

SUSTAINABILITY AND ITS IMPACT ON BUYING BEHAVIOR: THE EMERGING TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMPANIES

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Sustainability and Its Impact on Buying Behavior: The Emerging Trends and Opportunities for Companies

In contemporary society, concerns about sustainability and environmental impact are becoming increasingly relevant, amid climate change and ecosystem degradation. In a global context of significant environmental transformations and increased awareness of the need for collective action, the conceptions of sustainability and ecological responsibility are becoming central to individual decision-making, especially in purchasing behavior. Sustainable development and sustainability have gained significant importance in recent decades, reflecting awareness of human impact on the environment and the need for a viable future for future generations. However, the precise definition of these terms is often ambiguous, due to the complexity and interconnections between the economic, social, and ecological aspects of human development. In this context, the paper aims to analyze the two concepts, clarifying the differences between them. Also, the work aims to analyze the behavior of consumers regarding sustainability and ecological products, as well as underlines the opportunities that companies could capitalize on in this regard for the development of more sustainable businesses, according to market requirements. The methodology is based on the survey method, methods of analysis and synthesis, data interpretation, and relevant comparisons. The research results highlight the increased interest of consumers in the sustainability and ethics of companies, highlighting changes in purchasing behavior oriented towards ecological products and responsible practices in environmental protection. For companies, these results represent various opportunities to adapt their strategies and communicate their commitment to sustainability more effectively to meet consumer demand and differentiate themselves in the market.

Keywords: sustainability, sustainable development, purchasing behavior, sustainable practices, opportunities for companies, Republic of Moldova.

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Педурару Т., Цуркану Г. Стійкість і її вплив на купівельну поведінку: нові тенденції і можливості для компанії

У суспільстві стурбованість з приводу стійкості і впливу на навколишнє середовище стає дедалі актуальною на тлі зміни клімату і деградації екосистем. У глобальному контексті значних екологічних перетворень і зростання усвідомлення необхідності колективних дій концепції стійкості та екологічної відповідальності стають центральними в індивідуальному прийнятті рішень, особливо в купівельній поведінці. Сталий розвиток і стійкість набули великого значення в останні десятиліття, відбиваючи усвідомлення впливу людини на навколишнє середовище та необхідність створення життєздатного майбутнього для майбутніх поколінь. Однак точне визначення цих термінів часто неоднозначне через складність та взаємозв'язок між економічними, соціальними та екологічними аспектами людського розвитку. У цьому контексті стаття покликана проаналізувати ці дві концепції, з'ясувавши різницю між ними. Крім того, робота спрямована на аналіз поведінки споживачів щодо стійкості та екологічних продуктів, а також наголошує на можливостях, які компанії можуть використовувати у цьому відношенні для розвитку більш стійкого бізнесу відповідно до вимог ринку. Методика заснована на методі опитування, методах аналізу та синтезу, інтерпретації даних та відповідних порівняннях. Результати дослідження підкреслюють зростання інтересу споживачів до сталого розвитку та етики компаній, підкреслюючи зміни в купівельній поведінці, орієнтованій на екологічні продукти та відповідальну практику в галузі захисту навколишнього середовища. Для компаній ці результати є різноманітними можливостями для адаптації своїх стратегій і більш ефективного інформування про свою відданість сталому розвитку, щоб задовольнити споживчий попит і диференціюватися на ринку.

Ключові слова: стійкість, сталий розвиток, купівельна поведінка, стійкі практики, можливості для компаній, Республіка Молдова.

Рис.: 3. **Табл.:** 2. **Бібл.:** 15.

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Introduction. The concept of sustainability and environmental impact concerns have become increasingly relevant in contemporary society amid the alarming increase in climate change and ecosystem degradation. In a global context, marked by significant transformations of the environment and the increasing awareness of the need for collective action, the concepts of sustainability and ecological responsibility are becoming more and more central in individual decision-making, especially in terms of the behavior of purchase.

Sustainable development and sustainability are terms that have gained significant importance in recent decades, reflecting an increased awareness of the impact of human activities on the environment and the need to ensure a viable future for future generations. However, the precise definition of these terms is often surrounded by persistent ambiguity, reflecting the complexity and deep interconnections between the economic, social and ecological aspects of human development. Thus, in this work, the author makes an analysis of the 2 terms, clearly defining the differences between them.

In an international setting, numerous studies have been conducted to better understand how consumers react and adapt to these global challenges. However, for the Republic of Moldova, a country with its specifics, there is a large lack of extensive and deep research on purchasing behavior in the context of sustainability and its ecological implications. This gap turns out to be an opportunity to explore new emerging trends and to identify possibilities to adapt to the changes in attitudes and preferences of Moldovan consumers.

In this context, the author refers in this paper to a study carried out on the territory of the Republic of Moldova regarding the "knowledge of the population about climate change", which highlights an increased concern and a significant interest among Moldovans regarding the issues related to climate change. The author also analyzes the main results of a study, carried out in 2022, regarding the attitudes and behaviors of consumers in the Republic of Moldova regarding sustainability and ecological products, as well as underlines the opportunities that companies could capitalize on in this meaning for the development of more sustainable businesses, according to market requirements. Understanding consumer preferences and values related to sustainability provides companies with valuable insight into business strategies. This data can guide the development of initiatives that align with consumer values and support overall sustainability.

Literature review. Although, initially, sustainable development was a solution to the ecological crisis determined by the intensive industrial exploitation of resources and the continuous degradation of the environment, nowadays, the concept has expanded to the quality of life, in its complexity and from an economic and social aspect. Current models of production and consumption, especially those applied in developed and developing countries, show variable degrees of sustainability, even if the idea of sustainability is accepted, mainly,

by those responsible for managing production and consumption systems. These contested approaches also derive from the fact that the global economic landscape is facing numerous transformations and challenges in all areas. In this context, we observe an increasingly obvious manifestation of the concept of sustainable development, which is no longer just a new aspect in specialized literature, but also in the concrete elements of its application in socio-economic practice. Today, the concept of sustainable development is not entirely new to governments, the business sector, and especially academia and research.

In the scholarly literature, the terms "sustainability", "sustainability" and "sustainable development" are used with similar meanings, often considered synonymous, but according to different contexts and situations. The word "sustainability" appears more and more in today's society and can often invoke both fundamental and complex concepts. But what actually is sustainability? The word sustainability is derived from the Latin "support", broken down its meaning is translated as "tenere", "to hold". Modern dictionaries today offer many definitions for support [9], most of which include the words "to maintain", "to support" and "to bear". The way sustainability is currently used is based on the English term "sustainability", which is an expression of the possibility that a certain problem can be sustained. Sustainability is seen as a paradigm for thinking about the future where environmental, societal and economic considerations are balanced in the pursuit of an improved quality of life. The ideals and principles behind it are based on broad concepts such as intergenerational equity, gender equity, social tolerance, poverty reduction, environmental conservation and restoration, natural resource conservation, and building just and peaceful societies [6]. According to the Encyclopedic Dictionary, the word sustainability [4] implies the "quality of an anthropic activity to be carried out without exhausting the available resources and without destroying the environment, therefore, without compromising the possibilities of meeting the needs of future generations". At the same time, the word durability [5] (lat. = durabilitas), according to the DEX, implies "the quality of what is durable; vivacity, resistance, viability". In economics, "sustainable" is a term that refers to goods that are not depleted or consumed through use, thus "sustainability" is a dynamic characteristic of processes in the natural environment where there are no dissipative systems (Dinga, 2009) [15].

The problem of studying the concept of sustainable development is not limited to the term "sustainable", but rather to the word "development", which is perceived as having a negative and harmful impact. However, through this association with "development", centered on economic growth, it becomes an implicit part of "sustainability", bypassing the questions: Development for whom and for what? It is clear that there is an ambiguity about this concept. Previous literature such as Caldwell and Barbier mention that: "sustainable development" is understood as a necessity for developing nations and is often decoupled from growth. But this distinction is lost when the UN equates development with growth and the OECD calls for sustainable development for their member countries, i.e. developed nations (OECD 2004) [13]. This problem has been ad-

ressed by numerous authors, who consider that the term "sustainable development", like "sustainable growth", is an oxymoron (Redclift, 2005 [10]; Johnston et al. 2007 [7]; Brand, 2012 [2]). In particular, Redclift argues that the notion of 'development', rooted in Western colonial capitalist narratives, presents numerous barriers to sustainability, and without political interrogation and change, sustainability itself is endangered (Redclift, 1987 [11]). Sneddon proclaims that "sustainable development" has "reached a conceptual dead end" and that, for clarity, it is necessary to decouple the notion of "sustainability" from its counterpart (Sneddon, 2000 [12]). He problematizes recasting "development" as sustainable, citing the many socio-ecological abuses enacted throughout its history and its blindness to deeper structural problems. "Sustainability", on the other hand, despite its reputation as a buzzword, has much less historical baggage, and its necessity for a specific context raises conceptual questions such as, for whom and for what the?. Looking at the more contemporary literature, however, it appears that little has changed, and the recent articulation of the SDGs has further cemented the notion of 'sustainable development'. From the previous analysis we deduce that sustainable development is interconnected with the concept of sustainability. An explanation of the difference between sustainable development and sustainability is suggested by UNESCO [14]: "Sustainability is often considered as a long-term goal (i.e., a more sustainable world), while sustainable development refers to the many processes and pathways of achieving it', for example, green and sustainable agriculture and forestry, sustainable production and consumption, good governance, research and technology transfer, education and training, etc. The concept of sustainable development has been debated and criticized over time in various ways. While some specialists consider it to be a paradoxical concept or an oxymoron [1], stating that development is inherently unsustainable, other specialists argue that this concept has multiple and heterogeneous approaches, being disappointed by the fact that no progress has been made so far in this regard [3].

Thus, although sustainability and sustainable development are related concepts, they have distinct meanings. Sustainability refers to the ability of a system or process to be maintained at a certain level over time. In the environmental context, it means meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development, on the other hand, is a broader concept that encompasses not only environmental sustainability but also economic and social sustainability. It refers to a process of meeting human development goals in an economically, socially, and ecologically sustainable manner over the long term. In other words, sustainable development is a way to achieve sustainability in several dimensions, including economy, society, and environment. The goal of sustainable development is to improve human well-being and living standards while protecting and conserving the natural resources and systems on which life depends.

Methods and materials applied. Sustainable development and sustainability, important terms in recent decades due to the awareness of the increasing human impact on the environment and the need to ensure a viable future, remain ambiguously defined due to the complexity of the interconnections between the economic, social and ecological aspects of human development. For the realization of this work, various research methods were used, such as analysis, synthesis, comparative analysis, and documentation. The informational support uses various bibliographic sources regarding sustainability and sustainable development. The research

was based on the analysis, synthesis and deduction of processed data, in order to obtain representative conclusions and support personal opinions. Also, the author chose a quantitative analysis for this investigation to better understand consumer perceptions of sustainability. In this case, the research method used for this study is a survey. Analysis and synthesis are based on processed and summarized data.

Research results and discussions. Although, at the international level, there are various studies on the analysis of consumer behavior regarding sustainability for the Republic of Moldova, the author has not identified extensive studies on this subject. An important study to mention carried out on the territory of the Republic of Moldova refers to the "knowledge of the population about climate change" [8], carried out by IMAS (Institute of Marketing and Surveys) in 2022. The results of this study indicate a significant concern and a high degree of interest among Moldovans regarding this topic. The study reveals that both the interest and the perception of the importance of climate change are extremely high, with 78% of respondents considering this topic as quite important, very important, or extremely important [8]. The results show that women, people with higher education, employees and rural residents show a higher degree of interest in climate change. Also, according to the IMAS study, there are significant variations by age, with increasing concern as age increases. A notable aspect is that 89% of respondents consider the issue of climate change as urgent. These results underscore the importance of informing and raising public awareness of climate change and the need for immediate action to address this global issue.

Starting from these considerations, in the period August-September 2022, through the survey method, the author initiated an extensive study among consumers (Central Region and Chisinau Municipality), the basic objective being the *analysis of the attitudes and behaviors of consumers in the Republic of Moldova regarding sustainability and ecological products*. The sample consisted of 305 respondents, a probabilistic, bistadial, stratified, random sample, respecting the gender and age quotas according to the BNSRM. As part of the research, we aimed to identify the main factors that lead consumers to purchase products and services. According to Table 1, the product's environmental impact is a significant, but not predominant, factor in purchasing decisions. With a percentage of 30%, this factor ranks high in the list of characteristics considered by consumers. Although not dominating in consumer preferences, the fact that 30% of respondents pay attention to the product's impact on the environment denotes an increase in awareness of sustainability and ecological responsibility in the purchasing process.

This finding suggests that companies could benefit from adopting greener practices and transparently communicating their efforts to reduce environmental impact in order to attract a growing segment of consumers interested in green aspects of their purchases.

Next, we analyzed the decision-making factors of consumers in choosing certain brands, excluding factors related to price and service quality. The results shown in Figure 1 indicate that the majority of respondents place significant importance on ethical values and company efforts to reduce plastic materials and improve the environment, followed by issues related to transparency and positive organizational culture in brand decision-making.

Table 1

Factors that determine consumers in the purchase of products/services

Characteristics	Percent (%)
Quality of products/services	69
Price	66
The advice, recommendations of friends, colleagues	41
Accessibility and availability of products	33
Previous positive experiences with this company	33
The impact of the product on the environment	30
Company image/reputation in the market	29
Advertising	15
No one	1

Source: elaborated by the author

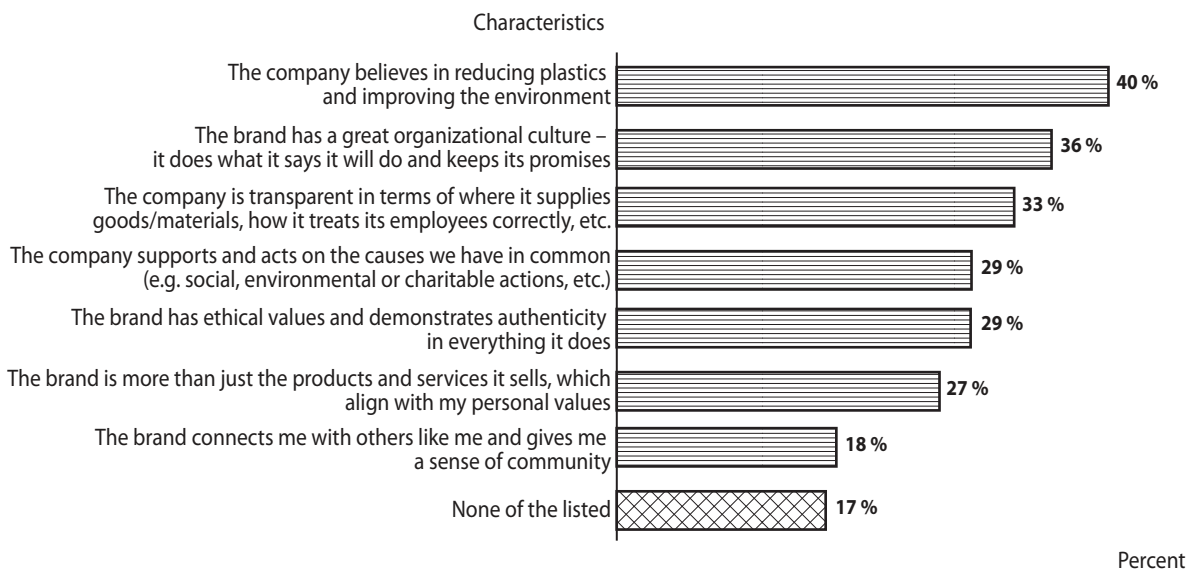


Fig. 1. Decision makers in choosing brands, excluding price and quality of products/services

Source: elaborated by the author

These results highlight the fact that consumers are increasingly attracted to brands that show commitment to environmental protection, transparency in operations and the promotion of ethical values. These aspects, along with authenticity and alignment with personal values, have become key factors in the decision to choose brands, highlighting a trend towards responsible consumption and emotional connection with companies that share the same concerns and values.

Also, within the research we aimed to identify and analyze the attitudes and expectations of consumers towards the sustainability and ethics of companies.

The results in Figure 2 show that consumers place a strong emphasis on reducing waste and conserving natural resources, suggesting that companies may gain a positive response from the public if they focus their efforts on these issues. Also, practices related to reducing the carbon footprint and protecting biodiversity are considered important by a significant proportion of consumers.

Understanding consumer preferences and values regarding sustainable practices can provide companies with valuable insight into business strategies to meet demands and build a positive brand image. Thus, actions and initiatives can be developed that align with consumer values and support overall sustainability.

According to Table 2, important trends can be highlighted in consumer behavior regarding supporting the sustainable practices of companies by paying more for the services/goods they buy, as follows:

Environmental protection comes first: all areas of involvement related to environmental protection, such as: reducing waste, producing sustainable packaging and products, supporting circular practices, protecting biodiversity and reducing carbon emissions, attract a large proportion of respondents who are willing to pay more for such products and services.

Interest in social aspects: in addition to environmental aspects, a significant number of respondents show a willing-

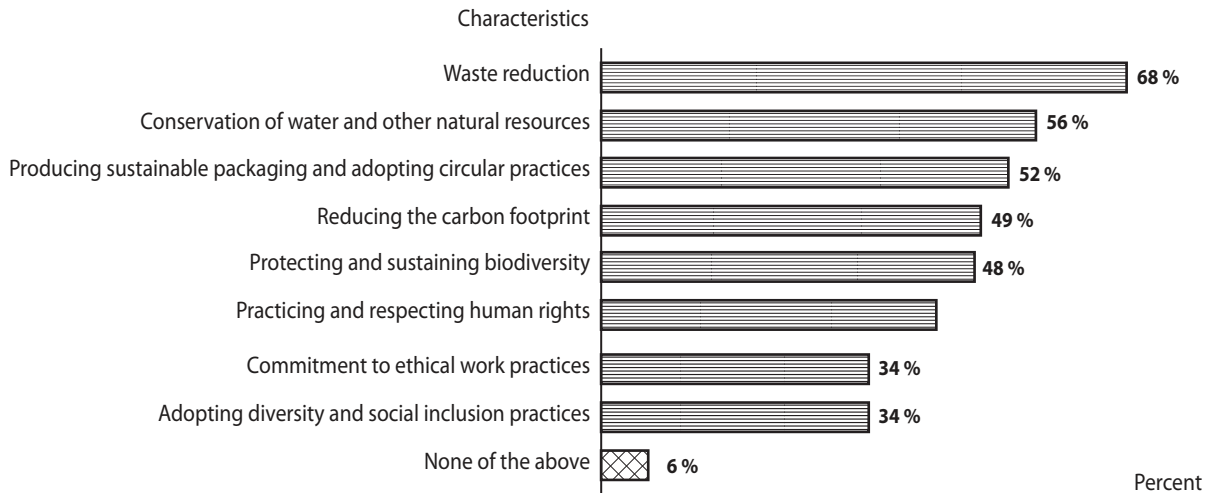


Fig. 2. The sustainable practices that consumers value in companies

Source: elaborated by the author

ness to pay more for companies engaged in ethical work practices, respecting human rights and promoting diversity and social inclusion.

Reluctance to pay more: although overall interest is positive, there is also a significant proportion of respondents who are unsure or would not be willing to pay more for such goods and services.

Thus, the data presented in Table 2 indicate a positive trend towards supporting companies involved in environmental protection and sustainability practices, both from an ecological and social point of view. However, communication and ongoing education can play a crucial role in fostering a more favorable attitude on the part of the general public.

Regarding consumer trust in companies' environmental performance reports, we can note that most consumers have a tendency to trust (46%), suggesting that there is a level of perceived credibility in companies' communication regarding their environmental performance and a positive perception re-

garding transparency (Fig.3). There is also a significant percentage of consumers who tend not to trust (27%), indicating some suspicion or skepticism about them.

Therefore, companies must be aware of these perceptions and pay particular attention to transparent and truthful communication of information regarding their environmental performance in order to gain and maintain consumer trust.

The analysis carried out highlights the increased interest on the part of consumers regarding the sustainability and ethics of companies. This highlights changes in purchasing behavior and consumer preferences, which are increasingly oriented towards products and companies that adopt responsible practices and are committed to protecting the environment. For companies, these results represent an opportunity to adapt their strategies and communicate their commitment to sustainability more effectively to meet consumer demand and differentiate themselves in the market. Research findings also suggest that most consumers are sensitive to companies'

Table 2

Payment preferences for sustainable goods and services: Engaging in ethical and environmental practices

	Yes, I would be willing to pay more	No, I wouldn't be willing to pay more	Hard to answer
Waste reduction	65	26	9
Production of sustainable packaging and products	65	27	9
Supporting the adoption of circular practices	57	30	12
Protecting and sustaining biodiversity	68	25	8
Reducing carbon emissions	64	28	9
Conservation of water and other natural resources	64	25	11
Commitment to ethical work practices	50	34	16
Respect for human rights	57	28	15
Adoption of diversity and social inclusion practices	52	36	12

Source: elaborated by the author

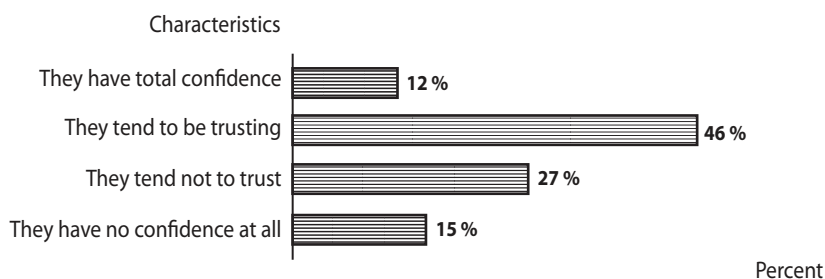


Fig. 3. Consumer trust in companies' environmental performance reports

Source: elaborated by the author

environmental impact and want transparency about their environmental practices. This can be an opportunity for companies to consider the public interest and implement more responsible environmental measures to gain consumer trust and loyalty.

In the context of the evolution of consumer preferences towards sustainability and social responsibility, there are many opportunities for businesses:

Differentiation in the Market. Companies that adopt sustainable practices can differentiate themselves in a positive way in the market. This allows them to attract consumers who are increasingly interested in the ecological and ethical aspects of their purchasing decisions.

Building Customer Loyalty. Businesses that engage in sustainable and ethical practices can earn customer loyalty. Consumers are more likely to stay loyal to a brand that shares their values and gets involved in social and environmental causes.

Innovation and Efficiency. The adoption of sustainable practices can drive innovation and operational efficiency within the company. The search for ecological and responsible solutions can lead to the development of innovative products and the optimization of internal processes.

Access to New Markets and Consumer Segments. Brands that promote sustainability can attract new segments of consumers, including those who care deeply about environmental and ethical issues. This can open up new market opportunities.

Compliance with Regulations and Rules. In many regions, environmental protection rules and regulations are becoming increasingly strict. Adopting sustainable practices can help businesses comply with these regulations and avoid possible fines or legal issues.

Gaining Stakeholder Appreciation. Engaging in ethical and environmental practices can improve a company's image in the eyes of stakeholders, including employees, investors and local communities.

Reputation and Credibility. Providing tangible evidence of commitment to sustainability can enhance a company's reputation and credibility in the eyes of consumers, which can have a positive impact on financial performance.

Strategic Partnerships. Companies with a sustainable focus can create strategic partnerships with organizations or other companies that share the same values, which can lead to synergies and growth opportunities.

Overall, the adoption of sustainable practices not only meets the current demands of consumers but can also bring significant benefits in terms of brand image, financial performance and long-term development of companies.

Conclusions. From the beginning, sustainable development was a reaction to the ecological crisis generated by intensive industrial exploitation and environmental degradation, but now the concept has become more complex and expanded to include quality of life, as well as economic and social aspects. In this context, the concept of sustainable development becomes more and more visible, moving from the stage of novelty in specialized literature to its concrete application in socio-economic practice. Sustainability and sustainable development, although related, have different meanings. After analyzing the specialized literature, the author finds that sustainability refers to the maintenance of a system over time, ensuring the satisfaction of current needs without affecting future capacity, while sustainable development is an extensive concept, covering not only environmental sustainability but also economic sustainability and social. The study carried out by the author, through the survey method, highlights the increased interest on the part of consumers regarding the sustainability and ethics of companies. This highlights changes in purchasing behavior and consumer preferences, which are increasingly oriented towards green products and companies that adopt responsible practices and are committed to protecting the environment. In addition to analyzing purchasing behavior, the research also addressed consumer attitudes and expectations towards sustainability and ethics in companies. The results reveal a strong emphasis on reducing waste and conserving natural resources, suggesting that companies can get a positive response from the public if they focus their efforts on these issues.

For companies, these results represent an opportunity to adapt their strategies and communicate their commitment to sustainability more effectively to meet consumer demand and differentiate themselves in the market. Understanding consumer preferences and values related to sustainability provides companies with valuable insight into business strategies. This data can guide the development of initiatives that align with consumer values and support overall sustainability. Therefore, in a time marked by major changes in purchasing behavior and increasing awareness of environmental issues, companies can adopt sustainable practices to meet both the needs of consumers and the demands of an ever-changing world.

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