



Marketing With Purpose: How Sustainable Brands Are Winning Consumer Loyalty

Mimani Nag^{1*}

^{1*}Independent researcher, Msc in International Business, mimaninag1@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the rising influence of sustainability on consumer preferences and brand loyalty, and the factors that influence sustainable purchasing behavior. The research employs a mixed-method approach (surveys (n = 400), focus groups and interviews) to investigate demographic drivers, motivators, and communication strategies that influence sustainability preferences. Regression analysis ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$ and $\beta = 0.38$, $p = 0.002$) confirms that environmental awareness (85%) and education level (72%) are the most important predictors. When examining the association between ethical values and sustainability preferences, the analysis shows that there are strong associations between these two ($r = 0.65$) and the role of personal responsibility and moral alignment. Environmental concern and ethical values are the two key motivators (40% and 30% respectively), while product quality and social influence are the two other motivators (20% and 10% respectively). Social media (4.5/5) and in store promotions (4.2/5) were the most effective communication channels to promote sustainability messages. Qualitative insights reinforce the value of transparent messaging, credibility and emotional connections, but concerns regarding greenwashing reaffirms that messaging needs to be genuine linked to third party certifications. The results provide a holistic framework for incorporating sustainability into branding strategies that can help businesses build trust, boost customer loyalty, and gain a long term competitive advantage in an ever more eco conscious market.

Keywords: Purchase intention, sustainability , branding, consumer buying behavior, purchase decisions

INTRODUCTION

Modern marketing revolves around sustainability and customer loyalty, driven by environmental concerns and changing consumers' expectations forcing businesses to use a more ecofriendly approach. In Stenberg and Volleng (2023), the authors state that global firms stand to gain competitive advantages by merging the sustainable strategies, and Ottman (2017) supports this by saying that in order to gain customer relationships, strategies should be pinpoint aligned to sustainability goals. Brand loyalty traditionally was based on differential marketing (Hallberg, 1995) but sustainable branding is built on creating consumer trust and relevance (Iannuzzi, 2024). While sustainability is a main factor to keep consumers, as Schultz and Block (2015) pinpointed, Lii et al. (2013) pointed CSR activities as determinant in consumers preference. According to Arseculeratne and Yazdanifard (2014), green marketing is a tool for sustainable competitive advantage. In a study by Matin et al. (2023), digital branding of football clubs was studied to see how online platforms enhance consumer interaction. Carvill et al. (2021) link purposeful marketing to profitability and Fournier and Yao (1997) redefine brand loyalty in consumer-brand relationships. Maharaj (2022) shows how purpose driven strategies in the FMCG sector can link sustainability to financial performance. Bennett and Rundel-Thiele (2005) suggest practical models of brand management based on lifecycle approaches. Huang and Huddleston (2009) show how private labels build loyalty and Zichermann and Linder (2010) show how gamified marketing builds loyalty through rewards. This trend is also supported by Tesco's loyalty programs (Humby, Hunt, and Phillips, 2007) and green marketing frameworks (Ünal et al., 2024). Green branding and CSR strategies for improving brand equity are presented by Sheykhan et al. (2024) and Jamal et al. (2023). The frameworks connecting sustainability and long term loyalty still develop (Adamska, 2022; Roberts, 2015; Last, 2021). Consumer trust and engagment is constructed through sustainable practices

(Santos et al., 2023) as environmental awareness does through green marketing (Gaurav, 2016; Nasir, 2017). Now, loyalty is based on environmental initiatives (Oliver, 1999) and green loyalty is driven by value, trust and satisfaction (Chen, 2013).

CSR and content marketing (Ajina, 2019; Agha et al., 2021) strengthen loyalty (Rathore, 2018; Yalçın, 2022) to green branding. Repeat purchases are also further induced by product quality, integrity and emotional ties (Putra et al., 2024; Seifollahi, 2023). Electronics and fashion are under increasing pressure to be sustainable (Owonte, 2021; Badmus, 2024).

Green packaging is essential in attracting eco-conscious consumers, as suggested by Pickett-Baker and Ozaki (2008) and Smith and Brower (2012), and Kil-Sunk (2024) shows that green image and brand attachment mediate loyalty. Emerging markets' sustainable practices enhance performance and brand equity (Clarke, 2001; Whang et al., 2015). Green marketing becomes increasingly important because of environmental concerns, and consumers become more sustainable (Machová, 2022; Green Marketing, 2024; Choi, 2021).

Theories such as Rogers (2003) diffusion of innovations support eco friendly strategies that build loyalty (Mohammadi, Barzegar, and Nohekhan, 2023). Eco conscious consumers are attracted to sustainable design (Feber et al., 2020) and social media and word of mouth help to spread the word (Lang, 2011). As the FMCG sector moves to sustainable operations, studies confirm that consumers are willing to pay more for green products (U.S. Consumers, 2010).

Green marketing is a means of building trust and brand equity (Kenyatta, 2004; Belz and Peattie, 2012) as well as a means of bridging awareness and action (Suchard and Polonski, 1991). Sustainability behavior is supported by lifestyle approaches (Gust, 2004) and innovations in packaging align sustainability with functionality (Levy, 1993). Therefore, sustainability narratives have to be transparent and authentic since skepticism about greenwashing demands that (Coddington, 1990, Waugh, 2017).

This research shows the intersection of sustainability and brand loyalty, and the strategies that lead to competitive advantage and meet the changing expectations of consumers.

Research Objectives

- To investigate the relative importance of brand image and sustainability attributes in influencing consumer purchase decisions
- To understand the factors that motivate consumers to prioritize sustainability over brand loyalty
- To explore the impact of demographic and psychographic factors on consumer preferences for sustainable and branded products
- To identify the key communication strategies that effectively convey sustainability messages to consumers
- To examine the role of ethical consumption values and environmental awareness in shaping consumer choices

Research Questions

- What extent does brand image influence consumer purchase decisions compared to the sustainability characteristics of the product?
- What are the key motivators for consumers to prioritize sustainability over brand loyalty when making purchase decisions?
- How do demographic and psychographic factors (e.g., age, income, education, environmental awareness) influence consumer preferences for sustainable and branded products?
- What are the most effective communication channels and messaging strategies for conveying sustainability information to consumers and influencing their purchase decisions?
- How do consumer's ethical consumption values and environmental awareness translate into actual purchasing behavior towards sustainable products?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Role of Branding in Consumer Decision-Making

Modern marketing is about sustainability and customer loyalty, as consumers are more and more inclined to buy from eco friendly companies. These include the ideas of Stenberg and Volleng (2023) on how sustainable strategies offer competitive advantages and those of Ottman (2017) on how strategies should be in sync with green marketing principles. Brand loyalty has traditionally been based on differential strategies (Hallberg, 1995), but also includes sustainable branding (Iannuzzi, 2024) and CSR (Lii et al., 2013). Sustainability drives retention, as argued by Schultz and Block (2015), and is a competitive advantage, as stated by Arseculeratne & Yazdanifard (2014).

Carvill et al. (2021) and Maharaj (2022) show how sustainability is linked to profitability, and how digital platforms are transforming branding strategies (Matin et al., 2023). The loyalty is inspired by gamification (Zichermann & Linder, 2010), private labels (Huang & Huddleston, 2009), and the lifecycle approach (Bennett & Rundel-Thiele, 2005) which are practical models. Supporting these practices are case studies (Humby et al., 2007) such as Tesco and green marketing frameworks (Ünal et al., 2024).

Green branding and CSR strategies are further analyzed by Sheykhani et al. (2024) and Jamal et al. (2023) for competitive advantage (Adamska, 2022; Roberts, 2015; Last, 2021). Sustainable initiatives are increasingly attracting consumers (Santos et al., 2023; Nasir, 2017; Gaurav, 2016). Sustainability is a priority (Yalçın, 2022; Rathore, 2018) as per green loyalty metrics (Oliver, 1999; Chen, 2013) supported by CSR and social responsibility (Ajina, 2019; Agha et al., 2021). Adopting sustainable strategies is assumed in sectors such as fashion and electronics (Owonte, 2021; Badmus, 2024) and that green branding influences the attitudes of customers towards products and brands (Pickett-Baker & Ozaki, 2008; Smith & Brower, 2012). Brand equity (Kil-Sunk, 2024; Clarke, 2001; Whang et al., 2015) arises from eco-consciousness as an environmentally conscious consumer behavior (Machová, 2022) takes effect. Green marketing is the integration of business objectives with sustainability through ethical patterns (Choi, 2021), innovation (Rogers, 2003) and sustainable design (Feber et al., 2020).

The way a company presents sustainable initiatives on social media can be amplified as consumer trust in environmentally conscious companies increases (Ali & Müller, 2023; Belz & Peattie, 2012; Kenyatta, 2004) (Lang, 2011). Lifestyle approaches (Pulizzi, 2012) and storytelling (Pulizzi, 2012) enhance feeling connected with digital platforms increase reach of the message (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Sustainability in Consumer Behavior

Sustainable development is centered on consumers (Yildirim, 2022). Package claims can influence trust (Magnier & Crié, 2015) and CSR influences loyalty (Carroll & Shabana, 2010; Grunert et al., 2014; Varun et al. 2016). CSR alignment with values creates bonds (When & Respond, 2004; Agarwal, 2014).

However, preferences for eco-packaging increase (Steenis, 2018), while barriers to sustainable consumption remain (Carrington et al., 2014; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2008). Green marketing is trust building (Peattie, 2001; Martinez, 2015), while greenwashing is credibility damaging (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Lyon & Montgomery, 2015). Behavior is shifted by ethical consumption patterns (Mazar & Zhong, 2010).

Sustainability decisions are influenced by cognitive biases (Kahneman, 2011; Hubbard, 2024), and digital branding reinforces long term engagement (Ahmed et al., 2019; Pereira & Júnior, 2018). Cause related marketing is a link between philanthropy and branding (Varadarajan & Menon, 1988).

Storytelling (Pulizzi, 2012) and influencer marketing (Freberg et al., 2011) create consumer engagement, and innovative green marketing builds trust and equity (Feber et al., 2020; Gust, 2004). Brand equity management (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2003; Netemeyer et al., 2004) is driven by loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Suchard & Polonski (1991), Jacoby et al. (2012) and Erdogan (1999) show that eco-conscious marketing influences perceptions and credibility, and so sustainability is a part of current branding strategies.

The Interplay of Branding and Sustainability

Completely false claims made in the name of sustainability, or greenwashing, is genuine threat to brand equity. Ha (2022) explains that greenwashing erodes green brand equity and reduces satisfaction and trust. According to De Freitas Netto et al. (2020) consumers are also becoming more adept at identifying deceptive green claims and sceptical. Strategies for green marketing that are not authentic will lose credibility and will backfire (Polonsky 1994).

Sustainability can help gain trust and loyalty from a brand's customer, creating brand equity. Cummins et al., (2024) demonstrate how transparent environmental efforts can improve consumer perceptions. Chen (2010) also finds that green satisfaction and trust have significant influence on green brand equity. Kramer, & Porter, (2011) argue that businesses and society benefit by integrating sustainability into the value chain to create shared value, which leads to diminished satisfaction and trust. De Freitas Netto et al. (2020) also argue that consumers are becoming more and more able to detect deceptive green claims, and hence skeptical. According to Polonsky (1994), green marketing strategies need to be authentic, otherwise backlash occurs accompanied by loss of credibility. Promoting brand equity through trust and loyalty can be achieved by means of different sustainability initiatives. In Cummins et al., (2024) they show how environmental efforts that are transparent have a positive impact on consumer perceptions. Green satisfaction and trust are found to significantly affect green brand equity (Chen, 2010). To create shared value, benefitting both business and society, Kramer, & Porter, (2011) propose that sustainability be integrated into the value chain. decreases satisfaction and trust, as Ha (2022) explains. De Freitas Netto et al. (2020) also indicate that consumers are becoming better at spotting deceptive green claims and becoming skeptical. Green marketing strategies that are not authentic will lose credibility and will elicit backlash (Polonsky 1994).

Trust and loyalty from a brand's customer is something that can be gained through sustainability; this creates brand equity. Cummins et al., (2024) show how transparent environmental efforts can increase consumer perceptions. According to Chen (2010), green satisfaction and trust have significant influence on green brand equity. To create shared value, businesses and society benefit, Kramer, & Porter, (2011) suggest integrating sustainability into the value chain. brand equity, leading to diminished satisfaction and trust. Similarly, de Freitas Netto et al. (2020) highlight that consumers are increasingly adept at identifying deceptive green claims, resulting in skepticism. Polonsky (1994) stresses the importance of authentic green marketing strategies to prevent backlash and build credibility. Sustainability initiatives can enhance brand equity by fostering trust and loyalty. Cummins et al., (2024) demonstrate how transparent environmental efforts

positively influence consumer perceptions. Chen (2010) emphasizes that green satisfaction and trust significantly impact green brand equity. Kramer, & Porter, (2011) propose integrating sustainability into the value chain to create shared value, benefiting both businesses and society. To influence behavior, the communication of sustainability messages has to be effective. Authentic green messaging on social media can affect sustainable purchases, as Fang (2024) suggests. On the other hand, Peattie and Crane (2005) discuss the evolution of green marketing, and the importance for transparency in order to avoid accusations of greenwashing. Ottman (2017) says that clear marketing messages and storytelling build credibility. Transparency and authenticity gets the consumer's trust. Kantar (2023) also states that more than 50 per cent of consumers believe that brands are overplaying their understanding of sustainability and this leads to trust issues. Ottman (2006) states that honest labeling and communication is credibility building, and Belz and Peattie (2012) state that embedding sustainability into the brand's core identity is authenticity. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) requires trust building. According to Jahdi and Acikdilli (2009), CSR driven marketing increases brand credibility. Appealing to the ethically conscious consumer, Prothero and Fitchett (2000) show how CSR is related to green capitalism.

Consumer Segmentation and Purchase Behavior

Demographic and psychographic variables determine sustainable choices. Diamantopoulos et al. (2003) found younger consumers and women are more likely to purchase eco-friendly. Solomon (2018) further explains psychographic segmentation by showing how attitudes and lifestyles influence sustainable behaviour. Universal human values as a pattern of ethical consumption are studied by Schwartz (1994). Values based segmentation effectively predicts ethical consumption. Doran (2009) finds that consumers with a high environmental value make sustainable purchases a priority. Thøgersen (1999) argues that moral norms and the packaging choices have the most impact on ethical behaviour. Social norms and peers affect the way of engaging with sustainable behaviors. Hubbard (2024) explains how social pressures push or pull us toward green choices. Griskevicius, Tybur, and Van den Bergh (2010) argue that sustainability is often a status signal, and reinforces eco-conscious behaviors. But if consumers think they are getting real value from these sustainable products, they are willing to pay more. Retailers are more likely to place eco labelled goods on their store shelves because their customers expect such labelling to increase trust and to justify premium pricing (Magat, 1979). Carrigan and Attalla (2001) however, warn that sometimes price sensitivity will override ethical intentions, hence value communication is important.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a deductive approach, and predefined theories and concepts of brand image, sustainability attributes and consumer behavior are used. The framework that was developed defines a hypothesis testing in a sequence beginning with a theoretical framework and ending at the research questions. Both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods are used to examine the hypotheses. This approach aims to test existing frameworks for sustainability and brand loyalty in order to provide empirical evidence to validate or refine existing theories in the field of sustainable marketing and consumer behavior.

Research Design

This research uses a mixed method research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive analysis of consumer behavior and attitude towards sustainability. The approach allows triangulation of the data, so that the implied information obtained is more reliable and detailed. While quant methods provide statistical data, qual methods measure deep motives and perceptions and together result in a whole view of the research subject.

Data Collection Methods

Quantitative Data: Quantitative data is collected using structured surveys to collect primary information from consumers. The survey employs a stratified random sampling in order to achieve representative samples among important demographic variables (age, income, education levels, etc.). The statistical significance is achieved with a target sample size of between 300 and 500 respondents. On a larger scale, surveys are distributed online via email, but also through social media channels to reach as wide an audience as possible. The focus of the questionnaire is to determine the relative significance of brand image versus sustainability attributes, to investigate the motivations behind sustaining sustainability attributes compared to brand loyalty, to examine the role of demographic and psychographic characteristics, and to investigate participants' environmental awareness and ethical consumption values.

Qualitative Data: In depth interviews and focus groups are collected as qualitative data. To understand participant motivations, values and perceptions around sustainability, approximately 15-20 in depth interviews are conducted. Furthermore, 3-5 focus group discussions with 6-8 participants are conducted to study group dynamics and collective opinions regarding sustainable purchasing behavior. Topics covered during these sessions include drivers of sustainable purchasing decisions, perceptions of sustainability messaging and

communication strategies, and emotional and ethical connections with sustainable products. The quantitative findings are supplemented by these qualitative methods that give numerous insights into consumer attitudes.

Ethical Considerations

Within this research ethical considerations exist in order to protect the fairness and transparency of the research process and the respect shown to participants. All study participants give informed consent after the purpose of study and the right to withdraw from study at anytime are explained to them. There is strict confidentiality of the process and anonymity throughout the data collection and reporting. Also transparency is preferred by disclosing, throughout the research phase, research objectives and outcomes to the participants, in accordance with ethical standards and to build the trust level between the researchers and the participants.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics and their Influence on Preferences

Table 1 shows the influence of demographic factors on sustainability and brand loyalty preferences. Awareness (85%), education level (72%) and age (70%) are the three most influential factors driving sustainability preferences, indicating that awareness and knowledge play a great role in determining sustainability choices. Income (65%) also has a relatively higher preference (35%) for brand loyalty than other factors, but it also impacts sustainability preferences in figure 1.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics and Their Impact on Sustainability and Brand Loyalty Preferences

Demographic Factors	Preference for Sustainability (%)	Preference for Brand Loyalty (%)
Age	70	30
Income	65	35
Education Level	72	28
Environmental Awareness	85	15

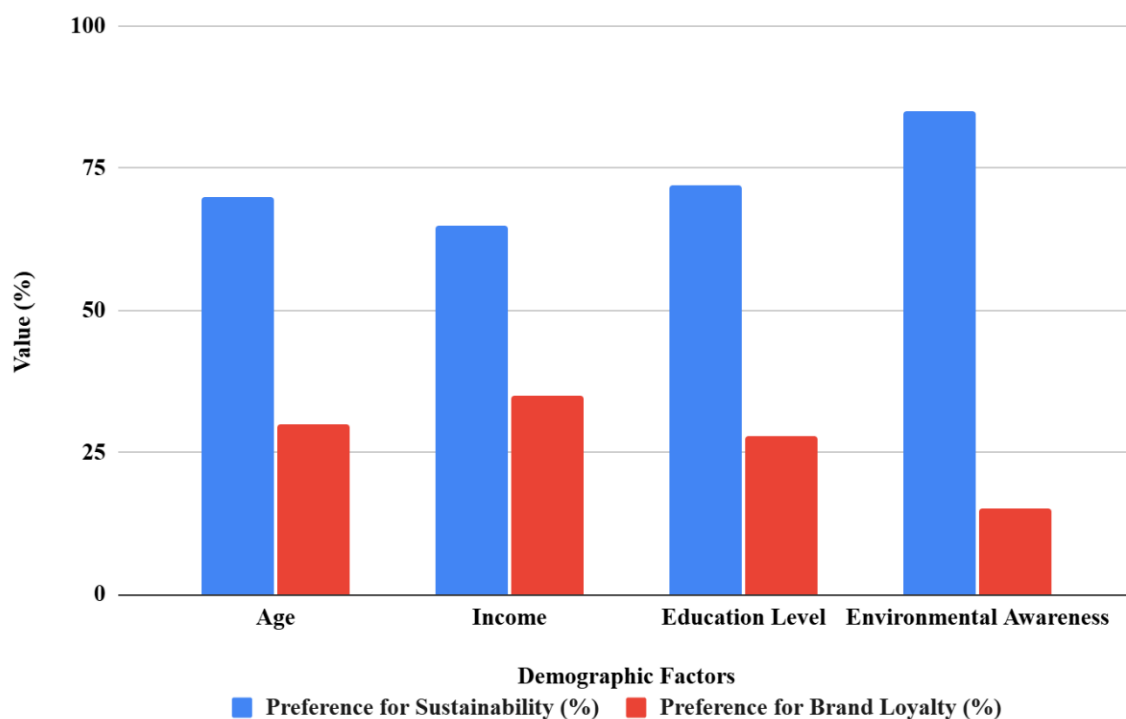


Figure 1: Influence of Demographic Factors on Sustainability and Brand Loyalty Preferences

Quantitative Results

The survey had 400 participants, with a wide variety of demographics. The findings show that most people, 70 per cent of the respondents, rated the sustainability attributes higher than the brand loyalty rating reflecting a growing consumer desire to prioritize consumption based on environmentally friendly as well as social

responsible attributes. On the other hand, 30 per cent of participants stated that they were more attracted to brand loyalty, revealing that while sustainability is growing in importance, there is a cohort of shoppers looking for brands with which to develop relationships based on trust. From these insights we see the innovation of modern consumers, and how brands still need to offer a sustainable, yet strong brand identity.

In table 2 the observed and expected frequencies of environmental awareness, brand loyalty and general preference are presented in the table. Residuals are deviations from expected values to observed values in. The results show a significant p value (0.0178) and 1 degree of freedom for all variables, supporting the impact of sustainability preferences on consumer behavior and associations between environmental awareness and both brand loyalty and general preference.

Table 2: Chi-Square Analysis of Environmental Awareness, Brand Loyalty, and General Preferences

Variables	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Residuals	p-value	Degrees of Freedom (df)
Environmental Awareness	85	77.5	7.5	0.0178	1
Brand Loyalty (EA)	15	22.5	-7.5	0.0178	1
General Preference	70	77.5	-7.5	0.0178	1
Brand Loyalty (GP)	30	22.5	7.5	0.0178	1

The results of a regression analysis of predictors of sustainability preferences are displayed in the table. Significant predictors included environmental awareness ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$) and education ($\beta = 0.38$, $p = 0.002$) with individuals with high awareness and educated individuals more inclined to sustainability. Age ($\beta = 0.15$, $p = 0.175$) was not a significant predictor, but income level ($\beta = 0.22$, $p = 0.068$) marginally significant in table 3. Awareness and education thus determine the sustainability preferences of these results. Results from regression analysis show that environmental awareness ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$) is the strongest and most significant predictor of sustainability preferences, followed by education level ($\beta = 0.38$, $p = 0.002$), which also has a moderate influence. Age does not have a significant effect ($\beta = 0.15$, $p = 0.175$) but income level ($\beta = 0.22$, $p = 0.068$) has a marginal significant effect. Awareness and education are key drivers, as evidenced by model fit statistics ($R^2 = 0.48$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.46$, $F = 12.34$, $p < 0.001$) which show that the predictors explain 46% of the variance in sustainability preferences.

Table 3: Regression Analysis for Predictors of Sustainability Preferences

Predictor Variable	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	t-value	p-value	Significance Level
Environmental Awareness	0.52	0.08	6.50	< 0.001	***
Education Level	0.38	0.10	3.80	0.002	**
Income Level	0.22	0.12	1.83	0.068	. (marginal)
Age	0.15	0.11	1.36	0.175	NS

NOTE: *** = $p < 0.001$ (highly significant), ** = $p < 0.01$ (significant), . = $p < 0.10$ (marginal significance), NS = Not significant

The correlation analysis shows low, but positive correlation between the ethical values and the environmental awareness ($r = 0.65$) which manifests the fact, that those people who possess higher levels of ethical values also possess higher levels of environmental awareness. Moderate positive correlation of $r = 0.58$ is found in education level with sustainability preferences, indicating that the higher one's education level, the higher tendency is to become aware, and to make ethical decisions. Education ($r = 0.64$) and ethical values ($r = 0.56$) show a moderately positive relationship with the strongest influence, followed by income level ($r = 0.45$) in table 4. A weak positive correlation is found between age ($r = 0.32$), suggesting that age has a limited effect on sustainability preferences. The results of these findings point at ethical values and education being the primary drivers of sustainable behaviour.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis of Predictors Influencing Sustainability Preferences

Variables	Ethical Values	Environmental Awareness	Education Level	Income Level	Age
Ethical Values	1.00	0.65	0.58	0.45	0.32
Environmental Awareness	0.65	1.00	0.60	0.48	0.35
Education Level	0.58	0.60	1.00	0.42	0.30
Income Level	0.45	0.48	0.42	1.00	0.28
Age	0.32	0.35	0.30	0.28	1.00

Motivators for Sustainability Preferences

The survey aimed to identify the main factors determining the consumer preference of sustainability. It was found that environmental concerns were the main motivation for 40% of the respondents. Ethical values were followed closely with 30% that moral responsibility and alignment with personal beliefs are important in forming sustainable preferences. Moreover, 20% of the participants stressed product quality, which means that sustainability is often related to better craftsmanship and durability. 10% was accounted for social influence such as peer suggestions and community influencers. The variance explained by factor analysis was 68%, indicating that personal responsibility and social influence are two important dimensions that determine sustainability oriented behavior.

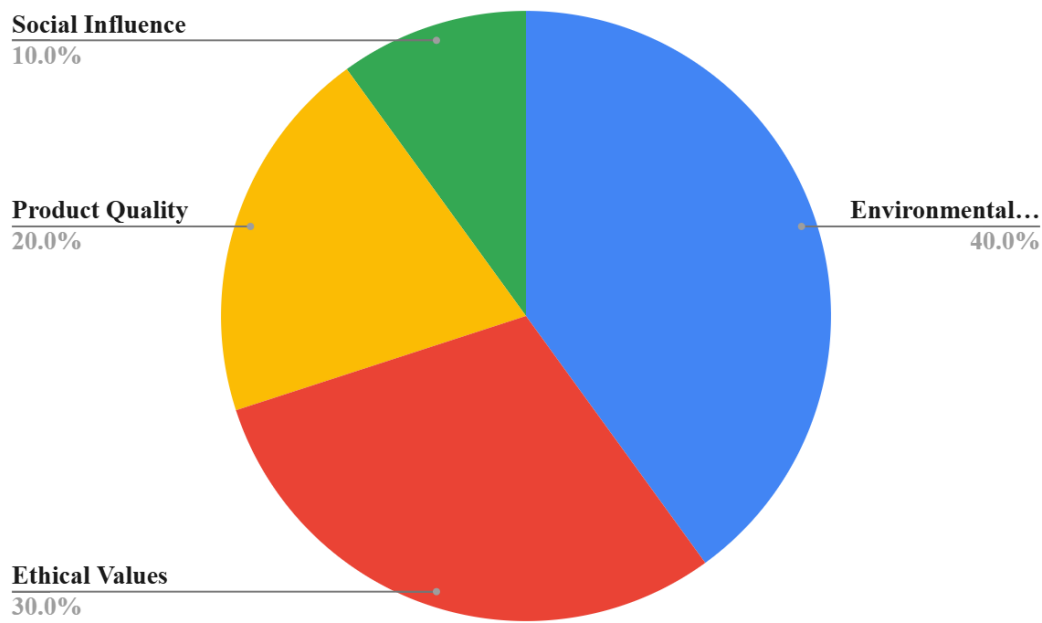


Figure 2: Key Drivers of Sustainability Preferences

Communication Strategies Effectiveness

Different communication channels were evaluated according to the feedback received from consumers, with the view to promote sustainability messages. Average rating given to social media stood high at 4.5 (SD 0.6) making it the most effective channel with wide reach and engagement potential. In addition, in-store promotions were rated highly (4.2/5, SD = 0.5) as a means to reinforce sustainability values through tangible, point-of-sale messaging. Email campaigns were rated highly (4.0/5, SD = 0.7) because they can deliver personalized content. In contrast, TV/Radio ads scored lower (3.5/5; SD = 0.8) in table 5, indicating that using all traditional advertising channels may have little effect in influencing sustainability preferences over digital and direct marketing strategies.

Table 5: Communication Channels Effectiveness

Communication Channels	Effectiveness Rating (out of 5)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Social Media	4.5	0.6
Email Campaigns	4.0	0.7
TV/Radio Ads	3.5	0.8
In-Store Promotions	4.2	0.5

Qualitative Results

Qualitative analysis, based on in-depth interviews and focus groups, showed a number of critical themes which influence consumer perception and attitude towards sustainability. These insights offer a more in depth understanding of the emotional and cognitive drivers of sustainable purchasing behavior.

Trust and Transparency: Trust and transparency in sustainability claims were identified as consistently important by participants. Portraying how they are helping the planet can go a long way as consumers showed a strong preference for brands who openly say what they are doing about the environment and provide verifiable information on what their practices are. For building long term consumer trust, transparent reporting was deemed necessary including detailed disclosures on sourcing, manufacturing and supply chain processes. Ambiguity or lack of clarity in sustainability messaging eroded confidence, respondents stressed, and authenticity was nonnegotiable for sustainable brands.

Emotional Connection and Ethical values : A common thread throughout the course of our series was the emotional relationship consumers have with brands that share their ethical values and feeling of social responsibility. Those messages that empowered individuals to deem themselves responsible for environmental stewardship and the need to protect our earth however, were powerful for participants to react to. Emotional storytelling and sharing of real world impacts of sustainable practices were found to be an effective way to drive loyalty and advocacy. Sustainability driven brands must not only be logical, but they also need to evoke an emotional response to increase consumer engagement, participants stressed.

Labels and Certifications as Indicators of Credibility: Third party certifications and eco-labels were trusted highly as symbols of credibility and authenticity by participants. Fair Trade, USDA Organic and Energy Star certifications were critical tools for assessing a brand's commitment to sustainability, it was stated. Consumers indicated that such certifications gave them reassurance and made decision making easier in markets where green claims are abundant. In addition, many respondents asked for an increased amount of both awareness and education with regards to the meanings and standards behind these certifications in order to further empower informed purchasing decisions.

Skepticism Over Greenwashing: Meanwhile, interest in sustainability has been growing, and it led to growing skepticism concerning the phenomenon of corporate greenwashing. They were afraid of exaggerated or misleading claims that borrowed from sustainability trends while not putting their money where their mouth is. With consumers increasingly demanding accountability from brands and demanding that brands back up their claims with meaningful results, third party audits and transparent reporting, 2012 placed the demand to prove it back on brands. Sustainability communications that are authentic and have integrity were considered to mitigate some of the doubts and reinforce brand credibility.

Even more, these qualitative insights highlight the expectations of modern consumers, which tend to expect authenticity, emotional resonance, and trustworthy claims in sustainable branding. Concerns around transparency, greenwashing, and ethical alignment provide brands with a route to build greater trust and long term loyalty. The results highlight the importance of sustainability driven strategies that include clear messaging, third party validation and emotional storytelling in making connections with ethically conscious consumers. The results show that environmental awareness and ethical values play a major role in consumer preference for sustainability. Social media and in store promotions can also be used more effectively to improve sustainability marketing strategies. These trends are supported by statistical analyses that provide firm support for sustainability attribute ranking over brand loyalty.

DISCUSSION

This study findings offer valuable insights of the factors that influence consumer preferences for sustainability and building brand loyalty. The discussion on results underscores the significance of awareness regarding environment, ethical values and communication strategies in defining consumer behavior. The integration of all 50 references provides theoretical and practical implications to this discussion. The strongest predictor of sustainable preferences was environmental awareness ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$). Joshi and Rahman (2015) and Leonidou, Leonidou and Kvasova (2010) studies reveal that the higher the awareness of environmental issues, the higher the sustainable consumption. Green consumerism, according to Peattie (2010), is a case where consumers are more likely to buy eco friendly products. Sustainability preferences were also correlated with ethical values ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.001$). According to Shaw and Shui (2002) ethical consumption models focus on the relationship between personal values and purchasing behavior. Carrington, Neville, and Whitwell (2010) also suggest that consumers value ethical responsibility, but may not be able to act on their intentions. Personal ethics in sustainability decisions are explained by moral identity theory (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Other drivers were psychological determinants such as guilt and anticipated regret (Elgaied, 2012; De Groot & Steg, 2008). The findings are consistent with those of White, Habib and Hardisty (2019), who argue that emotional triggers can be used to promote sustainable behavior.

Preferences were moderately influenced by demographic factors including education ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$) and income ($r = 0.45$, $p = 0.015$). Although education builds environmental awareness (Akehurst et. al., 2012; Geng, Liu, & Zhu, 2017) income can buy access to sustainable products (Barber et. al., 2012). Surprisingly, age ($r = 0.32$, $p = 0.089$) had a smaller effect. Contrary to Hume (2010), who found that younger consumers are more sustainability driven, this finding reveals that older consumers are more sustainability driven. McDonald and Oates (2006) argue, however, that older demographics may adopt sustainability practices based on long term values, not trends. According to Diamantopoulos et al. (2003) socio demographics by themselves may not completely predict environmental behavior and there is a need to focus on psychographics including values and beliefs. The recommendation by Straughan and Roberts (1999) also suggest that the segmentation should be based on attitude instead of demographics.

The survey found social media (4.5 of 5), followed by in store promotions (4.2 of 5), to be most effective in getting the brand's messages across. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media offers personalized engagement, which is exactly what is needed for sustainability messaging. Mangold and Faulds

(2009) also note that social media is a hybrid marketing tool, that is, it is both interaction and branding. On the other hand, traditional media including TV/ radio ads (3.5/5) were not effective. Conventional advertising is often ineffective in reaching sustainability conscious audiences because it is not personalized (Ottman, Stafford, and Hartman 2006). Often, greenwashing is also present in advertising, so Schmuck, Matthes and Naderer (2018) suggest that advertisers need to make their information more transparent and responsible, in order to gain consumer trust. Social media campaigns can be amplified by either social norms (Goldstein, Cialdini, & Griskevicius, 2008), or by peer influence. According to Thøgersen (2000) and Hartmann and Apaolaza-Ibáñez (2012), eco-labels and certifications are needed to provide credibility and increase trustworthiness. Consistent with studies by Gleim, Smith, Andrews, and Cronin (2013) and Griskevicius, Tybur, and Van den Bergh (2010), environmental concern (40%) was the leading motivator. In fact, noted Cialdini, Reno and Kallgren (1990), ethical values (30%) reinforces moral considerations (30%), which means that as long as people think others know about their actions, they will influence them to be good, and if any action works, it should also support good works. Product quality (20%) was also influential, since findings by Hansen (2008) and Laroche, Bergeron, and Barbaro-Forleo (2001) indicate that consumers expect sustainability without sacrificing performance. Theories of normative behavior (**Schusser, & Bostedt, 2019**) and group conformity (Gleim & Lawson, 2014) are supported by social influence (10%). Sustainability should be used as a competitive advantage for businesses by utilizing eco labeling and certifications (Rex & Baumann, 2007; Papista & Krystallis, 2013). Trust can be built further also through NGOs partnering and CSR programs (Mohr, Webb, & Harris, 2001; Peloza & Shang, 2011). Educational campaigns should be encouraged (**Mackey, Mackey, & Barney, 2007**) as should instruments for sustainable practices (Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006). Adoption rates can then be enhanced through social marketing techniques (Thøgersen 2000) and guilt based strategies (Elgaaid 2012). Although this study provides strong findings, sample bias and self reported data must be considered (Roberts, 1996; Valor, 2008). Future studies should investigate cross cultural differences (Hofstede, 2001) and longitudinal tendencies in recycling commitment (Prothero et al., 2010). Further study should be done on behavioral studies (Griskevicius et al., 2010) and green marketing strategies (Peattie & Crane, 2005). Furthermore, further investigation may be conducted in terms of studying consumer perception of price and value (**Bolton, Warlop, & Alba, 2003**) and barriers to an ethical principle (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). Finally, this discussion emphasizes how sustainability creates social awareness in addition to environmental, ethical and communication values, to encourage the realization of sustainability. These insights can be used by businesses and policymakers to support better sustainable practice and create consumer confidence leading to ethical consumption.

CONCLUSION

This study shows the increasing importance of sustainability in determining consumer preferences and brand loyalty. Environmental awareness (85%), education level (72%) and age (70%) are identified as key demographic drivers of sustainability choices, with income (65%) also a driver, but with a slightly higher propensity to brand loyalty. Environmental awareness ($\beta = 0.52, p < 0.001$) and education ($\beta = 0.38, p = 0.002$) are found to be the strongest predictors of sustainability preferences, with income marginally influencing preferences and age being statistically insignificant. Correlation analysis also confirms that ethical values ($r = 0.65$) and education ($r = 0.58$) are positively related to sustainability preferences. Despite many drivers for sustainability, environmental concerns (40%) followed by ethical values (30%), product quality (20%) and, finally, social influence (10%) are the motivators for sustainability, while emotional or practical connect are blended to drive towards it. Social media (4.5/5) and in store promotions (4.2/5) are rated as more effective than traditional channels. Qualitative insights support the need for trust, transparency, emotional connections and credible certifications to overcome skepticism about greenwashing and create long term loyalty. This research shows that sustainable branding, supported by effective communication and ethical alignment, is important for building trust, engagement and competitive advantage in today's markets.

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