

ENVR 1080 – The Smart Consumer - Uncovering the Hidden Story behind the Product Label

School:	Academy of Interdisciplinary Studies
Subject Area:	Environment
Course Credit:	3
Instructor:	SAUERWEIN Meike
Pre-requisite/co-requisite:	Nil

Notes:

- The syllabi provided here is for reference only and may be subject to changes and adjustments as determined by the course instructors.

ENVR 1080

- The Smart Consumer

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

Spring Semester 2025

Date and Venue

Date & Time: Tue & Thu, 9:00 - 10:20

Venue: Rm 5619, Lift 31/32

Given the interactive nature of class students are advised to bring a fully charged laptop / tablet for activities, quizzes etc. to the classroom.

Contact Information

Instructor

Name: Dr. Meike SAUERWEIN

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Office: Room 4355 (via Lift 13-15)

Teaching Assistant

Name: Christina, Tianyuan MA

Email: tmaak@connect.ust.hk

Office Hours: Feel free to send an email to us anytime in order to schedule a ZOOM or face to face meeting. Students are also advised to stay behind after class in case of questions.

Course Content & Teaching approaches

This class aims to investigate existing consumption patterns and its consequences on the environment and our society and analyze what can be done – by individual consumers as well as institutions - to move towards smart, sustainable consumption. For that we will look at what motivates people when making purchasing decisions and how can smart, sustainable consumption be promoted. At the same time the class provides insides on what makes specific products and product groups unsustainable and what is needed to enhance product sustainability and associated consumption decisions.

During this class, students will put them self into the consumer's shoes e.g., by evaluating their own consumption behavior or experiencing challenges when trying to choose more sustainable products. This will enable students to analyze what kind of information and triggers are needed to enable sustainable consumption in general, and how knowledge can be transferred to consumers. To allow students to explore the topic and exchange their ideas a blend of lecturing and interactive tasks, discussions, and group projects will be used for teaching.

The course is covering 3 major themes:

1 – What makes consumption (un)sustainable?

In the course we will look at the consequences that current consumption behavior has on societies and the environment, and dive into the questions ‘*What is a sustainable product?*’ and ‘*How can we measure whether one product is more sustainable than another?*’ We will also have a closer look at two specific product groups, particularly Food and Fashion and identify the sustainability hotspots (weak-points) with regard to raw-materials and ingredients, production, processing, as well as use and disposal.

2 – Why do consumers behave in an (un)sustainable manner?

The course also aims to investigate the consumption behavior of people and explore what generally motivates us to consume. Furthermore, we discuss the questions ‘*Why do we consume so much?*’ and ‘*Does consumption make us happy?*’ and we will explore the challenges and barriers consumers face when attempting to make more sustainable purchasing decisions.

3 – How can we enable smart, sustainable consumption?

Lastly, we will explore how different stakeholders – like policy makers, producers & retailers, educators & actors from non-governmental institutions – could enable and motivate consumers to make smarter choices.

Prerequisites

This course is designed for students from any discipline and there are no specific prerequisites.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

On completion of this course, students will be able to:

- ILO-1 Explain the consequences of unsustainable consumer behavior on the environment and social welfare
- ILO-2 Apply life cycle thinking to analyze production methods and consumption behaviors and identify what renders them (un)sustainable
- ILO-3 Analyze what drives citizens to consume in an (un-)sustainable manner and identify enablers as well as barriers towards behavior change
- ILO-4 Critically analyze “sustainable” claims to recommend areas of improvement for product labeling and marketing
- ILO-5 Evaluate and develop tools that help to enhance consumer education and enable Hong Kong citizens to make more sustainable purchasing choices

Course Schedule (tentative as of 15. Jan 2025)

Themes	1. What makes consumption (un)sustainable?
	2. Why do consumers behave in an (un)sustainable manner?
	3. How can we enable smart, sustainable consumption?

Lecture #	Date	Topics	
1	Tue 04-Feb	(Un)Sustainable Consumption	What is smart consumption?
2	Thu 06-Feb		How much do we consume?
3	Tue 11-Feb	Consumption and Happiness	How much do we need to consume to be happy?
4	Thu 13-Feb		
5	Tue 18-Feb	Drivers for unsustainable consumption	Why do we consume so much?
6	Thu 20-Feb		
7	Tue 25-Feb	How to change consumer behaviour?	Education and Behavioural interventions
8	Thu 27-Feb		
9	Tue 04-Mar	(Un)Sustainable Products - Environmental Dimension	LCA concepts & Life Cycle Game
10	Thu 06-Mar		There is no such thing as a sustainable product!
11	Tue 11-Mar	(Un)Sustainable Products - Social Dimension	Modern Slavery
12	Thu 13-Mar	Challenges & Barriers for buying sustainable products	Availability, Price and Information, Trust, Quality, Habits, Social Norms
13	Tue 18-Mar		
14	Thu 20-Mar	How to recognize sustainable products?	Eco-Labeling, Environmental Certification & Greenwashing
15	Tue 25-Mar		
16	Thu 27-Mar	Enabling Sustainable Consumption <i>Corporate Actions</i>	What can <i>retailers</i> do to enable sustainable consumption?
	Tue 01-Apr	MIDTERM BREAK	
	Thu 03-Apr		
17	Tue 08-Apr	Enabling Sustainable Consumption <i>Corporate Actions</i>	What can <i>producers</i> do to enable sustainable consumption?
18	Thu 10-Apr	Enabling Sustainable Consumption <i>The role of the government</i>	Voluntary, market-based & regulatory policies to enable Sustainable Consumption
19	Tue 15-Apr		
20	Thu 17-Apr	Product Sustainability - Food	Food - Production, Processing, Consumption & Waste
21	Tue 22-Apr		
22	Thu 24-Apr	Public Holiday	
23	Tue 29-Apr		
	Thu 01-May	Product Sustainability - Textiles	Textile - Production & Waste
24	Thu 06-May		
25	Tue 08-May	Final Project Presentations	

Lecture slides /Literature / References

Lecture slides will be made available right before the lecture starts to allow students to follow along during class. Please note that many class contents will be discussion or activity based. Outcomes or solutions of such activities (if any) will be added to the slides after the lecture and a the “post-class” version will be made available for students’ revision (i.e., Quiz preparation).

There is no course or reference book for this course. Information will be drawn from different sources which are listed class-slides. If you like to have more information on specific topics or recommendations, you can contact the instructor any time.

Assessment Scheme (tentative as of 15. Jan 2025)

Task		Points	Release	Due date	ILOs
Group work	#1 Mindful Consumption (Activity, Presentation & Video)	15	Week 4 (Tentative: 27 March)	8. May	ILO 5
	#2 Retail Case Study (Report)	15	Week 8 (tentative: 27. March)	9. April	ILO 4&5
	Peer evaluation (ipeer)	5	After all group work is submitted		
Individual	Participation & Attendance & iPeer	15 (10+3+2)	starting from 18. Feb		
	2-3 Quizzes	30	Throughout the semester, exact date tba		ILO 1-4
	Homework Task	5	Week 7&8	24. April	ILO 4
	Reflection Essay	15	1 week after semester ended		ILO1-4

Group project presentation

In task #1 students are working on a small challenge that that asks groups to come up with creative interventions and prompts to be installed on campus that engages the campus community towards sustainable or mindful consumption using consumer change intervention theories. The task will be conducted throughout the semester and results will be presented in the last class.

In task #2 students will receive a case study about retailer strategies to increase the share sustainable products and derive a strategy for Hong Kong retailers. To test the student's

understanding of the case some quiz questions will be about the case. The strategy will need to be submitted as a report.

Participation + Attendance + ipeer

Since this class heavily draws on in-class activities and discussions, 15% of the grade are allocated to evaluate each student's attendance and participation. Students are expected to attend regularly (3 points) and actively participate (10 points) and assess their peers' performance / get assessed (2 points). The participation mark will consider proactive engagement in class discussions and in-class activities. In class we will use different types of online tools and surveys for students to submit their ideas and opinions which will count towards the participation mark.

Quizzes

MC quizzes will be conducted twice in the semester. The quizzes will be based on class contents of the prior lectures and reading materials to be read in preparation for the class. Quizzes will mainly contain multiple choice questions but may incl. open answer questions. **Students need to be present in class to be eligible to take the quiz. Absent students will automatically be reset to zero.**

Homework

There will be 2 homework tasks and students have to pick EITHER ONE of them. Both tasks will link to challenges that the sustainability team of a local retail corporation is facing and students will come up with solutions and recommendations.

Reflection Essay

By the end of the term students are will be asked to write a reflective essay about their learnings in class and thoughts about sustainable consumption.

More information on assignments will be made available on Canvas > Assignments throughout the semester.

Late submission for group projects and the reflection essay as well of the peer evaluation will be penalized e.g., with the deduction of -1 point per day late; students who do not submit an evaluation of their peers will receive 0 points themselves, regardless of the score given by peers.

Group formation and preferred name

Students can indicate a grouping preference as well as the name they like to be called in class on this excel sheet. *Please follow the announcements in class and on Canvas.*

Please note that we try to accommodate all requests but cannot guarantee that all students are grouped according to their preference. Students that do not provide a grouping preference will be assigned by the TA following the grouping criteria (5 students per group, at least from 2 different years of study and 2 different schools).

Course Policy

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism and violations of the University policy will not be tolerated. Please refer to the university policy about [academic integrity](#) and [student conduct](#).

Course Copyright

All course materials students receive or to which students have online access are protected by copyright laws. Students may use course materials and make copies for their own use as needed, but unauthorized distribution and/or uploading of materials without the instructor's express permission is strictly prohibited.

Special Accommodations

If you have a documented disability, or any other problem you think might affect your ability to perform in class, please schedule an appointment to see the instructor early in the semester so that arrangements may be made to accommodate you.

Inclement Weather

Please refer to the University website regarding [bad weather policies](#). If you are affected by a weather-related emergency, please contact your instructor at the earliest possible time to make special arrangements.

Policy for GenAI Integration in Teaching and Learning

In general, there are no general restrictions on use of generative AI for an assessment task. Detailed instructions will be provided for each assignment. Example statement: "In this assessment, you are allowed to use generative artificial intelligence (AI) to aid you in any manner. However, you must give proper credit for any use of generative AI." **Failure to disclose the use of generative AI will result in a failing grade for this assignment.**