

Sustainability in Business: The Shift Toward Green Commerce in 2021

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Abstract

The transition toward green commerce in business practices has become a key area of focus in recent years, particularly in 2021, when sustainability emerged as a critical factor for business success. This paper explores the growing trend of sustainability in business, specifically within the context of India, where green commerce is becoming increasingly important. The research investigates the factors driving this shift, the impact of consumer preferences, corporate strategies for implementing sustainability, and the role of government policies. By analyzing data from consumer surveys, corporate sustainability reports, and government initiatives, this paper provides a comprehensive understanding of the shift toward sustainable business practices in India. Key findings reveal that the increasing demand for eco-friendly products, along with stricter regulations and the rise of corporate social responsibility, has significantly influenced businesses to adopt green strategies. However, challenges such as financial constraints and lack of awareness among small and medium enterprises (SMEs) persist, limiting the widespread adoption of green commerce practices. This paper concludes by discussing the opportunities for businesses to capitalize on the growing trend of green commerce and its potential to transform India's economic and environmental landscape.

Keywords: Green commerce, sustainability, business, eco- friendly

1. Introduction

The growing concern over climate change and environmental degradation has made sustainability one of the most pressing issues of the 21st century. Over the last few decades, businesses have increasingly recognized the importance of adopting sustainable practices to ensure long-term profitability, meet consumer expectations, and comply with stricter government regulations. In 2021, the momentum toward sustainability reached new heights, driven by multiple factors, including global consumer demand for eco-friendly products, corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, and increasing regulatory pressures. Businesses are realizing that incorporating sustainability into their core operations is not only a moral responsibility but also a strategic advantage in today's competitive market.

The concept of **green commerce** refers to business activities and practices that aim to reduce environmental harm and promote sustainable development. This includes everything from reducing carbon footprints, using renewable energy, and minimizing waste to adopting sustainable sourcing practices and promoting products with lower environmental impact. Green commerce is not limited to any one industry; it spans sectors from manufacturing to services, retail to agriculture, with each industry implementing its own version of sustainability. The transition to greener business practices has been particularly prominent in emerging economies like India, where both consumer behavior and government policies are pushing businesses toward more sustainable models.

In India, the demand for environmentally responsible products and services is rising, as Indian consumers become more aware of the environmental and social implications of their purchasing decisions. In parallel, Indian businesses are increasingly recognizing that sustainability is essential for securing long-term success. Large corporations, such as the Tata Group and Reliance Industries, have set ambitious sustainability goals,

including achieving net-zero emissions and investing heavily in renewable energy. However, challenges remain, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that often lack the resources and knowledge to implement sustainable practices.

India's government has also taken significant steps to support green commerce. Policies and initiatives, such as the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) and the Perform, Achieve, and Trade (PAT) scheme, have incentivized businesses to adopt energy-efficient technologies and reduce carbon emissions. These regulatory frameworks, combined with market demand for green products, are helping to shape the future of business sustainability in India.

This paper aims to explore the key drivers of green commerce, analyze the sustainability practices of Indian businesses, and examine the role of government policies in shaping the green economy. The research further investigates the challenges faced by businesses in adopting sustainable practices, particularly SMEs, and identifies opportunities for growth in the green commerce sector. Through a comprehensive review of literature, data analysis, and case studies, this paper will shed light on the ongoing shift towards sustainability in business and its potential impact on India's economic and environmental future.

2. Literature Review

This section discusses various studies and reports related to sustainability and green commerce, with a particular focus on India.

Global Literature on Green Commerce

- **Sustainability as a Competitive Advantage:** According to Nielsen (2021), 73% of global consumers are willing to pay more for products from brands that are sustainable. This trend has influenced businesses worldwide to adopt greener practices, with a significant rise in the use of renewable energy, eco-friendly packaging, and waste reduction strategies.
- **Green Supply Chains:** Grewal et al. (2020) highlighted that businesses are increasingly focusing on integrating sustainability into their supply chains, using green logistics and sourcing materials from sustainable sources.

Indian Literature on Sustainability and Green Commerce

Consumer Preferences: Research by KPMG India (2021) revealed that Indian consumers are becoming more eco-conscious, with 61% of consumers expressing a preference for purchasing sustainable products. This is reflected in the growing demand for organic food, eco-friendly products, and ethical sourcing.

Corporate Sustainability: According to a PwC India (2021) report, Indian companies are focusing on sustainability to attract investment and meet regulatory requirements. Large Indian conglomerates like Tata Group and Reliance Industries have made public commitments to achieving net-zero emissions.

Government Policies: India's government has introduced policies aimed at encouraging sustainable business practices, including the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) and the Perform, Achieve and Trade (PAT) scheme. These regulations have forced businesses to adopt greener processes.

Challenges in India: Despite the growing interest in sustainability, Rao (2021) noted that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in India face challenges in adopting green practices due to financial constraints and lack of awareness.

3. Data Analysis and Findings

To understand the extent of the shift toward green commerce in India, we analyzed consumer behavior data,

corporate sustainability reports, and government initiatives.

3.1 Consumer Preferences in India:

A survey conducted in 2021 revealed the following key data about Indian consumers' preferences for sustainable products:

Parameter	Percentage (%)
Consumers willing to pay more for eco-friendly products	61%
Consumers actively seeking organic products	56%
Consumers concerned about brand sustainability	67%
Consumers aware of environmental impact of packaging	72%

Source: KPMG India, 2021

This data shows a clear trend towards increased consumer preference for sustainability, which is shaping demand for greener products and services.

3.2 Corporate Sustainability Practices in India

The table below outlines some of the prominent sustainability initiatives undertaken by leading Indian companies in 2021:

Company	Sustainability Initiative	Objective
Tata Group	Commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050	Reduce carbon footprint
Reliance Industries	Investment in renewable energy (Target of 100 GW by 2030)	Transition to clean energy
Infosys	Carbon neutral since 2020, commitment to water conservation	Enhance environmental sustainability
Hindustan Unilever	Sustainable sourcing of raw materials, zero waste to landfill	Promote circular economy and reduce waste
Mahindra Group	Sustainability drive in agriculture (Mahindra Tractors)	Promote sustainable farming practices

Source: PwC India, 2021

3.3 Government Policies Impact on Green Commerce in India

The following table summarizes key government policies and their influence on green commerce in India:

Policy/Regulation	Impact
National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)	Encouraged companies to reduce carbon emissions
Perform, Achieve and Trade (PAT) Scheme	Promoted energy efficiency in industries
Goods and Services Tax (GST) reductions for eco-friendly products	Lowered the cost of eco-friendly products, encouraging adoption
FDI in renewable energy sector	Increased investment in green energy technologies

Source: Indian Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, 2021

These policies have created an enabling environment for businesses to invest in green technologies and adopt sustainable practices.

4. Discussion

The data and findings from both global and Indian literature, as well as the analysis, indicate that sustainability is increasingly influencing business strategies. In India, consumer preferences are shifting towards sustainable products, and businesses are responding by incorporating eco-friendly practices into their operations. Corporate giants like Tata and Reliance are setting ambitious targets for carbon neutrality, which is driving innovation in green technologies. However, SMEs continue to face challenges in adopting these practices due to financial constraints and lack of resources.

Challenges for Indian Businesses

- **Financial Constraints:** SMEs in India struggle with the high upfront costs of implementing sustainable practices, such as renewable energy installations and waste management systems.
- **Lack of Awareness:** Many small businesses are unaware of the long-term benefits of sustainability, both in terms of cost savings and consumer loyalty.

Opportunities for Indian Businesses

- **Government Support:** Policies and incentives such as tax breaks and subsidies for sustainable practices present significant opportunities for businesses to invest in green technologies.
- **Rising Consumer Demand:** The increasing awareness and demand for sustainable products create a market for businesses to expand their green product lines.

Table: Overview of Business Sustainability Benefits

Benefit	Impact on Business
Enhanced Brand Loyalty	Consumers prefer brands that demonstrate environmental responsibility
Cost Savings from Efficiency	Energy and resource savings through sustainable operations
Regulatory Compliance	Meeting government standards and avoiding fines
Competitive Advantage	Ability to differentiate in the market with sustainable practices

Source: Adapted from KPMG India, 2021; PwC India, 2021

5. Conclusion

The shift toward green commerce represents a significant transformation in the way businesses operate, especially in emerging economies like India. In 2021, sustainability has evolved from a fringe concern to a mainstream business strategy, driven by a convergence of consumer preferences, corporate social responsibility, and government policies. As businesses increasingly adopt environmentally friendly practices, the demand for green products and services continues to grow, offering a new avenue for innovation and market growth.

Our findings underscore that large corporations in India, such as the Tata Group, Reliance Industries, and Infosys, are leading the way in embracing sustainability. These companies have made substantial commitments to reducing their environmental footprints, including setting ambitious goals for carbon neutrality, increasing the use of renewable energy, and incorporating sustainable sourcing in their supply chains. The actions of these industry leaders demonstrate that sustainability is not only an ethical imperative but also a competitive advantage that can enhance brand loyalty, reduce operational costs, and attract investment. As more companies take the lead in adopting sustainable practices, the trend toward green commerce is expected to intensify, setting a new standard for business operations in India.

However, the analysis also reveals that significant challenges remain, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). While large corporations have the resources and infrastructure to invest in green technologies, many SMEs struggle with the high upfront costs of adopting sustainable practices. Additionally, there is a lack of awareness and understanding of the long-term benefits of sustainability, leading to a reluctance to embrace green initiatives. Without targeted support and incentives, it is likely that SMEs will fall behind in the green commerce movement, widening the gap between large and small businesses in terms of sustainability performance.

Government policies and regulations play a critical role in shaping the trajectory of green commerce. India's proactive stance in encouraging sustainable business practices, through initiatives such as the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) and the Perform, Achieve, and Trade (PAT) scheme, provides businesses with the necessary frameworks and incentives to adopt green practices. These policies not only encourage businesses to reduce their environmental impact but also promote the development of green technologies, making sustainability more accessible for companies of all sizes. However, the government needs to do more to address the specific challenges faced by SMEs, such as providing financial support, offering tax incentives, and raising awareness about the economic and environmental benefits of green commerce.

Moreover, the growing consumer awareness regarding environmental issues is a powerful driver of change. As Indian consumers become more informed about the environmental and social implications of their purchasing decisions, businesses are under increasing pressure to align their offerings with consumer demand for sustainable products. The results from consumer surveys indicate that a significant percentage of Indian consumers are willing to pay a premium for eco-friendly products and actively seek out brands that prioritize sustainability. This shift in consumer behavior provides a significant opportunity for businesses to differentiate themselves by offering greener alternatives and positioning themselves as leaders in corporate social responsibility.

Looking ahead, the future of green commerce in India appears promising, but it will require continued collaboration between businesses, consumers, and policymakers. The rising awareness of environmental issues, coupled with the growing demand for sustainable products and services, will continue to drive the adoption of green practices. However, businesses must be prepared to navigate the challenges of integrating sustainability into their operations, especially in the face of financial constraints and market competition. In particular, businesses must focus on innovation to develop new green products, enhance supply chain sustainability, and integrate circular economy principles into their business models.

In conclusion, while the shift toward green commerce in India is still in its early stages, it holds immense potential to reshape the country's economic and environmental landscape. By aligning business strategies with sustainability goals, companies can not only contribute to mitigating climate change but also enhance their long-term profitability and market competitiveness. As businesses in India continue to adopt sustainable practices and as the government introduces more supportive policies, India will emerge as a key player in the global green economy. The green commerce movement in India is not only an opportunity for businesses to capitalize on a growing market but also a crucial step towards ensuring a sustainable and environmentally responsible future.

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