

The Lack of Sustainability in Gift Giving

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June 12th, 2022

The concept of sustainability is very recent idea that has swept up the population.

Environmentalists have stressed the importance of taking care of the planet and preserve its resources for quite some time now. However, as of more recently, people are starting to pay attention to their cries to take care of the environment better. Sustainability and gift-giving is a topic that does not have very much prior research done on it. Researchers are just beginning to explore the meaning of being sustainable in the practice of gift-giving and giveaways. Gift-giving is a practice that has been in motion for centuries in history and it has been adjusted to the lifestyle as society progresses. Given the landscape of present times, it is imperative to understand the gift-giving practice under the lens of sustainability.

Since the surge in environmental research, Farbotko and Head conclude their [research paper](#) with the apperency that the production and consumption of different products is playing a huge role in the destruction of the environment. A lot of the research on sustainability and consumption surrounds studying the impact of consumption on the environment but there is not much information on what consumers can do. There are certain, possible solutions but they can be difficult to properly implement, especially without knowing if it is effective in its goal. Regardless, [Farbotko and Head](#) also point out that many consumers have made attempts in being aware and responsible in their consumer habits. However, the question gets raised of whether they practice sustainably responsible consumer practices in all aspects of their life, especially gift-giving.

Following the research on sustainability and trend of being environmentally conscious by [Green and associates](#), there is an increase of consumer demand for products that are socially and environmentally responsible. Green [highlights](#) even more research that has shown that most consumers are not consistent in their awareness for sustainability when they are giving gifts. They tend to be more socially and environmentally conscious when they are making purchases for themselves but when it comes to gift-giving practices, they do not follow the same limitations. Green and their [researchers](#) also found that people that may not have “positive attitudes towards socially responsible consumption behaviour, purchase socially responsible gifts for others.” They predict that people may do this to be

perceived in a better light by others and uphold the reputation of wanting to be environmentally conscious.

Furthermore, since the importance of gift-giving is so vital to relationships it is fundamental to exchange gifts that are appropriate to the nature of said relationship. The receiver or the giver may not be too concerned with socially and environmentally conscious gifts. On the other hand, environmentally responsible gifts may also come off as inexpensive or low quality to the receiver. Gifts that may seem environmentally responsible, such as crafts or handmade items, may not be appropriate for every relationship and they usually are more time-consuming than a mass-produced item at a store. It can be more convenient to purchase an easily available product, without being too aware of the environmental costs. Most consumers tend to prioritize efficiency and ease over being environmentally conscious. Others that do want to attempt to be environmentally responsible, may choose to opt for a more sustainable wrapping and presentation. But that action may not always be understood or appreciated by the receiver.

There are several concerns that go into the practice of gift-giving and gift-exchange, such as the context of the relationship, the occasion/reason, and financial limitations, amongst several others. However, these three reasons can dictate whether a person is able to be environmentally responsible and give sustainable gifts. Usually, finding sustainable items can be a challenge as they are not yet mass-produced by all companies. Often times, obtaining and purchasing a sustainable product would require extra effort and special stores, which may not be easily accessible to everyone. For those reasons, they may be priced a bit higher than other products that may not be sustainable. That creates a dilemma in the minds of consumers that are trying to shop while being environmentally conscious. Additionally, during busy holiday times, it becomes increasingly harder to purchase any sort of product due to high consumer demands, a product that is sustainable from a company that is environmentally conscious may likely be even harder to find.

Moreover, another dilemma that presents itself in the context of gift-giving is the purchasing and gifting of unwanted gifts. It is fairly common for gifts to not be wanted or serve a purpose. Not every gift

is one that has a lot of thought or effort behind it, or simply, it can be something that the receiver did not need. In the likely event of that happening, it leaves a huge environmental impact that cannot be justified adequately. Since the production of an unwanted gift has environmental costs, it leaves a carbon footprint that served no purpose. There are now damages to the environment for no reason since the gift is getting no use out of it and it is getting wasted. According to the [paper by Frotbotko and Head](#) in 2013, “If unwanted gifts were not bought in the first place, the carbon footprint of Christmas shopping would be reduced by 80 kg CO₂-e per person”. That is a sizeable carbon footprint that would be reduced, all over the world if consumers showed more awareness in their gift-giving purchases.

In conclusion, while there is a rise in consumers in the general public showing interest in being sustainable and environmentally conscious. It is also incredibly difficult to do in the current landscape of corporations and manufacturing practices. Being a socially and environmentally conscious consumer is a lot harder than it may seem, despite best intentions.

References:

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