
TOWARDS A GREENER FUTURE: CONSUMER RIGHTS AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT

The quest for greener tomorrow is contingent upon the robust legal framework that enshrines consumer rights, ensures sustainable consumption, and stimulates transitions towards the circular economy. As the green agenda becomes increasingly intense, the role of consumers is central to ensuring sustainable action and thereby they are to be empowered to make informed decisions that can influence responsible consumption. Nonetheless, issues like disinformation, ineffective regulatory implementation, company hesitance, and greenwashing might discourage them from doing the correct thing. Enhanced legal frameworks of consumer rights would make things more transparent, fair in business practices, and responsible, hence encouraging sustainability objectives and delivering long-term social and environmental benefits. This into the crucial position of consumer rights to ensure sustainability, recognizing the need to realize policy gaps, and enhance existing laws, hence enhancing best international practices. Additionally, it calls for the adoption of digital innovations, obligatory disclosures of sustainability, and more enhanced enforcement mechanisms capable of driving sound decision-making and enhanced consumer accountability towards international sustainability development.

Keywords: sustainability, consumer rights, legal framework, policy gaps, digital innovations.

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid increase in industrialization and consumer-driven global economy over the years has led to severe environmental consequences, including climate change, biodiversity and resource depletion laws. Consumer rights and sustainability are tightly interconnected as the choice of the consumer significantly impacts environmental outcomes. Earlier, consumer protection laws were designed to prevent unfair trade practices and ensure the safety of products. However, as consumer's keen interest in environmental protection is increasing, these laws are also evolving to address sustainable consumption and corporate responsibility.¹ Many international organizations and the governments have recognized the need to integrate sustainability principles with consumer laws, encouraging businesses to adopt environment friendly practices, while taking care of transparency and reliability of information about environmental impact of the purchases they make.²

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasizes on responsible consumption and productions, urging various governments to adopt policies that helps in minimizing waste, promoting recycling and ensuring sustainable usage of resources.³ Similarly, The European Green Deal aims to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, introducing measures that can strengthen consumer rights related to the eco-friendly products and sustainable supply chains.⁴ Despite all these efforts over years, challenges exist in enforcing commitments related to sustainability and consumer rights, as many corporations often mislead consumers with false or exaggerated environmental claims and involve themselves in greenwashing.⁵ Strengthening consumer protection framework and corporate responsibility mechanisms is necessary to ensure truly sustainable global economy.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

This study significantly focuses on exploring the intersection between consumer rights and sustainability. In an era where environmental degradation is a critical concern across the globe, consumer laws play an important role in ensuring responsible production and consumption patterns. By analyzing legal frameworks, this study aims to highlight the importance of

¹ OECD, 2021

² United Nations, 2015

³ IBID

⁴ European Commission, 2023

⁵ Harvard Environmental Law Review, 2023

effective policies in protecting consumers from misleading environmental claims, while promoting corporate accountability in sustainability.⁶ Additionally, it emphasizes the need for harmonized international standards to address regulatory gaps, ensuring that consumer rights contribute meaningfully to global sustainability goals. This research focuses on providing valuable insights for policy-makers, legal professionals and consumers by advocating for stronger sustainability laws and regulatory enforcement.

III. ROLE OF CONSUMER RIGHTS IN SUSTAINABILITY

Consumer rights are crucial in achieving sustainability since they can influence businesses, governments and international policies. The enforcement of consumer protection laws ensures transparency in product labelling, promotes ethical business practices and eliminates deceptive advertising⁷. Consumer rights take on several roles towards achieving sustainability, four of which are discussed in detail as given below.

First, regulatory compliance is an essential aspect of upholding sustainable practices in companies. Consumer protection regulations encourage companies to comply with sustainability regulations by making sure that their production processes are consistent with environmental regulations. Governments impose penalties on companies that fail to meet sustainability standards, thereby enhancing legal liability.⁸

Secondly, corporate responsibility is paramount in the pursuit of sustainability. By providing consumers with the opportunity to challenge greenwashing and false assertions of sustainability, such regulations hold corporations accountable for false declarations of being sustainable and for fraudulent practices. Organizations such as the European Commission and Federal Trade Commission oversee corporate sustainability claims, with companies that deceive consumers facing penalties.⁹

Third, empowering sustainable consumer decisions is the most important role of consumer rights. Sustainable legal systems empower consumers to take proper decisions by promoting transparency in the environment-related claim on the product. Eco-labelling, life-cycle

⁶ Elgar Online, 2023

⁷ OECD, 2021

⁸ Federal Trade Commission, 2021.

⁹ United Nations Environment Programme, 2021

analyses, and carbon footprints enable the consumer to pick green products.¹⁰

Lastly, consumer protection frameworks reduce pollution and damage to the environment through regulation of wastes from manufacturing, pollution, and excessive usage. Governmental policy, for instance, Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) acts, hold the producers liable for post-consumer waste and contribute to recycling initiatives.¹¹

IV. INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL FRAMEWORK: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Different countries have adopted varied approaches to integrating sustainability within consumer protection laws. The comparative study of key legislation policies for sustainability and consumer rights and sustainability provisions adopted in different countries such as United States, European Union, United Kingdom, Canada, India and Australia are presented in detail in the below table.

Table: A comparative study of policies for large economies

Country	Key Legislation & Policies	Consumer Rights & Sustainability Provisions
United States	Green Guides (FTC), Right-to-Repair Laws (State-Level)	Regulates false environmental claims, promotes sustainable consumer choices, enhances repair rights. ¹²
European Union	European Green Deal, Single-Use Plastics Directive, Rightto-Repair Directive	Comprehensive consumer protection against greenwashing, strong e-waste reduction policies, and reparability rights. ¹³
United Kingdom	Environment Act 2021, Green Claims Code	Strengthens corporate sustainability reporting, bans single-use plastics, and enforces fair green marketing. ¹⁴

¹⁰ ResearchGate, 2022

¹¹ Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2021

¹² Federal Trade Commission, 2021

¹³ European Environment Agency, 2022

¹⁴ European Commission, 2023

Canada	Environmental Protection Act, National Waste Reduction Strategy	Implements extended producer responsibility (EPR), regulates plastic pollution, and promotes circular economy practices. ¹⁵
India	Consumer Protection Act (2019), E-Waste Management Rules	Holds businesses accountable for misleading sustainability claims, mandates e-waste recycling, and promotes consumer education on sustainability. ¹⁶
Australia	National Waste Strategy, Australian Consumer Law	Enforces corporate sustainability disclosures, bans certain single-use plastics, and promotes responsible production. ¹⁷

V. IMPORTANCE OF DIGITAL INNOVATION IN CONSUMER RIGHTS AND SUSTAINABILITY

1. Digital Innovation and Consumer Rights

a. Empowering the Consumer Through Transparency

Digital technologies have radically enhanced consumer access to information, with the result that consumers can now make informed choices in an atmosphere of transparency¹⁸. Online platforms, review websites, and price comparison sites educate consumers regarding the quality of products, ethical supply chains, and corporate social responsibility initiatives. The age of data has also allowed consumers to gain comprehensive information on corporate practices—anything from labor policies to carbon footprints—reaffirming their bargaining power in the market.¹⁹ In this regard, digital innovations are catalysts: they gather, analyze, and spread real-time information

¹⁵ Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2021

¹⁶ United Nations, 2015

¹⁷ ResearchGate, 2022

¹⁸ OECD, 2021

¹⁹ United Nations, 2015

that gives consumers the leverage to reward sustainable behavior and punish irresponsible behavior.²⁰

b. Personal Data Protection and Privacy

A key aspect of consumer rights in the digital age relates to data protection and privacy. Accelerating technological growth has led to extensive data-gathering practices, which can compromise sensitive personal data. In response, many jurisdictions have introduced data protection legislation. The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is one of the most prominent examples, influencing the way businesses globally treat consumer data. Comparable frameworks, such as the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA), are solidifying the global standard that individuals have the right to manage their personal data. These lawmaking tools, anchored by the support of electronic technologies like secure encryption and blockchain, seek to safeguard the consumer while facilitating a dynamic digital economy.²¹

c. Better Dispute Settlement Mechanisms

The globalisation of e-commerce has made it necessary to have more effective means of resolving cross-border consumer disputes. Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) websites enable parties to settle their disputes by way of electronic mediation and arbitration. This does not only lower the cost and simplicity of legal processes but also promotes just, quick resolution in accordance with consumer's rights. In addition, blockchain-based "smart contracts" provide self-enforcing contracts integrated with conflict resolution policies, decreasing dependence upon conventional court systems and improving user trust in online marketplaces.²²

2. Digital Innovation and Global Sustainability

a. Increased Responsibility Through Supply Chain Monitoring

Sustainability requires businesses to face the entirety of their environmental and social

²⁰ Harvard Environmental Law review, 2023

²¹ Elgar Online, 2023

²² European Commission, 2022

footprint. Digital technologies such as the Internet of Things (IoT), AI-powered analytics, and blockchain are important in shedding light on global supply chains. IoT-enabled sensors allow data to be gathered on energy consumption, levels of emissions, and other key performance indicators across all stages of production. Blockchain technology provides transparency and record immutability, allowing stakeholders to track a product's history from raw materials to end-users. This increased level of transparency promotes ethical sourcing, waste minimization, and fairer labour practices, thereby supporting wider sustainability objectives.²³

b. Effective Resource Management

Digital innovation maximizes the use of resources in ways that were previously unthinkable. Smart grids, for instance, use IoT and AI to match electricity supply with consumer usage, minimizing energy wastage. Precision farming in agriculture applies satellite imaging and AI algorithms to plant seeds, fertilizers, and water in specific areas of need. Such practices reduce the environmental impact of farming while maintaining biodiversity. Moreover, AI-powered analytics can anticipate supply and demand changes, reducing excess production and reductions in resource-based industries. Through data exploitation, digital solutions enable businesses to address consumer demand as well as environmental needs in a more balanced way.²⁴

c. Circular Economy Initiatives

One of the central principles of global sustainability is the transition to a circular economy from a linear "take-make-dispose" approach, wherein products and materials are constantly repurposed. Digital innovation supports the development of new business models—product-as-a-service (renting/leasing) and sharing economy platforms—maximizing the usage of resources. Through the application of AI for demand forecasting and blockchain for validating material quality, companies can plan products with disassembly and recycling in mind. This not only minimizes waste but also halts the mining of finite resources. Essentially, digital technologies form the foundation for circular economy practices, enabling real-time monitoring and efficient

²³ United Nations Environment Program, 2022

²⁴ Research Gate, 2022

collaborations between different stakeholders.²⁵

3. The Evolving Legal Framework for Global Sustainability

a. International Agreements and Regulatory Harmonization

The Paris climate change agreement is a prime example of international commitment to tackling environmental emergencies through concerted policy action. However, the effectiveness of such agreements depends on compliance and measurable progress—both of which are reinforced by digital solutions for monitoring and data gathering. Countries can use digital platforms to monitor greenhouse gas emissions and other indicators, facilitating easier harmonization of legal instruments across borders. As nations incorporate environmental law into local statutes, reporting obligations online maintain uniformity and responsibility in fulfilling sustainability goals.²⁶

b. National Legislation and Green Innovation

Subnational governments across the globe are increasingly adopting digital innovation within laws to encourage green responsibility. For instance, tax relief for technology companies creating sustainable solutions like smart waste disposal systems or green energy analytics is provided by certain jurisdictions. Others place more stringent reporting requirements that require corporate disclosure of carbon emissions, use of resources, and recycling rates. Laws that allow for open data sharing also trigger innovations, as startups and research institutions can use these datasets to develop new sustainability solutions. These converging strategies demonstrate that legal systems, supported by digital technologies, can serve both carrot and stick in driving sustainable behaviours.²⁷

c. Global Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing

Global cooperation and sharing of knowledge are the key to establishing a global legal framework for sustainability. Sites like the United Nations Global Marketplace and digital hubs spearheaded by NGOs facilitate the interactions among governments,

²⁵ Ellen Macarthur Foundation 2021

²⁶ United Nations 2015

²⁷ Elgar Online 2023

business, scholars, and civil society in sharing research, funding sources, and best practices. Digital innovations intensify the reach of these cooperative activities by offering real-time communication and data analytics capacities that support more sophisticated policy responses. By incorporating digital technologies into international governance frameworks, actors can concentrate on systemic responses to global problems.²⁸

4. Challenges and Ethical Considerations

a. Digital Divide and Accessibility

One enduring challenge is the unequal availability of digital resources. Most developing areas continue to lack stable internet connectivity or access to sophisticated technology. This inequality has the potential to increase socio-economic disparities and reduce the impact of digital consumer protection and sustainability programs. Policymakers and technologists must thus work together to provide equal access to digital infrastructure, thus extending the scope of global sustainability interventions.²⁹

b. Data Integrity and Cybersecurity

As online platforms deal with huge volumes of sensitive data, threats of data breaches and cyber attacks hang heavy. Poor infrastructure or poor regulation can leave consumers, businesses, and even the public sector open to hacking, fraud, and identity theft. Consequently, any strong digital model for sustainability needs to ensure safe storage of data, encryption standards, and rigorous legal liability for security failures.³⁰

c. Ethical AI and Algorithmic Bias

AI-driven tools are indispensable in analyzing large data sets for sustainable solutions. However, AI algorithms can unintentionally perpetuate biases if trained on skewed data, potentially undermining consumer rights and broader social justice objectives. Policymakers must implement regulations that address algorithmic transparency and

²⁸ OECD, 2021

²⁹ United Nations Environment Program, 2021

³⁰ Federal Trade Commission, 2021

accountability, ensuring that digital innovation remains a force for equitable progress.³¹

VI. CASE STUDIES: OVERCOMING OBSTACLES THROUGH CONSUMER RIGHT POLICIES, SUSTAINABILITY AND DIGITAL INNOVATIONS

Case Study 1: Volkswagen Emissions Scandal – Greenwashing and Deceptive Marketing

One of the most infamous examples of corporate greenwashing is the 2015 Volkswagen Emissions Scandal. Volkswagen installed software in its diesel vehicles to manipulate emissions tests, lying to regulators and consumers about the environmental impact of their vehicles. The company actively promoted its vehicles as green while they emitted pollutants thousands of times larger than allowable levels. The scandal had resulted in class-action proceedings globally costing billions of dollars in settlements and fines. The European Commission and the U.S. Federal Trade Commission penalized Volkswagen for deceptive advertising, highlighting strict legal actions on greenwashing.³² This case highlights the importance of strong enforcement actions to ensure true sustainability claims and protect consumer interests.

Case Study 2: Right-to-Repair Movement – Barriers to Sustainable Consumer Choice

Consumers worldwide have been fighting for the right to repair their electronics rather than being forced to replace them due to manufacturer-imposed restrictions. The Right-to-Repair Movement has gained considerable ground, with the European Union and certain U.S. states enacting legislation requiring the manufacturers to provide access to spare parts, repair manuals, and independent servicing options. Companies like Apple and John Deere have been sued for restrictive repair practices that generate electronic waste and ultimately increase consumer costs. How effective right-to-repair law has been around the world highlights how policy adjustment can make consumers opt for sustainable choices and reduce wastage in the environment.³³

Case Study 3: Coca-Cola's Greenwashing Lawsuit – Lack of Corporate Responsibility

In 2021, green groups sued Coca-Cola for greenwashing its plastic recycling operations and

³¹ Elgar Online, 2023

³² Harvard Environmental Law Review, 2023

³³ Sage Journal of Consumer Policy, 2022

deceiving consumers. The company positioned itself as a sustainability leader while being one of the world's biggest plastic polluters. Earth Island Institute sued Coca-Cola and challenged its claims, bringing attention to the widespread practice of corporate greenwashing. Legal experts emphasized the role of consumer protection law in preventing greenwashing environmental advertising, ultimately resulting in increased regulation of sustainability claims.³⁴ This case emphasizes the value of transparent corporate disclosure of sustainability and increased penalties for deceptive advertising.

Case Study 4: Nestlé and Unethical Palm Oil Procurement – Lax Regulation and Regulatory Loopholes

Nestlé has also faced a series of legal and reputational concerns due to its unsustainable approach in sourcing palm oil, which contributed to deforestation, habitat destruction, and abuse of human rights. Greenpeace, an environmental organization, uncovered Nestlé's supply chain issue, leading to consumer boycotts and legal suits under international laws on sustainability. The company later demanded stricter sustainability certification processes from companies sourcing palm oil via the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO). The example highlights the absence of enforcement mechanisms in the global scenario and lack of ease in holding multinational corporations responsible for unsustainable supply chains that harm the environment.³⁵

Case Study 5: EU Single-Use Plastic Ban – Consumer Rights Influence Policy Reform

The European Union Single-Use Plastics Directive of 2021 demonstrates the efficacy that consumer lobbying and legislative institutions have in shifting influential environmental policy change. Plastic staples, straws, cutlery, and food wrappers are banned for sale in the member states of the EU by the regulation. The policy has been guided by broad consumer need for environmentally sound alternatives and enhanced plastic pollution concern. The law also holds producers responsible for waste management, strengthening the concept of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). This is an example of how the legal framework can protect consumer rights without compromising mass-scale environmental sustainability.³⁶

³⁴ Earth Island Institute, 2021

³⁵ Greenpeace, 2018

³⁶ European Environment Agency, 2022

Case Study 6: Amazon's Transparent Consumer Information and AI-Driven Logistics

Amazon's use of AI-based logistics platforms has optimized its shipping procedures to cut down on environmental footprints while offering consumers clear information about product availability, delivery duration, and packaging eco-friendliness.³⁷

Case Study 7: Online Dispute Resolution Platform for Cross-Border E-commerce in Europe

Europe's Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) platform illustrates how digital solutions can make it easier to resolve cross-border consumer complaints, creating trust and easy access to legal redress for e-commerce purchases.³⁸

Case Study 8: Apple's Data-Encrypted Payment and Repair-Friendly Initiatives

Apple's introduction of data-encrypted payment technologies and repair-friendly initiatives shows how companies can drive privacy, user control, and decreased electronic waste by uniting innovative technology with sustainable corporate practices.³⁹

Case Study 9: Dell's Digital Tracking for Global Recycling and Refurbishment

Dell's global recycling and refurbishment program includes digital tracking to enhance resource management and e-waste responsibility, thus building consumer trust in sustainable production.⁴⁰

Case Study 10: Starbucks' Data Analytics for Ethical Sourcing and Supply Chain Optimization

Starbucks' online platform, which uses data analytics to streamline supply chains and enhance ethical sourcing, demonstrates how procurement and production transparency can promote both customer confidence and environmental responsibility.⁴¹

³⁷ Amazon Sustainability Report, 2021

³⁸ European Commission, 2022

³⁹ Apple Environmental Progress Report, 2022

⁴⁰ Dell Corporate Social Responsibility Report, 2022

⁴¹ Starbucks Global Responsibility Report, 2021

VI. CHALLENGES IN CONSUMER RIGHTS AND SUSTAINABILITY AND RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS

Greenwashing and false green claims are among the greatest challenges in consumer rights and sustainability. Many companies greenwash their products by representing them as being sustainable but without any environmental benefit, tricking consumers into buying products with purported environmental stewardship. This erodes trust in actual sustainability efforts and allows companies to make money from fraudulent practices. A solution is stricter antigreenwashing laws, such as mandatory third-party verification for environmental claims and higher penalties for deceptive advertising. Governments must implement transparency laws that require corporations to submit scientific evidence to support their claims of sustainability. The second serious concern is weak enforcement and loopholes in regulation. Although most governments have enacted sustainability legislation, uneven enforcement has resulted in corporations using loopholes in the law to escape compliance. Regulatory bodies usually lack the power or resources to track corporate sustainability claims properly. One of the solutions to this problem is improving regulatory enforcement and monitoring measures. Governments must increase funding for consumer protection authorities, adopt independent audits of sustainability, and collaborate with international agencies to establish international standards for sustainability compliance

Third is a deficit of consumer awareness about sustainability and consumer rights. Consumers are not aware of how to identify greenwashing, make environmentally friendly purchasing decisions, or report false claims. Without proper education, consumers will be less likely to make environmentally friendly decisions. To counteract this, consumer education programs must be expanded. E-government, NGOs, and business entities must launch public campaigns, integrate sustainability literacy into school curriculum, and develop affordable online materials to empower consumers to make informed choices.

Lastly, economic constraints and market barriers are enormous challenges in making sustainable products available to all. The majority of eco-products are costly since sustainable production is expensive, and thus inaccessible to poorer consumers. Small businesses lack the means to obey stringent environmental regulations either because of their limited resources. To address this problem, one may instill incentives to encourage sustainable business and products. Governments may provide tax breaks, subsidies, and grants to companies embracing

sustainable operations, and also conduct research to make green ways of making things more affordable. Encouraging a circular economy where products are designed for durability and recyclability also saves costs in the long run.

VII. CONCLUSION

New technologies are at the crossroads of innovation, consumer protection, and sustainability, providing powerful instruments for protecting information, stopping greenwashing, and reshaping supply chains. Strong legal frameworks are still essential for closing the gap between innovation and responsible regulation, calling for international collaboration and strict enforcement. By combining data analytics, AI, IoT, and blockchain with ethically directed systems, societies can optimize resource utilization, enhance transparency, and catalyze inclusive growth. Just as important are consumer education, corporate responsibility, and extensive stakeholder cooperation, so that responsible consumption is the foundation of environmental stewardship. These concerted actions will create a more sustainable, resilient, and equitable world.

VIII. FUTURE SCOPE OF THIS STUDY

Despite global strides towards sustainability policies, there is still much to be done in adopting consumer rights acts for sustainability. The most prevalent issues are:

1. Greenwashing and False Environmental Claims – Corporate organizations market a number of products as green without any related environmental benefit without misleading people into believing that they are becoming greener.
2. Lax Enforcement and Loopholes in Legislation – The majority of countries have legislation on sustainability, but its enforcement is patchy. Corporates exploit loopholes in the law to avoid compliance.
3. Lack of Consumer Awareness – The majority of consumers are yet to become aware of their rights and how to practice sustainable buying choices. Governments and institutions need to extend education campaigns for sustainability policies.
4. Economic Constraints and Market Barriers – Sustainable products are costlier, making them unaffordable for low-income consumers. Small enterprises may also struggle to

achieve stringent sustainability requirements

Possible Solutions

1. Enhancing Anti-Greenwashing Laws – Governments must implement tougher sanctions against firms that are convicted of greenwashing. Third-party certification of environmental claims can enhance credibility and consumer trust.
2. Enhancing Regulatory Supervision and Enforcement–National and international regulatory agencies must institute more effective monitoring of business sustainability practices. Regulation funding can strengthen enforcement mechanisms.
3. Enhancing Consumer Education Programmes – Governments and NGOs must launch public campaigns on sustainable consumption, which will allow consumers to make informed decisions.

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