption habits that are unsustainable, but other studies have found that when big events happen, like
pregnancy (Schafer et al., 2010; Noble et al., 2007; Olsen, 2005), life events (Herde, 2007), and relocation (Bamberg, 2008; Thogersen, 2009), individuals are more likely to open up to the idea of sustainable consumption. Research has also found that the relationship between knowledge, attitude, and behavior is weak (Schafer et al., 2012; Hargreaves, 2008), making it hard for someone to change their consumption habits.

A study found that 40% of consumers are willing to learn about buying sustainable products, but only 4% do it (Makower, 2006). To change these behaviors, consumers must be addressed depending on the stage they are in, which include: social norms, perceived personal responsibility, goal feasibility, behavioral skills, and implementation problems (Bamberg, 2007). More awareness regarding environmental issues may increase the willingness of consumers to buy sustainable products (Aman, Harun, & Hussein, 2011). Since environmental concerns are part of individual’s everyday lives (Carlsson-Kanayma, 1998; as seen in Onwezen, Antonides, & Bartels, 2013), understanding consumer’s decision-making steps regarding consumption is important (Onwezen, Antonides, & Bartels, 2013).

Pro-Environmental Behavior

Pro-environmental behavior (PEB) in individuals is a widely talked about topic amongst many different disciplines (Brewer & Stern, 2005) and is highly associated with sustainable consumption (Jackson, 2005). Over the years, there have been many debates to finding a shared understanding of how PEBs works. The article “Pro-environmental Behavior: Rational choice meet moral motivation” suggest that norm-activation theory and value-belief-norms theory are two well-accepted theories of explaining these types of behaviors (Turaga, Howarth, & Borsuk, 2010).
The ‘norm activation theory’ was established by Schwartz (1977) and is based on personal norms. The norm-activation theory states that “these norms are actively experienced as feelings of moral obligation not as intentions” (Schwartz, 1977, p. 227) and are determined by “two factors: the awareness that performing (or not performing) the particular behavior has certain consequences, and the feeling of responsibility for performing the specific behavior” (Onwezen, Antonides, & Bartels, 2013). Activation, obligation, defense, and response (Turaga, Howarth, & Borsuk, 2010) are the steps individuals take when making moral decisions and since each person has a different level of importance on certain values, “the activation of personal norms would generate different intensities of moral obligation to different people in the same action situation” (Onwezen, Antonides, & Bartels, 2013, p. 212). De Groot and Steg (2009) found that individuals must be aware of the penalties of their actions before feeling the guilt or responsibility for it.

Throughout the research, norm-action theory has been applied to understanding pro-environmental behavior, especially as it relates to household behaviors (Solstrand & Gressnes, 2014) and environmental protection. These studies have found that individuals with “awareness of consequences” are more likely to be involved in pro-environmental behavior (Turaga, Howarth, & Borsuk, 2010; Fraj & Martinez, 2007). However, various other studies (Bamberg, 2003; Lee & Jackson, 2010; Norlund & Garvill, 2002) have found that pro-environmental attitudes do not always result in pro-environmental behavior.

The Value-Belief-Norm Theory (VBN) was established by Dietz et al. (1999) and links value theory, norm activation theory, and the new environmental paradigm (Stern, 2000). VBN theory moves from “relatively stable, central elements of personality and belief structure to more
focused belief about human-environmental relations (NEP), their consequences, and the individuals responsibility for taking corrective action” (Stern, 2000, p. 413).

**Consumer behavior**

Consumer behavior is a many-sided subject in the current competitive market where a variety of products are presented for consumers to choose. This concept has been around since the 1960s (Brosekhan & Velayutham, 2013) and continues to evolve over time. Consumer behavior has been defined differently by many scholars. Today, Kotler and Keller (2012), defined consumer behavior as a way to learn about how individuals, groups or organizations choose to buy goods and services. It is a way for marketers to know how the consumers think, feel and select products based on cultural, social, personal and psychological factors (Brosekhan & Velayutham, 2013).

Consumer behavior is influenced by many different factors, such as feedback, packaging, advertisement, product aesthetics, and price (Peter & Olsonetc, 2005). Other factors that influence consumer behavior are cultural norms (Solomon et al., 2002), social norms (Kotler et al., 2009), and personal norms. These influences include age (O’Cass, 2000), family life cycle (Kotler et al., 2009), and gender (Frith & Muller, 2010). Once the consumers can get the information they want about the product, they will initiate the purchase-making decision. An example is a consumer that has entered into a supermarket that has twenty brands of coffee. Determining the brand that suits the needs of the consumer are all dependent on the information and earlier experience that they have on the coffee. The brand that has plenty of the necessary information will have an edge over the other brands in terms of purchase. Bamberg and Moser (2007) found that knowledge is a must for an individual’s behavior. Therefore, the behavior
consumer’s display is based on the product knowledge known by the buyer (Homburg & Schwemmle, 2015)

**Shopping Orientation**

Stone (1954) describes shopping orientation as ways in which shopper styles influence their shopping related decisions. It is a multidimensional concept that allows individuals to understand the wants and needs of consumers (Moye and Kincade, 2003). Each shopper has a different orientation, consumer characteristics, and market behaviors that include the needs and preferences for information (Moschis, 1976). Shopping can be seen as an economic, psychological and social activity. Going back to one of the first researchers of shopping orientation, Stone (1954) identified four types of shoppers: economic, personalizing, ethical, and apathetic. These four types of shoppers have been confirmed by multiple researchers, amongst multiple disciplines (Darden & Reynolds, 1971; Williams et al., 1978; Shim and Kotsiopoulous, 1992a).

The economic shopper will feel the responsibility to do the purchasing duties for their households and will shop at places that offer products at a cheaper price (Osman, 1996). The personalizing customer likes to feel known and wants to create a relationship with the store. This shopper does not factor in cost or quality of the product, but more of the experience (Stone, 1954). The ethical shopper is your typical advocate for “shop local”. They want to keep the large department stores from driving neighborhood businesses out of business (Hassan, Muhammad, & Bakar, 2010). Lastly, the apathetic shopper does not choose between different kinds of stores; rather they shop for necessity and convenience.
Shopping orientation can vary from one consumer to the next. Each consumer can create a shopping orientation based on their identity and attitude towards a product or brand (Dash & Sarangi, 2008). Shopping is a many-sided activity and involves many notions (Seo & Namwamba, 2014). These shopping orientations have a tendency to overlap with shopping behavior and motives, because of the many complex factors that are involved (Vijayasarathy, 2003).

Shopping motivations dates back to 1972 when Edward Tauber first explored what motivates consumers to shop. Tauber (1972) describes shopping motivations as a series of behaviors of retrieving a particular product or service of the shopping experience. The author believes that consumers shop for products that they find useful, as well as for the satisfaction obtained during those shopping trips. Later, Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) added the factors, pleasure, feeling, aesthetics, emotion, and enjoyment to Tauber (1972) ideas of shopping orientation. As seen in Patel and Sharma (2009), many researchers have studied shopping orientation and motives amongst many disciplines (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003; Babin, Darden & Griffin 1994; Batra & Ahtola 1991; Bloch, Ridgway & Dawson, 1994; Tauber, 1972; Westbrook and Black, 1985).

Existing literature has found that the above-mentioned shopping orientation has a major impact on consumer motives in a functional orientation and non-functional needs (Arnaudovska et al., 2010; Ogden-Barne, 2011), also known as hedonic and utilitarian orientation (Park & Sullivan, 2009; Childers, Car, Peck, & Carson, 2001). Babin et al. (1994) define utilitarian as “resulting from some type of conscious pursuit of an intended consequence” (p.645). Thus, it is a decision that is on the rational side of shopping, while hedonic, explained by Holbrook and
Hirschman (1982) comes from the personal side. Researchers have found that during a single shopping trip, consumers can have both hedonic and utilitarian shopping motives (Babin et al., 1994; Morschett, Swoboda, & Schramm-Klein, 2006).

Arnold and Reynolds (2003), found that there are six different areas of hedonic shopping: adventure shopping, social shopping, gratification shopping, idea shopping, role shopping, and value shopping. The adventure shopper is someone who shops for adventure and excitement (Tauber, 1972; Westbrook & Black, 1985; Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2001; To & Sung, 2015). Social shopping is when a consumer likes to shop with family and friends, as a social activity. Many researchers have also identified “social” as a hedonic motivation (Stone, 1954; Arnold & Reynolds, 2003; To & Sung, 2015). Gratification shopping is more of a de-stressor, it is done when an individual wants to feel better about the mood they are in (McGuire’s, 1974; Babin et al., 1994; Tauber, 1972; Lee, Moschic, & Mathur, 2001). Idea shopping is when a consumer is trying to keep up with the trends and innovations (McGuire’s, 1974; Tauber’s, 1972). Role shopping is when a consumer seeks to fulfill a perceived role, meaning they are shopping because it is their duty or job (Babin et al., 1994; Westbrook & Black, 1985). The final area of hedonic shopping is value shopping; this is self-explanatory and occurs when the consumer is looking for a deal (Babin et al., 1994; Diallo et al., 2015).

Utilitarian shopping, on the other hand, does not evoke such extreme feelings as hedonic shopping (Maehle et al., 2015). Consumers focus more on rational shopping, buying what they need rather than what they want (Michon, Chebat, Yu, & Lemarié, 2015). Previous literature has found that functionality of the product (Jin & Kim, 2002) and price (Maehle et al., 2015) are the main motives of utilitarian shopping. While aspects of utilitarian may appear to be similar to
hedonic, the end “goals” are different (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003), meaning utilitarian is looking to accomplish a task, while hedonic is looking for some emotion.

Although the above-mentioned information says that both hedonic and utilitarian shopping can occur in one trip, a study conducted by Lee and Yun (2014), found that when shopping for particular products, such as organic food, consumers had more of a utilitarian mindset because they have a positive attitude towards the product. As seen in Kim and Lee (2011), many other researchers have found this to be true, that shopping orientation changes when consumers are shopping for different products (Bloch & Richins, 1983; Girard, Korgaonkar & Silverblatt, 2003; Klein, 1998; Vijayasarathy, 2003b; as cited in Kim & Lee, 2011; Korgaonkar, 1984).

Today, green products are becoming increasingly more available to the consumer-as the level of awareness increases (Gam, 2011). When consumers choose to have a more sustainable lifestyle, they enter an “increasingly” more complex decision-making process (Young, Hwang, McDonald, & Oates, 2010). Studies have found that “green purchasing behavior was the least popular activity alongside activities such as recycling and habitual household activities” (Barr & Gilg, 2006, p. 4). However, Craig-Lees and Hills’ (2002) study found that there are three motivations why individuals choose a more simplified lifestyle (sustainable) that include; environmental, spiritual and self-oriented.

**Theoretical Framework**

*Goal Framing Theory*
“Goal-framing theory has emerged from different sources but is most strongly influenced by research in cognitive, social psychology about influences of goals on cognitive processes” (Lindenberg & Steg, 2007). Goal type research has been done by many authors (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Dijkstra et al., 2007; Heidgerken, Hughes, Cavell, & Willson, 2004; Ojanen, Grönroos, & Salmivalli, 2005; Renshaw & Asher, 1983; as cited in Dijkstra, Kretschmer, Lindenberg, & Veenstra, 2015), but for the purpose of this study, the goal-framing theory (Lindenberg, 2001a, 2001b, 2006, as cited in Lindenberg & Steg, 2007) will be used. This theory suggests that one’s perception is changed as they are given different information. The theory is meant to show how an individual will have multiple goals and sub-goals happening at once, but one of those goals will dominate over the others (Lindenberg & Steg, 2007). In other words, it controls what individuals are more sensitive to and what triggers those emotions (Kruglanski & Köpetz, 2009). There are three predominant goals within the theory. Hedonic goals are one of three main goals apart of the goal framing theory. This goal improves the way one feels in a situation while giving the least amount of effort (Lindenberg & Steg, 2007). Suppose one has a bag of old, frumpy clothes and wants to dispose of them by giving the clothes away to charity. Despite the fact that this is not the proper way to dispose of the garments, the little time and effort put into this task makes one feel good about themselves. The gain goal makes one feel sensitive to changes when it is affecting their personal resources (money) (Lindenberg & Steg, 2007). An example would be, say one is going shopping, and there is a sustainable, 100% organic cotton t-shirt on the rack, but it is more expensive than the non-sustainable t-shirt. The person with a gain goal will choose the non-sustainable t-shirt merely because it is less expensive. The third goal in the goal framing theory is the normative goal. This goal pushes one to act on appropriateness (Lindenberg & Steg, 2007). A normative goal person will take the time to walk across the street to throw their plastic
water bottle into the recycling bin, instead of the trash can right next to them, because it is simply the right thing to do.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

Introduction

The purpose of this study using a qualitative method was to examine the ways in which couples make decisions about their sustainable consumption choices. This chapter is broken down into five areas (1) research design, (2) participant recruitment, (3) procedure, (4) data analysis, and (5) ethical considerations.

Research Design

To answer the research question of “How do couples make decisions about their sustainable consumption choices?” a qualitative approach was taken. This method involves exploring and understanding the meanings that individuals or groups ascribe to a social and/or human problem (Creswell, 2014). An extensive collection of data that can agree, disagree or contest theories was gathered, which allowed for further understanding and clarification from the different observations (May, 1997; as cited in Conroy, 2010).

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data for this study. This type of qualitative research, allowed participants to elaborate more on the questions being asked and for more emergent findings that the researcher did not anticipate when drafting their interview protocol (Conroy, 2010). The researcher had an interview protocol prepared, which included a list of questions and probes that the researcher utilized when interviewing the participants.

When doing the semi-structured interviews, not one interview was the same (Kumar, 2005; as cited in Conroy, 2010). Each interview was expected to take no more than one hour, however, the actual length of the interview was based on the participant’s willingness to answer the questions. Therefore, the qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews was deemed
appropriate for the research purpose, as it allowed for deeper insight and truer meaning of the participants’ consumption experiences.

**Participant Recruitment**

The initial plan for this study involved interviewing ten married couple with children. Due to time constraints for the researcher, only six couples (12 individuals) with children were recruited using snow-ball sampling. Snow-ball sampling is a way of collecting participants and is widely used in qualitative research (Berg, 2004). In snow-ball sampling method, existing participants refer other participants they know to participate in the study (Goodman, 1961; Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Valentine, 1993; as cited in Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009). Participants who were born between the years 1977-1995, make up more than a fourth of the population (“Overview of America’s Gen Yers,” 2013), have been raised in a time where technology drives their behavior (Espinoza et al., 2010), and have unique purchasing routines (Nguyen et al., 2015), were best suited for this study due to previous research finding that millennials ages 27-30 are more inclined to purchase sustainable products (Pomarici & Vecchio, 2014). Previous research has also found that Generation Y makes up a major portion of socially responsible consumers (Han & Stoel, 2016). The researcher decided to select participants that have one or more children due to previous research finding that females with children are more willing to include health and sustainable practices into their purchases (Dettmann & Dimitri, 2009; Zepeda et al., 2006; Lea & Worsley, 2005). Participants were selected within a 100 miles radius of Kent State University, for the convenience of the primary researcher.
Data Collection

Participation in the study were voluntary; data for this research was collected on December 2015- March 2016. After approval of the Institutional Review Board, participants were recruited in a multiple-step approach. First, the participants were identified by snow-ball sampling. Then, the primary researcher contacted the participants via email with a copy of the consent form and information regarding the study. Lastly, the participants that practiced and showed interest for sustainable consumption during the prescreening process and wanted to participate in the study were selected for the research. The participants were then contacted by email with the specification and to schedule the interview time and location. Participants were given the option to have the interview conducted in a place of their choosing. The semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded (with the consent of the participants) to aid transcription. The interview protocol guided the interview process. The interview schedule is shown in Appendix A. All participants were asked the same questions, but the probing questions varied depending on each participant’s responses. The questions prepared for the interview were open-ended, aside from general questions about location and demographics. Open-ended questions such as, ‘what is your definition of sustainability?’ were asked to the participants. These questions allowed the individual to share their emotions and explain their true motivations. The interview questions are shown in Appendix B.

To ensure the interview questions were understandable and relatable for the participants, a pilot interview was conducted prior to the start of the study. This allowed the researcher to gather feedback about the questions and change any topics/questions before the actual interviews happen. The data from the pilot study was not used in the final data analysis.
Data Analysis

Before the data was analyzed, the researcher transcribed all interviews. Transcribing the information allowed the researcher to become familiar with the data. The researcher created computer files for each interview. All files will be protected by a password on a locked computer that only the primary researcher had access to. Hard copies of transcribed interviews were coded using a colored highlighter to mark the appropriate themes and findings of the interview. This allowed for the data to be put into appropriate categories and sub-categories (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). The transcribed data and questionnaire were interpreted thematically and then as a whole, to fully understand what motivates and influences sustainable consumption (Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009; Spiggle, 1994). The thematic codes began at the finest detail and were modified and adjusted as the interviews progressed and new themes emerged from one interview to the next, creating broader observations.

The color-coded codebook can be found in Table 1, and shows the initial codes that were established during the data analysis process. The codebook was based on inductive and deductive codes, which were established from previous research and the current interviews. These codes were then used to create broader, more generalized themes. To ensure intercoder reliability, the final step of data analysis consisted of the first author, Madeline Ingersoll, and co-researcher, Dr. Gargi Bhaduri analyzed themes and created relationships among those themes over a considerable amount of time. Once satisfactory consensus amongst both researchers was met, the first author continued with the remainder of data collection and analyses.
Table 1

*Codebook*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Color</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>Pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion Reference</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recycle/Environment</td>
<td>Orange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience/Time</td>
<td>Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child/Baby/Pregnant</td>
<td>Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship/Engagement/Marriage</td>
<td>Purple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>Cyan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy Lifestyle</td>
<td>Orange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving/Relocation</td>
<td>Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/Friends</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ethical Considerations

All participant-research interaction was carried out in compliance with the ethical guidelines of the Kent State University Institutional review Board (IRB). Although there were no identifiable risks for participating in this study, some considerations were kept in mind while dealing with the subjects. First, all participants being interviewed were given a written and verbal consent form stating that the participation in the study was voluntary, and he/she had the willingness to withdraw from the study at any point. Second, each participant was advised that they are not obligated to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable answering. Participants were also given advance notice of when the interview was to be conducted and the specifications of the interview.

All participants were asked to sign a consent form that states that they are willing to participate in the interview while also ensuring them confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study. All ethical considerations were taken into account to ensure that all of the participants felt safe, comfortable, and had the freedom to withdraw from the study if they felt the need to.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Interpretation/Discussion

Interpretation of the interview data and analysis of the demographic questionnaire revealed multiple factors which are related to married couples’ motivation towards sustainable consumption. The data interpretation gave way to many smaller themes that were then grouped into five major theme categories: (a) Meaning of sustainable consumption to consumers and their lack of confidence in their knowledge, (b) shopping decisions regarding sustainable consumption, (c) life events that encouraged or hindered one's views towards sustainable consumption, (d) motivations gained by choosing to consume sustainably, (e) product life cycle phases involved in sustainable consumption.

Respondent Characteristics

Six heterosexual married couples (12 participants, 6 men, 6 women), between the ages of 23-35, were selected using the snowball sampling technique. All participants were employed full-time. All couples were residents of three adjacent counties in the mid-Western United States. Three couples have one child, two of the couples have one child and are expecting one more, and one of the couples had two children. To protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms were used for the study. Table 2 below shows the respondent characteristics in detail.
Table 2

*Respondent’s characteristics in detail*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Couple</th>
<th>Participant (pseudonyms)</th>
<th>Year Born</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th># of Children</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mr. Smith</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1; 1 expecting</td>
<td>Small Business Owner</td>
<td>Summit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Smith</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>Human Resources-incentive specialist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mr. Adams</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1; 1 expecting</td>
<td>Self-employer Advertising/Sales</td>
<td>Summit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Adams</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mr. Collins</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Mahoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Collins</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>Consultant/Sales</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mr. Green</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Account Manager/ Sales &amp; Services</td>
<td>Allegheny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Green</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mr. Matthews</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>Summit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Matthews</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mr. Franks</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Recruiting</td>
<td>Summit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mrs. Franks</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>Digital Marketing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis of the Study Data

Meaning of Sustainable Consumption to Consumers and Their Lack of Confidence in Their Knowledge

All couples for this study expressed that either both or at least one partner practiced and were interested in some form of sustainable consumption. When asked what sustainable consumption meant to them, participants focused on issues such as recycling/reuse, health, and concern for the environment and that for present and future generations. A majority of participants (6) indicated that understanding “what we recycle vs. what we throw away” (Mrs. Smith), and “the way you use or can reuse products” (Mr. Matthews) was a major part of sustainable consumption. Other than recycling, participants explained that according to them, sustainable consumption included understanding and “being knowledgeable” about “what we put in our own bodies” (Mrs. Adams). Participants also articulated that sustainable consumption was “creating an environmentally friendly” (Mr. Collins) place where “consumables” can “replenish easily on their own” (Mr. Smith), to “better our environment now and for the future” (Mrs. Franks).

However, as participants were elaborating on their understanding of sustainable consumption, they seemed to lack confidence while articulating their responses. The data from this research found that while all the participants had a positive outlook on the environment, some were confused and unsure of what sustainable consumption was, stating things like “I don’t really understand sustainable consumption. I don’t think I firmly understand it” (Mr. Green), and “now that I feel I know nothing about it [sustainable consumption]” (Mr. Smith). Some participants expressed that they felt uneducated because they “don’t even know what this means” (Mr. Smith) and were unsure of the correct answer. Particularly, the male participants seemed to
express verbally the difficulty of understand the topic “is this an interview to make me feel stupid (laughter)” (Mr. Smith). They even questioned their sustainable consumption habits saying “I mean, we don’t really consume sustainable” (Mr. Matthews). The female participants, on the other hand, seemed to be more confident in their responses trying to assure their spouses and reach a consensus as to what sustainable consumption means to them as a couple. The females seemed to take the lead and assure their husbands saying “wow honey, that’s a good one” (Mrs. Smith) and “that sounds right” (Mrs. Matthews).

As the interview progressed, participants articulated that they needed to “go home and research” (Mr. Green) more about sustainable consumption and acknowledged that “it’s something important” and “people should know more about” (Mr. Smith). By the end of the interview, participants were eager to “read” and “learn” (Mrs. Smith) more about sustainable consumption. Table 3 below displays the responses from the demographic questionnaire, which asked both the husband and the wife, to write down individually, what sustainable consumption means to them.

Current findings are in line with previous research indicating that the depth of one’s knowledge impacts his/her decision-making choices (Kaplan, 1991). In regards to pro-environmental behavior, many studies have found that knowledge or lack thereof can have a major impact on whether one practice sustainable consumption or not (Laroche et al., 2001; DeYoung, 1989; Moisander, 2000). Supporting the previous research, the findings of this study also suggested that prior knowledge of sustainability in general and/or sustainable consumption were associated with participants’ behaviors changes towards sustainable consumption. Although there seemed to be a lack of knowledge on the topic of sustainable consumption at first, participants’ written and verbal communication throughout the interview showed that the
participants knew more about sustainability and/or sustainable consumption than they articulated. The participants also seemed to gain confidence and become more curious about sustainable consumption as they continued to participate in the interview session. According to the Norm Activation Theory (NAT), which was established by Shalom Schwartz (1977), explains individual’s personal norms towards pro-environmental behavior (Harland, Staats, & Wilke, 2007). During the NAT, individuals go through multiple steps of understanding that their actions or lack thereof, may have repercussion, which then leads to feeling the need to change their behavior towards that specific action (Schwartz, 1977). The findings of the study, therefore, draws on the first step in the Norm-Activation Theory to argue, that before one can reach a behavioral intention of consuming sustainably, one must understand the consequences of their actions (De Groot & Steg, 2009). Furthermore, participants of the current study began realizing the importance of sustainable consumption as the interview progressed and expressed their willingness to learn more about the topic. This finding is parallel with that of Haron, Paim, and Yahaya (2005), which found that most of the respondent’s general knowledge on environmental issues were high, but when asked about specific topics, like sustainable consumption, they were unsure. This study also found that there was a positive correlation between knowledge and environmental attitudes (Haron, Paim, & Yahaya, 2005).
Table 3

Participants’ Responses to “What Sustainable Consumption Means to You?”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Couples</th>
<th>Husbands</th>
<th>Wives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Smith</td>
<td>To consume at a rate where consumables replenish easily or on their own.</td>
<td>What types of products we consume as a family and what we recycle vs. what we throw away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Adams</td>
<td>It means trying to leave the earth better off than it was, while also taking care of yourself through the process. It can be achieved by what we do to the environment and also what we put in our own bodies.</td>
<td>As we learn more about foods and products that we consume in our everyday lifestyles, sustainable consumption is acknowledging healthy, organic, good-for-you methods when it comes to our lifestyles. This leads into choosing the ‘right’ foods, using specific products in the household, being conscious of recycling, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Collins</td>
<td>Helping make the environment a better place.</td>
<td>Sustainable consumption is an important topic on helping create a more environmentally friendly consumption of food, waste, products and of goods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Green</td>
<td>Buyer behavior and buying habits of consumers</td>
<td>Sustainable consumption is being knowledgeable about what you are putting into your body.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Matthews</td>
<td>The way you use or can reuse products.</td>
<td>Sustainable consumption are products that can be recycled or reused for other purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Franks</td>
<td>Beneficial to our future or children if we reuse items over and over again</td>
<td>Reusing and reducing waste to better our environment now and for the future.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: All statements appear in this table are direct quotes from the participants.
Shopping Decisions Regarding Sustainable Consumption

Once participants were finished articulating what sustainable consumption meant to them, the interviewer asked the couples “where are you shopping at most often?” and “how are you deciding which products to buys?” All six participating couples mentioned that they shop or have shopped at one or more of the major known health food stores in the U.S. For participants, shopping at major premium-priced health food stores was often considered trendy while shopping at lower priced or price conscious grocery stores was associated with “a bad connotation.”

I think people think this is [purchasing sustainable food from premium priced health food store in the U.S.] a fad. It is funny how it comes up often that people ask where we grocery shop. I am like “oh, we shop at XXX [a well-known health food store in the U.S.]” and I think people think we are putting ourselves at a different level…I think people think that healthy food, and how it is portrayed in the media, is just a fad. (Mrs. Adams).

In addition to the prestige associated with shopping at premium priced health food stores, there seemed to be an assumption among couples that sustainable food always came with a price premium. They expressed that anything that is “sustainable” (Mrs. Matthews) or “better for the environment” (Mrs. Green) are “priced higher” (Mrs. Matthews) and “more expensive” (Mrs. Green). However, for all couples, the price of sustainable food products seems to be an important factor in their consumption choices. Some couples expressed that they had to plan their budget extensively to be able to shop at premium priced health food stores. According to Mrs. Adams, although shopping at such premium stores put them at a different status amongst their peers, they felt like they “break [broke] the bank at this major health food store and we have [had] to plan. It is not like we have disposable income to shop there”. For some participants, paying “20x more” (Mr. Adams) for products, such as “organic milk” (Mrs. Green) and “all natural wipes” (Mr.
Green) is worth it because they have done “research” (Mr. Franks) and it is better for their bodies and their families.

I think for him [child], it is more of a discussion between us. Like if he gets a rash, there were these wipes that were all natural and cleared up the problem right away. They were more expensive than the other brands, but we discussed it and decided it was worth the money (Mr. Green).

However, for other participants, obtaining sustainable food but from lower priced grocery stores was the practical choice for their budget and family needs. Three of the six couples chose to shop at XXX at a [lower-priced private label oriented grocery store chain] “more often” (Mrs. Matthews) because the “price” (Mrs. Franks) is right and they “have a lot of organic product” that are okay “for him [child]” (Mrs. Collins), in spite of such grocery stores having “a bad connotation” When asked “how do you, as a couple, make the overall decision regarding sustainable consumption?” the females were normally the ones making the decisions. The female participants seemed to be picking up the “groceries” (Mrs. Franks) and doing the shopping while gaining feedback (Mrs. Matthew) from their spouse. However, when the male participants did talk during this point of the interview, they discussed “price” (Mr. Franks) being the main decider on where and what they are buying.

The current study supports the findings of Tanner and Wolfing (2003), which suggest that consumers who are more aware of environmental issues are less concerned with the price of the sustainable product. Tanner and Wolfing (2003), also suggest that where people shop, is strongly correlated to what people are buying. During the interviews, it was observed that the participants who did research on sustainable products were more willing and likely to shop at the major health food stores and pay the higher price.
According to the shopping orientation, which was established by Stone (1954), shopping orientation is the way in which shopping styles influence consumers shopping related decisions. During shopping orientation, individuals can take on a hedonic or utilitarian orientation (Park & Sullivan, 2009), which means that consumers are shopping for some type of conscious pursuit or from a personal side. The participants of the study expressed how they shop at premium priced health food stores because they like the experience they gain by going there, while the others prefer lower priced private label oriented grocery store chains because the price fits better into their budgets. The findings of the study, therefore, draws on both hedonic and utilitarian shopping orientation to argue, that one’s shopping orientation changes when consumers are shopping for different products (Kim & Lee, 2011). Furthermore, participants in the current study expressed that when buying sustainable products, it came down to the price and reason for the product.

*Life Events That Encouraged or Hindered One’s Views Towards Sustainable Consumption*

Participants were asked a series of questions that allowed the interviewer to understand the influences and motivations of consuming sustainably. When asked, “Since when did you start sustainable consumption?”, “what motivates you to continue with sustainable consumption in general?” and “What/who influenced this sustainable consumption” the couples focused on three areas such as relocation, entering into a new relationship, and having a child. One participant found that they “used to be more into it [sustainable consumption]” and “it was a lot easier” (Mrs. Matthews) when they were living in a large city. For some, sustainable consumption started and continued with the ease of gaining these products. Couples were more willing to buy sustainable products when major health food stores were “in our [their] backyard” (Mrs. Green) and “eliminates the need for choice” (Mr. Adams). Some of the couples (3), explained that they
were willing to shop at these more “expensive” (Mr. Adams) health food stores because they know they are getting organic and top of the line foods, without having to do extensive “research about” (Mr. Adams) the product beforehand.

I used to be more into [sustainable consumption]. When I lived in a [major city], it was a lot easier because it was more accessible. There were farmer’s markets everywhere. I know there is some around our area now, but there was a major health food store a block away (Mrs. Matthews).

For others, sustainable consumption started when the participants “started dating” (Mr. Smith) or “got engaged” (Mrs. Adams). The data found that participants seemed to conform and change their ways, “leading” a more “healthy food” and “sustainable track” (Mrs. Adams) to match their partners. Participants were willing to accept new ways and begin “buying more organic” to “get ready for the wedding” (Mrs. Franks). Participants also expressed a sense of social pressure or “guilt” (Mrs. Adams) from their spouse, stating things like “I am probably guiltier of not following that track [sustainability] as well as him” (Mrs. Adams) and “I get into trouble [jokingly] if I don’t throw a can in the right place” (Mr. Smith).

Almost all of the couples (5) mentioned that they began paying more attention to sustainable consumption when they found out they were having a baby. Couples found it essential to “research” (Mrs. Green) and become more “cautious” (Mrs. Collins) about sustainable and organic options when they “were pregnant” (Mrs. Collins) and “having a baby” (Mrs. Franks). Participants at first were concerned about “what’s going into my body” because “he [baby] was in my [their] body” (Mrs. Green), but were then also worried about the safety of the child, once he/she was born. Some couples started buying “dye free” and “scent free” (Mrs. Adams) products, as well as being cautious of “cleaning” and “laundry” (Mrs. Collins) supplies, that could “harm him [child]” (Mrs. Collins). A few (2) of the individual participants made reference to “cloth diapers” and how they were “half tempted” to use them because diapers are
“awful for the environment” (Mrs. Adams). They admitted that they had “good intentions” of using them, but were “selfish” (Mrs. Collins) because of the “mess” (Mrs. Adams).

I don’t think I have every used one before. They smell, and there is so much other stuff to do. It is more selfish than anything. I don’t want to be washing diapers all the time. I think they are kind of gross. That is one thing I do think about, how many diapers we go through. I think they say it takes ten years for a diaper to be disposed. I do have a lot of family that does cloth diapers. Before I had him, I got cloth diapers. I had good intentions but could not do it. It would save us money, but I think we think more about saving money rather than the environment (Mrs. Collins).

But there is also cloth diapers, and sometimes I am half tempted to use them. Could I be one of those moms who could do that, while saving a ton of money? Diapers are absolutely awful for the environment. I know there are certain brands you can buy, like the honest company. I mean I have used that company, and they have cute patterns, but the pricing is outrageous for the amount you get. We have talked about me staying home eventually, so maybe I could use the cloth diapers, but I can’t send a baby to daycare with cloth diapers. It would be a mess (Mrs. Adams).

The couples also discussed their concern for the “future” (Mrs. Franks) of their children and Earth, stating things like “what type of life and world will they [children] be living in?” (Mrs. Adams) and “how this Earth is going to be around once we are gone, you want it to be okay for your kids” (Mrs. Collins).

What’s going into my body, it’s my body, and I don’t care, but since he was in my body [child], I started actually think about what I was putting in my body. I think you do so much research when you find out you are pregnant. I was looking up what products and foods were good for me and the baby (Mrs. Green).

Also, our children will be growing up. What type of life and world will they be living in? Again, does our actions make a difference for their future? I think education is a big part of it, not only for ourselves but for our daughter and her siblings (Mrs. Adams).

The statements shared by the participants during the study suggested that the couples not only thought that sustainability was good for the society, environment, and for future generations, but it was a safer option for themselves and their unborn child.

The current study supports the findings by Roundtable (2006), which suggest that it is crucial to understand different events surrounding one’s life that may impact their views towards
sustainable consumption. According to the findings of Herde (2007), life events can help individuals open up to the idea of learning and practicing sustainable consumption, which was supported by the present study. During the interviews, it was observed that when the participants were relocated to metropolitan areas, their willingness to obtain sustainable products increased, due to ease of access to those products. This supports Bamberg’s (2008) and Thogersen’s (2009) findings that relocation is a key driver in sustainable consumption.

The data interpretation also provided support that life events, such as entering into a new relationship and having a child, had a positive influence towards sustainable consumption behavior. Participants expressed that they had a sense of guilt or pressure to conform to their partners about sustainability when entering into a new relationship. Although it has not been fully understood, studies have found that “guilt and personal norms have distinct impacts on behavior” (Bamberg et al., 2007, Hunecke, Blöbaum, Matthies, & Höger, 2001, as cited in Onwezen, Antonides, & Bartels, 2013, p. 143). This interpretation supports the second step of the Norm-Activation Theory, which indicates a feeling of responsibility to act upon a certain behavior (Schwartz, 1977) and also aligns with the Goal Framing Theory (Lindenberg, 2001a, 2001b, 2006, as cited in Lindenberg & Steg, 2007), which suggest that one’s perception is changed when given new information.

Many researchers have found that when parents find out they are pregnant, they are more open to learning about healthier and sustainable options during their pregnancy and postpartum (Scafer et al., 2010; Noble et al., 2007; Olsen, 2005). Olsen’s (2005) study found that the transition to having a child is associated with making healthier food choices. For instance, Scafer et al. (2010) study found that parenthood could lead to higher consumption of products that are less harmful to the environment. On the other hand, previous research findings provide
contradicting assertion on the key factors influencing the changes in one’s lifestyle to sustainable consumption. For instance, Brunner et al. (2006) found that having a child may not be the deciding factor towards sustainable eating habits, rather, the attraction to this type of lifestyle already exist from prior life events. Therefore, the current study supports the findings of the studies mentioned above that becoming pregnant may lead to sustainable consumption, but may also have been introduced during an earlier life event. A novel finding of this study was that parents were not only concerned about the present but also for their child/children’s future. Furthermore, our participants articulated that they were concerned about the potential footprint of today’s generation will affect their children in the future.

Motivations Gained by Choosing to Consume Sustainably

When participants were asked, “What motivates you to continue with sustainable consumption in general?” and “In your opinion, are there any benefits related to sustainable consumption?” it was found that the participants had motivations to be more sustainable because of the benefits that would come from it. There were two common factors that came up as motivations as well as benefits to consuming sustainably, healthy lifestyle initiative and pro-environmental activities.

Healthy Lifestyle Initiative

Health-related benefits that come from adopting sustainable consumption behavior were heavily manifested by all participants throughout the interviews. The participants expressed that obtaining a healthy lifestyle meant “acknowledging healthy, good-for-you methods” (Mrs. Adams), “wanting to eat healthier things” (Mrs. Collins), and “being knowledgeable about what you are putting into your body” (Mrs. Green) that come from sustainable consumption.
Throughout the interviews, the participants continually brought up shopping for organic food as the most critical aspect of their sustainable consumption behavior. Out of the various times, health comments were mentioned, many of them were in regards to being healthy by consuming organic foods. The participants expressed “[buying and] eating organic is a valid thing” and “it keeps you healthy” (Mrs. Adams), while others consumed organic food for “personal well-being” (Mr. Green). One participant expressed how she would “buy organic” because she had “learned and done research, that buying organic…is good for you to do” (Mrs. Green). The participants seemed to believe that to be healthy; one must buy and consume organic food.

During the interviews, participants began to express how much easier it was to shop for organic and sustainable options when a health food stores or local farm were in close proximity to their homes. Also, the participants justified that having those health food stores and farms close to home also meant healthy and quality products. With that being said, all six couples described that shopping for organic food from “local farms and/or XXX [a major health food store in the US]” because it was “in our backyard” (Mrs. Green) and they knew “what health food stores are and what it stands for”, which “is healthy” (Mr. Adams). Participants expressed that when trying to “eat healthy and sustainable, XXX [a major health food store]…helps with that” (Mrs. Adams). One participant expressed how health food stores are almost a gatekeeper for individuals looking to consume sustainably because they allow these individuals access to healthier and sustainable options.

It eliminates the need for choice. If I go grab something off the shelf, I know it’s good. XXX [a major health food store in the U.S.] does it for me…I don’t have time to look at the labels or research about it (Mr. Adams).
Two re-occurring subthemes of healthy-lifestyle initiatives emerged from the data, trust, and convenience. The participants trust these health food stores because “XXX [a major health food store in the U.S.] are taking out a lot of the chemicals out of their processed foods” making the participants “more comfortable using their products” (Mrs. Collins). Again, these health food stores are acting as a gatekeeper that consumers can trust.

Another reason the participants rely on these health food stores is for their convenience. They provide stores that are “a block away” (Mrs. Matthews) from their homes, but also allow them to not having to “worry about labels” (Mr. Adams). One participant explained that “if we didn’t have the resources to…buy organic, I don’t think we would” (Mr. Green).

The current study supports the findings by Magnusson et al. (2001) and Spanos et al. (2015), which suggest individuals are becoming more concerned with the food they eat. According to the findings of Magusson et al. (2001), Grankvist’s (2001), Teng and Wang (2015), and Ellison et al. (2016) consumers believe food labeled with ‘organic’ is better for you, which was supported by the present study. This current research found that buying and consuming organic food was an integral part of the participants’ living a healthier lifestyle. This research supports the Health Belief model (HBM) (Rosenstock, 1974), which suggest that individuals may be more willing to behave healthily, when they perceive a threat of disease, understand the benefits of being healthy, and there are few obstacles to prevent the action (Xu, 2009).

The data interpretation also found that shopping at major health food stores gave the participants a sense of trust, supporting Ellison et al. (2016) study, which suggests that the labeling of ‘organic’ on food creates brand trust with the consumer. During the interviews, it was observed that taking the ‘thought’ process out of shopping, made the participants more willing to consume sustainably. According to Lehner (2015), it was found that having organic brands and
labels allowed the consumers to shop more easily for sustainable products. The participants in this study appeared to accept sustainable options more when the resources were readily available, aligning with the apathetic shopping from Stone’s (1954) shopping orientation. The apathetic shopper is someone who shops for necessity and convenience. The data found that when the participants lived in proximity to a health food store, they were more willing to shop there, supporting Memery et al. (2012) study, which suggests that apathetic shoppers will shop more at a store if they offer the most value and convenience for the consumer.

Pro-Environmental Activities

Pro-environmental activities, using the three R principle (reduce, reuse, and recycle) was found to be the other substantial emerging theme under motivations gained by choosing to consume sustainably. The three R principle (reduce, reuse, and recycle) was mentioned 31 times during the six interviews. When asked what the benefits related to sustainable consumption are, participants expressed how their motivations were removing trash from the landfills by either reusing, reusing, or recycling their waste, but the benefits were helping the environment. One such participant reflected on her employer and how she, as a part of the company, takes pride and feels good about helping the environment.

They [our company an established cosmetic chain in the U.S.] also have a zero landfill policy when they make the products. Nothing goes into the landfill. They call it the “pink doing green” initiative. They also do recycle compacts and have them paid to be ground down. Personally, we try to recycle as much as possible. We aren’t 100%, but the attempt is there (Mrs. Collins).

The participants seemed to gain a sense of hedonic value when they were talking about their pro-environmental activities and how “it’s good for the earth” (Mrs. Smith). This “feel good” (Mr. Adams) mentality was expressed as participants described their relationship with the environment. The couples talked about how they re-used “wedding décor” (Mrs. Franks) for
their home, and “plastic bags” (Mrs. Matthews) from the grocery store, and how they try to shop at “second-hand clothing stores” (Mrs. Franks) so that they reduce the amount of waste going into the landfills. When talking, the participants appeared excited or eager to recycle because they were contributing to helping the earth at a minimal level.

The data interpretation also found that behavior related to pro-environmental activities gave the participants emotional reward, supporting the findings of Lindenberg and Steg’s (2007), Goal Framing Theory. The Goal Framing Theory is used to explain how individuals have multiple goals (hedonic, gain, or normative) for a particular behavior at a given time, but one goal will dominate over the others (Lindenberg & Steg, 2007). In this current research, the emotions expressed, in regards to pro-environmental activities, align with the ‘hedonic goal’, which improves the way one feels in a situation (Lindenberg & Steg, 2007). Having a hedonic goal as a focal goal, the participants were motivated to take a part in reducing, reusing, and recycling behavior as a part of sustainable consumption behavior. These finding support those by Pelletier, Tuson, Green-Demers, Noels, and Beaton (1998), which found that individuals are more willing to engage in a pro-environmental behavior when they gain some levels of satisfaction from the behavior. The present study also supports the findings of Bissing-Olson et al. (2016), which suggest that individuals feel pride when they are engaging in pro-environmental activities, such as reducing, reusing, and recycling. Furthermore, as the interviews progressed the participants of this study began to realize they were not only participating in pro-environmental activities because it felt good to do it, but also it was better for the environment. Therefore, the participants’ focal goal switched from ‘hedonic’ to ‘normative’, within the Goal Framing Theory (Lindenberg & Steg, 2007), meaning the participants were motivated to continue these pro-environmental activities as part of sustainable consumption because it was the
appropriate thing to do, rather than gaining satisfaction. This switch in goals also aligns with the second part of the Norm Activation theory, which suggests that individuals feel a moral obligation to act in a certain behavior (Schwartz, 1977).

Based off the comments shared in regards to motivations gained by consuming sustainably, the majority of the participants expressed that sustainable consumption was primarily related to organic food consumption as healthy lifestyle and pro-environmental activities which support the Chen’s (2009) study, which found that the two most common motives for purchasing organic food are for health purposes and the environment.

Product Life Cycle Phases Involved in Sustainable Consumption

Towards the end of the interview, participants were asked: “what areas of your daily life is related to sustainable consumption?” The participants seemed confused about this questions and were unsure as to what the interviewer was asking. To clarify, probing words such as; product acquisition, consumption, and disposal was used to help the participants. Four out of six of the couples commented they practiced sustainability at the consumption phase, while the other two couple’s said the disposal phase. At the consumption phase, participants expressed that they were most sustainable when they were consuming “[organic] food” (Mr. Matthews) or using “[sustainable] products” (Mrs. Green) that were good for “healthy living” and “leaving the earth better” (Mr. Adams). Other participants expressed that they practiced sustainability at the disposal phase. Reducing, reusing, and recycling principles occurred to them as a “subconscious thought” (Mr. Franks), and they formed a healthy habit towards their disposal practices in a sustainable manner.
The data interpretation provides support to the findings of Chan (2001) and Stern et al. (1995) research that suggest, those who shop more regularly for sustainable products and spend more on organic produce, were more likely to be more environmentally friendly. Although the couples of this study distinguished being sustainable in either the consumption or disposal phase, the data collected from each interview showed that participants practiced sustainability at more than one phase. With that being said, the participants may have been confused by the interview and probing question and sensed they needed to give only one phase of the product lifecycle, from which they thought they were most sustainable.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Conclusions

The data interpretation found five major themes that influence and motivate individuals towards sustainable consumption: 1) Meaning of sustainable consumption to consumers and their lack of confidence in their knowledge, 2) shopping decisions regarding sustainable consumption, 3) life events that encouraged or hindered one’s views towards sustainable consumption, 4) motivations gained by choosing to consume sustainably, and 5) product life cycle phases involved in sustainable consumption. Overall, data interpretation revealed that life events and motivations gained from consuming sustainably were important influencers of couples’ sustainable consumption.

The first theme showed that while the participants agreed to know and practice some form of sustainable consumption prior to the start of the interview, they had a hard time communicating what sustainable consumption was. There appeared to be a lack of confidence in their articulation of the topic of sustainable consumption at first, but as the interviews progressed, participants’ written and verbal communication indicated that the couples knew more about sustainability and/or sustainable consumption than they articulated. Participant’s sustainable habits seemed to be embedded inside of them, so when asked to articulate, they could not, because they did not realize they were sustainable.

Although the lack of knowledge emerged, in regards to sustainable consumption, during the interview, the second theme revealed that price was the determining factor as to where the participants shopped for their organic and/or sustainable products. All participating couples mentioned shopping at one or more of the major known health food stores in the U.S. For some,
shopping at major premium-priced health food stores may cost more, but they were willing to pay the premium price because they perceived higher quality or were aware of the value of the products. In addition, hedonic shopping experience in the retail environment, as well as perceived social status, influenced their choice of shopping at a premium-priced health food store, rather than at alternatives. However, the other participants were not as willing to spend the premium, but rather spend their money at lower-priced, private-label oriented grocery stores.

While the price was a determining factor as to where participants were shopping, life events such as starting a new relationship, relocation and having a child appeared to be major influencers for behavioral change towards sustainable consumption. The third theme found that all individuals moderately to substantially changed their consumption patterns when they experienced one or more major life events. Their motivations behind their behavioral changes included conforming to their partners’ lifestyle, having easy access to sustainable consumption options, and having concerns about the health of their child/children. Another novel finding was that some parents were not only conscious of how sustainable consumption was beneficial for their child’s health but also reducing the footprint of today’s generation.

A healthy lifestyle was heavily articulated by all participating couples as a motivation to consume sustainably, but more-so the trust and convenience that shopping at major health food stores in the U.S. provides them. The fourth theme found that participants expressed they could consume sustainably more when a health food store was near their homes because it was more convenient for them. They also expressed that they trusted these health food stores’ missions and what they are known for, and, in turn, felt good about purchasing products from these stores without putting much thought into the process.
Lastly, the study findings also revealed that participants were motivated to consume sustainably at two phases of the product lifecycle: Consumption phase and disposal phase. Four of the six couples expressed that they were most sustainable while consuming organic food and using sustainable products. The other two couples articulated practicing sustainable consumption most in the disposal phase when they were reducing, reusing, and recycling their waste.

Implications

*Implications for Educators/Scholars*

The study findings have some important implications and contributions. First, the study investigated what motivates and influences individuals to participate in sustainable consumption behavior, thereby filling a gap in the literature. The study reinforces the Goal Framing Theory (GFT) (Lindenberg & Steg, 2007), the Norm Activation Theory (NAT) (Swartz, 1977), and shopping orientation (SO) (Stone, 1954), which all concern individuals thought process when doing specific activities. From this study, it was found that the theories mentioned above all link together to create and even bigger theory. The first two parts of the NAT, understanding the consequences of a certain action and reacting to those consequences, overlap with the hedonic and normative goals in the GFT, which in turn, overlap with the hedonic and utilitarian shopper in the SO. Educators could benefit from this information by possibly implementing programs to educate consumers on sustainable consumption. By adding programs, consumers could become more interested in the topic of sustainable consumption. This research could also inspire other scholars to explore sustainable practices within their specified field to expand the knowledge and execution of sustainable consumption.
**Implications for Industry**

Within the industry, this research can help in the understanding the importance for business owners of major food stores to ‘think’ like their customers. While premium priced health food stores are known for their sustainable and/or organic selection, it is important for them to stress the convenience of their stores and products. By promoting their premium products, individuals might continue to trust the brand and pay the higher price. They need to remind their customers that while shopping at a premium-priced food store, they are not only getting healthy food and sustainable products, but they are creating an experience by being there.

On the other hand, lower priced private label oriented grocery stores chains are not always known for their sustainable and/or organic selection. This present research could pose beneficial for them by further understanding their consumers’ needs for sustainable and/or organic products by heavily advertising their sustainable and organic options. Kalafatis et al.’s (1999) research found that sustainable marketing has a positive relationship between consumer’s attitudes and behavioral intentions. Therefore, hanging larger signs that indicate an item is organic/sustainable throughout the interior of the store and/or using the front page of their ads, may draw in that customer who is looking to consume sustainably on a lower budget.

**Limitations and Future Research**

The present study had several limitations. One limitation of the study was the size of the sample. However, when doing qualitative research, the goal is not to generalize (Polit & Beck, 2010), but to gather a deeper understanding of the motivations and influences of sustainable consumption behavior. Due to time restrictions, another limitation emerged in regards to the pre-screening process that was briefly done before the interviews. Since it cannot be assumed
everyone practices some form of sustainable consumption, pre-screening was appropriate to
gather the right participants. Future research could do a more extensive pre-screening process to
gather even more information on the participants. During this study, interviews were conducted
at a time convenient for the participant (usually evening), which at times, lead to short answers
and long pauses, due to the individuals being tired. Future research could conduct interviews in
the mornings or during a lunch break. It would also be beneficial to observe participant’s as they
did their daily shopping. Finally, this study only focused on married couples in the mid-Western
United States. To further the findings, future research could choose a sample of married subjects
from various geographic locations. Additionally, future research could be done to examine
sustainable practices within other areas of consumption, like apparel, adding knowledge and
understanding of sustainable consumption as a whole.
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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interview Schedule

**Introductory Text:** Hello, my name is Maddie Ingersoll, and I am a graduate student in the Fashion School at Kent State University. I am conducting a study on how couples make decisions about their sustainable consumption choices for my master’s thesis degree. I want to start off by thanking you for taking the time to meet with me today. I am excited to hear about your thoughts on this topic.

Before we begin, I have a consent form that I would like for you to read, so you are informed about this study. Please note the risks and benefits associated with participating in this study. I anticipate that there are minimal risks more than you would have in a daily lives associated with this study. The benefits that I foresee include the experience of sharing your opinion and thoughts on sustainable consumption. Also, by you, sharing will allow research to be furthered on sustainable consumption behavior.

With your permission, I would like to voice-record this interview for data analysis. The recording is to record accurately the information you provide, and will be used for transcription purposes only. You can pause or stop the interview at any time without penalty or prejudice.

The record of this study will be kept private. If results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personal information will not be used.

Do you have any question before we begin the interview? If you are willing to participate in this study, please provide your signature on the form.
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions: [Probe questions in bracket]

● Share with me about what you wrote regarding sustainable consumption on the questionnaire. Can each of you give me a few examples of things that you consume that are sustainable?

● Where are you shopping most often to buy those goods? How are you deciding which product to buy? How do you, as a couple, make the overall decision regarding sustainable consumption (e.g., product/store search, purchase, consumption)? [who is the player(s) in each phase?]?

● Since when did you start sustainable consumption? Where/when did you learn about this? What/who influenced this sustainable consumption? [Friends and family, media, etc.] Did any life events you directly or indirectly experienced result in changes in sustainable consumption?

● What motivates you to continue with sustainable consumption in general? In your opinion, are there any benefits related to sustainable consumption? Or are there any things you feel that you give up on? [Any examples? Why or why not?]?

● Tell me about what areas of your daily life is related to sustainable consumption. [Product categories; product lifecycle/phases - product acquisition, consumption, and disposal, etc.]

● Is there anything else about sustainable consumption choices that you would like to tell me about that I have not yet asked you about?

Concluding text

Thank you for participating in my study. If you have any further questions or thoughts, you are encouraged to contact me via email at mingerso@kent.edu or telephone at 330.212.0514.

Following the completion of this study, I may reach out to a few select participants for a follow-up. Please indicate below if you do not wish to be contacted for a follow-up.