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Ethical Consumerism and Sustainability: Investigating Brand Influence on Consumer Decision-Making

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ABSTRACT: Ethical consumerism and sustainability have become increasingly significant in shaping modern consumer behavior. This study investigates how brand influence affects consumer decision-making within the context of ethical purchasing choices. By analyzing consumer perceptions, marketing strategies, and corporate sustainability efforts, the research highlights the critical role brands play in fostering ethical consumption. Findings indicate that while consumers are becoming more environmentally and socially conscious, challenges such as greenwashing, price sensitivity, and lack of clear information continue to impact their purchasing behavior. The study emphasizes the need for transparency, authenticity, and regulatory oversight to enhance consumer trust in sustainable brands. Additionally, it explores the role of digital media in shaping ethical consumerism and influencing purchasing decisions. The research concludes that achieving a sustainable marketplace requires a collaborative effort between brands, consumers, and policymakers to ensure ethical responsibility and long-term environmental and social well-being.

I. INTRODUCTION

Ethical consumerism involves the practice of choosing products and services that adhere to specific moral or ethical principles. In this approach, consumers leverage their purchasing power to endorse companies and goods that prioritize environmental conservation, social responsibility, fair trade, and respect for human rights. Ethical consumers deliberately steer clear of products associated with exploitation, environmental damage, or other unethical behaviors, driving positive change through their consumption choices..

The growth of ethical consumerism has been fueled by rising awareness of global challenges such as climate change, worker exploitation, and corporate responsibility. As transparency around product manufacturing, sourcing, and distribution increases, consumers are empowered to make more informed choices. This has contributed to the rise of certifications such as Fair Trade, cruelty-free, and organic labels, which assist consumers in identifying ethically produced goods more easily. Additionally, digital advancements have made information readily accessible, enabling consumers to research and evaluate brands based on ethical criteria before making purchasing decisions.

The impact of ethical consumerism extends beyond individual purchasing habits. Businesses and industries are increasingly responding to consumer demand by integrating ethical and sustainable practices into their operations. Companies that fail to meet ethical standards risk losing market share as consumers gravitate toward brands that align with their values. This shift has led to innovations in sustainable packaging, ethical supply chain management, and corporate social responsibility initiatives, ultimately influencing industry-wide transformations.

However, ethical consumerism comes with its own set of obstacles. These products often carry a premium price, making them less affordable for some individuals. Additionally, consumers face the challenge of greenwashing, where companies falsely market their goods as ethical or sustainable. This deceptive marketing practice misleads consumers into believing they are making responsible choices when, in reality, the product or company may not adhere to genuine ethical standards. Addressing this issue requires stricter regulations, third-party verification, and consumer vigilance. Another challenge lies in balancing convenience with ethical considerations. Many consumers wish to make ethical choices but struggle to do so due to limited availability, higher costs, or lack of awareness. For instance, locally



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sourced, organic, or fair-trade products may not always be accessible in every region, limiting consumer options. Furthermore, ethical consumerism requires ongoing education and commitment, as ethical considerations can vary across industries and cultural contexts.

Despite these difficulties, ethical consumerism continues to expand, signaling a broader shift in consumer preferences toward sustainability, fairness, and accountability in the market. Governments and regulatory bodies have also begun playing a more active role in promoting ethical consumerism through policies that encourage sustainable production, corporate transparency, and responsible marketing.

Through mindful purchasing, ethical consumers strive to influence industries, pushing them toward adopting better practices and fostering a more equitable and sustainable future. This shift represents a cultural change where consumers expect businesses to focus not just on profits but also on making positive contributions to society and the environment.

Ethical consumerism ultimately promotes a holistic approach to consumption—one that considers the long-term consequences of purchasing decisions on people and the planet. By continuing to demand ethical practices, consumers can drive systemic change and contribute to the development of a more just and sustainable global economy.

How is sustainability relevant to ethical consumerism?

Sustainability is vital for ethical consumerism for several key reasons:

1. **Long-Term Effects:** Ethical consumerism seeks to foster practices that secure the well-being of future generations. Sustainability ensures that resources are utilized responsibly, safeguarding them for future use and preserving ecosystems.
2. **Comprehensive Perspective:** Sustainability includes environmental, social, and economic dimensions. Ethical consumerism aligns with this comprehensive perspective by prompting consumers to consider not just the ecological effects of their purchases, but also issues of social equity and fair labor practices.
3. **Consumer Education:** As consumers become increasingly aware of sustainability challenges—such as climate change, resource depletion, and social inequities—they are more inclined to make informed choices that reflect their values. This awareness stimulates demand for products and companies committed to sustainable practices.
4. **Corporate Accountability:** Sustainability compels businesses to take responsibility for their environmental and social impacts. Ethical consumerism supports this accountability by favoring companies that prioritize sustainable practices, motivating more businesses to adopt similar values.
5. **Cultural Transformation:** The focus on sustainability within ethical consumerism reflects a broader cultural transformation towards valuing environmental stewardship and social justice. This transformation impacts market trends and encourages businesses to innovate in sustainable ways.

Sustainability is essential to ethical consumerism as it shapes consumer behaviour, influences corporate practices, and fosters a more equitable and responsible marketplace. Ethical consumerism and sustainability are interconnected, with each reinforcing the other to create a positive impact on society and the environment.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is still limited literature focusing on ethical and sustainable consumption decision-making, especially at brand level discussion. Recent years, more and more researchers in this field noted that, although ethicality seems to be benefits for many consumers, ethical and sustainable activities not always led to positive consumers' responses. Previous researchers have looked into this issue from various directions: some found that price can be an important reference point. For example, Ngobo (2011) found that, unlike traditional consumption, lower prices and wider distribution made consumers less likely to buy ethical and sustainable household products. Some studies have focused on contextual factors such as the way information is accessed, how the choice is structured, and perceptions of whether the firm had intentionally set out to create a green product (Gershoff et al., 2015). For example, Newman et al. (2014) have revealed that consumers were less likely to purchase an ethical product when they perceive that the firm intentionally added an ethical attribute compared to when the same ethical attribute occurred unintentionally. Other researchers have examined the impact of brand-related factors and firm-related factors. For example, Torelli and colleagues (2012) revealed that communicating corporate social responsible information with consumers can backfire for certain luxury brands.



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These prior studies are important for our understanding of ethical consumption's decision making; however, missing has been the connection among products, brands and retailers, which influence consumer perceptions in a less obvious way. In order to address this gap, the purpose of this study is to investigate the factors that drive consumer's decisions for ethical and sustainable products. In this context, the present research aims to investigate the impact of brand related-factors, such as brand social responsibility reputation and brand benefits, on consumer retailer choice for ethical consumption. Based on these objectives, dependent variables of interest are evaluations of ethical and sustainable store brands. Independent factors of interest are ethical attribute benefits, product-brand benefits, brand social responsibility and resource synergy beliefs. The present study makes several contributions to current literature and practical implication of ethical and sustainable consumption in the following ways. From a theoretical standpoint, the present study investigates benefits congruity between an ethical attribute and a brand which different from the previous researches. We assumed that congruity between benefits delivered by a brand and benefits offered by an ethical attribute yield a positive impact on consumer responses to the product in question. For example, a utilitarian branded product will become more favourable to customers when it is associated with a utilitarian ethical attribute rather than a symbolic ethical attribute. We extended the current literature to a brand level by combining the consideration of values of a brand and benefits of ethical attribute. In doing so, we established the link between branding studies and product attributes studies in ethical and sustainable researching field. Besides, we also paid attention to the role of brand social responsibility in the relationship between benefits congruity and consumer perceptions of ethical and sustainable products, which is rarely studied in previous researches. Last but not least, we added resource synergy beliefs as an individual difference in our study and contributed to provide additional explanations of present findings. More specifically, we proposed that resource synergy beliefs may more or less affect the effectiveness of the positive impact of benefits congruity on consumers' product evaluations.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors that drive consumer's decisions for ethical and sustainable products. The present study compares consumer ethical and sustainable product evaluations associated with brands and ethical attributes benefits congruity with those associated without such benefit congruity. More specifically, the study reveals that consumer evaluations of ethical and sustainable branded products become more favourable when a utilitarian (symbolic) brand is presented with a utilitarian (symbolic) ethical attribute. Furthermore, we found that brand social responsibility serves as a mediator in the relationship between benefits congruity and consumer evaluation. Resource synergy beliefs as an individual difference were also tested in this study.

The crisis of unsustainable consumption and production patterns worldwide is fuelling the ongoing triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature loss and pollution. Domestic material consumption and material footprint continue to rise, some one billion meals worth of edible food are wasted every day in homes around the world and stockpiles of e-waste steadily grow. While countries are fulfilling their environmental agreement obligations and embracing comprehensive approaches to address environmental degradation, public funding supporting the production and consumption of fossil fuels has more than tripled since 2015, impeding the transition to net-zero emissions. Each stage of production or manufacturing presents an opportunity to reduce resource and fossil fuel use, foster innovation, conserve energy, cut emissions, and advocate for a circular economy approach.

- From 2019 to 2023, one-third of member states (63 countries) have reported 516 policy instruments related to sustainable consumption and production.
- From 2015 to 2022, Domestic Material Consumption (DMC) increased by 5.8%, and Material Footprint (MF) rose by 6.8%. Regional disparities between DMC and MF continue to grow, particularly between regions where MF is higher than DMC (Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, Europe and Northern America, Northern Africa and Western Asia) and those where MF is lower than DMC (Central and Southern Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania), showing different patterns of material consumption and their corresponding environmental impact.
- In 2022, 19% of global food was wasted, totalling 1.05 billion tonnes, with household waste accounting for 60%. This waste generates significant greenhouse gas emissions, costing over \$1 trillion annually, while 783 million people suffer from hunger. Addressing this issue is crucial for halving food waste by 2030, yet only 9 out of 193 countries have included food waste in their Nationally Determined Contributions as of 2022. Meanwhile, the percentage of food lost globally after harvest on farm, transport, storage, wholesale, and processing levels is estimated at 13.2% in 2021.



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- Number of parties to international multilateral environmental agreements on hazardous waste, and other chemicals that meet their commitments and obligations in transmitting information as required by each relevant agreement Minamata Convention on Mercury: Most Parties have met their obligations, with 94% appointing National Focal Points and 95% submitting complete national reports in 2023. o Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions: Parties continue to make strides in meeting their obligations and in policy-making to keep pace with rapidly changing global circumstances, such as responding to the growing challenges created by contemporary waste streams such as plastic waste and e-waste, improving the procedure to control transboundary movements of wastes, and enlarging their scope with the listing of new chemical. o Montreal Protocol: Parties consistently fulfil reporting obligations on the production and use of ozone-depleting substances, with 156 out of 198 ratifying the Kigali Amendment by January 2024, demonstrating an increased commitment to mitigating climate change under the Protocol.
- In 2022, e-waste generation rose to 7.8 kg per capita from 6.2 kg per capita in 2015, but only 1.7 kg per capita was properly managed. Mismanaged e-waste leads to resource loss, increased use of virgin resources, and environmental hazards, underscoring the urgency for improved and environmentally sound management.
- In 2021-2022, 73% of companies included in the sample published sustainability reports, with the number of companies tripling since 2016. This growth was observed in all regions in 2022
- Fossil fuel subsidies hit a record high of \$1.53 trillion in 2022, reversing the declining trend observed from 2012 to 2020. The post-COVID energy price surge inflated these subsidies, prompting some governments to introduce new support measures. Consequently, public funding for oil, coal, and gas production and consumption more than doubled from 2021 to 2022 and tripled since 2015, impeding progress towards net-zero transition.
- As we begin the second half of our journey to 2030, signs of a determined, sustained global comeback have yet to emerge. This year's report reveals that only seventeen per cent of SDGs targets are on track to be achieved, nearly half are showing minimal or moderate progress, and progress on over a third has stalled or even regressed.

Ethical Consumerism and Consumer Behavior

Ethical consumerism refers to the practice of purchasing products and services that are ethically produced, environmentally friendly, and socially responsible (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). Studies indicate that ethical considerations—such as fair trade, environmental sustainability, and corporate social responsibility (CSR)—significantly impact consumer preferences (Bray, Johns, & Kilburn, 2011).

However, a gap often exists between consumers' ethical intentions and their actual purchasing behavior, commonly known as the attitude-behavior gap (Hassan, Shiu, & Shaw, 2016). Factors influencing this gap include price sensitivity, product availability, and perceived effectiveness of ethical choices.

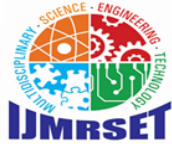
Sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Sustainability is a key driver in ethical consumerism. CSR initiatives that highlight environmental and social commitments influence consumer perceptions of brands (Kotler & Lee, 2005). Research suggests that companies engaging in transparent and authentic sustainability practices gain consumer trust and loyalty (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). Greenwashing—where brands falsely claim ethical commitments—can backfire, leading to consumer skepticism and reputational damage (Delmas & Burbano, 2011).

Brand Influence on Consumer Decision-Making

Brands play a crucial role in shaping ethical consumer behavior. Studies by Holt et al. (2004) and Park et al. (2014) indicate that consumers form emotional and cognitive connections with brands that align with their personal values. Ethical branding strategies, including sustainability certifications and eco-labeling, enhance consumer confidence in making responsible choices (Thøgersen, 2000).

Additionally, social media and digital marketing have transformed ethical branding by increasing consumer awareness and engagement with sustainability initiatives (Sarkar & Kotler, 2021). Influencer marketing and peer recommendations further amplify brand credibility in ethical consumerism (Ki & Kim, 2019).



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Challenges and Future Directions

Despite increased consumer interest in ethical brands, several challenges persist. Ethical products often carry premium pricing, limiting accessibility for price-sensitive consumers (Johnstone & Tan, 2015). Additionally, inconsistent sustainability standards across industries create confusion about what qualifies as an ethical purchase (Bennett, 2018). Future research should explore strategies for reducing the attitude-behavior gap, improving ethical branding transparency, and examining the long-term impact of ethical consumerism on corporate sustainability practices.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To analyze the impact of ethical consumerism on purchasing behavior.
2. To investigate the role of sustainability in shaping consumer preferences.
3. To evaluate how brands influence consumer decision-making through ethical and sustainable practices.
4. To examine the effectiveness of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives in promoting ethical consumerism.
5. To identify the challenges consumers face in making ethical purchasing decisions.
6. To explore strategies for reducing the attitude-behavior gap in ethical consumption.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods research approach to investigate the influence of brands on ethical consumerism and sustainability in consumer decision-making. The methodology consists of the following components:

Research Design

A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods will be used to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The study will focus on consumer perceptions, brand strategies, and the broader impact of ethical consumerism on sustainable practices.

Data Collection Methods

1. **Survey Research:** A structured questionnaire will be distributed to consumers across different demographics to gather quantitative data on their purchasing behavior, ethical considerations, and brand influence. The survey will include Likert-scale questions, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended responses.
2. **Interviews:** In-depth semi-structured interviews with industry experts, marketers, and consumers will provide qualitative insights into ethical consumerism trends, challenges, and branding strategies. The interviews will focus on consumer awareness, corporate sustainability efforts, and brand reputation.
3. **Case Study Analysis:** Selected brands known for ethical consumerism and sustainability practices will be analyzed to examine their influence on consumer decision-making. Case studies will include an evaluation of their marketing strategies, product transparency, and consumer reception.
4. **Secondary Data Analysis:** Existing reports, journal articles, government policies, sustainability indices, and market research data will be reviewed to support the primary findings and provide a broader context to the study.
5. **Observational Study:** Consumer shopping behaviors will be observed in retail settings to analyze how ethical considerations factor into decision-making in real-time. Online purchasing trends will also be examined.

Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling approach will be used to select survey respondents and interview participants. The sample will include:

- Consumers with a demonstrated interest in ethical consumerism.
- Marketing professionals from companies with sustainability initiatives.
- Experts in corporate social responsibility and ethical branding.
- Retailers and business owners promoting sustainable products.
- Academics and researchers specializing in ethical consumer behavior.

A minimum sample size of 300 survey respondents will be targeted to ensure statistical relevance, while at least 15 in-depth interviews will be conducted to obtain qualitative insights.



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Data Analysis

- **Quantitative Data:** Statistical analysis using SPSS or similar software will be conducted to identify patterns and correlations in consumer behavior. Descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and factor analysis will be used to measure the impact of brand influence on ethical purchasing decisions.
- **Qualitative Data:** Thematic analysis will be used to interpret interview and case study findings. Coding techniques will be applied to categorize key themes such as sustainability trust, ethical awareness, and brand credibility.
- **Comparative Analysis:** Ethical brands will be compared with conventional brands to assess differences in consumer perception and purchasing patterns.
- **Sentiment Analysis:** Social media discussions and online reviews will be analyzed to understand public sentiment regarding ethical consumerism and brand authenticity.

Ethical Considerations

- Informed consent will be obtained from all participants.
- Anonymity and confidentiality of respondents will be maintained.
- Ethical approval will be sought from a research ethics committee.
- Data will be used solely for academic and research purposes.
- Transparency in research methodology will be upheld to ensure credibility and reliability.

By implementing these methodologies, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how brands influence consumer decision-making in the context of ethical consumerism and sustainability.

IV. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While this study aims to provide valuable insights into ethical consumerism and brand influence on sustainability, several limitations must be acknowledged:

1. **Sampling Bias:** The study relies on purposive sampling, which may not fully represent the broader consumer population. The findings may be more reflective of individuals already interested in ethical consumerism.
2. **Self-Reported Data:** The survey and interview responses depend on participants' self-reported behaviors and perceptions, which can be influenced by social desirability bias or recall errors.
3. **Limited Geographic Scope:** The research may focus on specific regions or consumer groups, limiting the generalizability of the findings to global markets.
4. **Time Constraints:** The study is conducted within a limited timeframe, restricting the ability to track long-term shifts in consumer behavior or brand strategies.
5. **Complexity of Consumer Decision-Making:** Ethical purchasing decisions are influenced by multiple factors, including personal values, economic conditions, cultural influences, and marketing strategies. Isolating brand influence from these factors may be challenging.
6. **Challenges in Measuring Ethical Behavior:** Ethical consumerism is subjective, and defining what constitutes an 'ethical' brand or purchase decision can vary among individuals and cultures.
7. **Corporate Greenwashing:** Some brands may engage in misleading sustainability claims, making it difficult to assess the true impact of ethical branding on consumer trust and decision-making.
8. **Technological and Market Changes:** The rapidly evolving digital landscape and emerging sustainability trends may impact consumer behavior beyond the scope of this study.

Despite these limitations, the study aims to provide meaningful contributions to the understanding of ethical consumerism and the role of brands in shaping sustainable purchasing behaviors. Future research can build upon these findings by exploring additional variables and conducting longitudinal studies to capture changing trends over time.



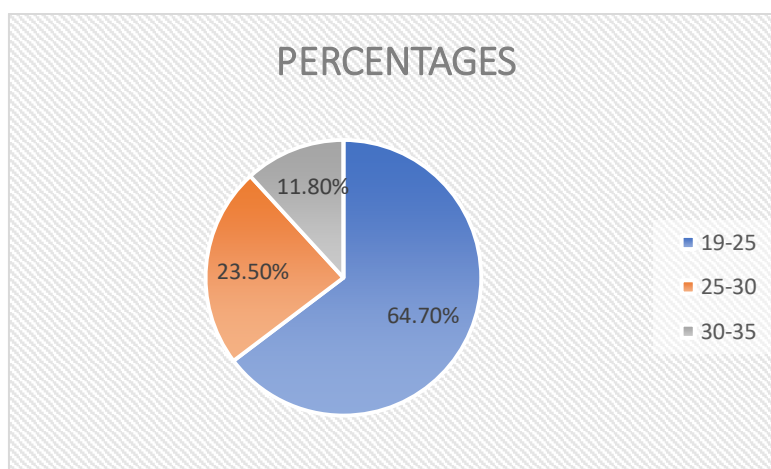
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V. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

1. What is your age group?

S.NO.	AGE GROUP	PERCENTAGE
1.	19-25	64.7%
2.	25-30	23.5%
3.	30-35	11.8%

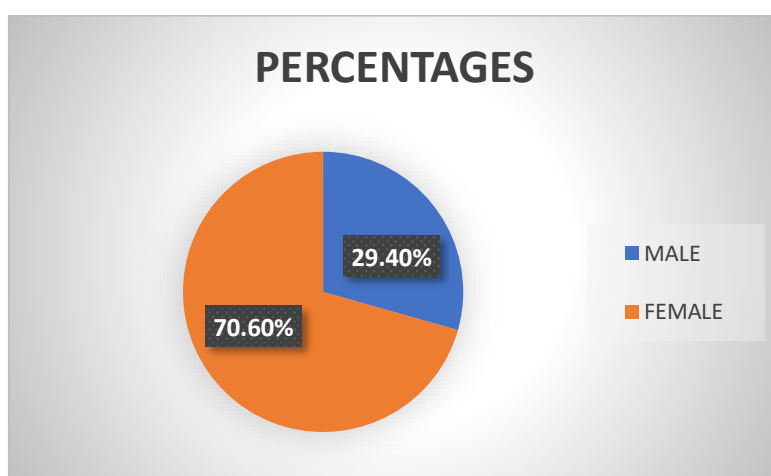


INTERPRETATION:

From the above table, it is inferred that most respondents 64.7% are between 19-25 years old, followed by 25-30 are of 23.5%. This also indicates that the survey is mostly engaging younger individual.

2. GENDER

S.NO.	GENDER	PERCENTAGES
1.	Male	29.4%
2.	Female	70.6%



INTERPRETATION:

From the above table, it is interred that most respondents 70.6% are female, while 29.4% are male. This also shows a significant gender skew towards female participation in the survey.

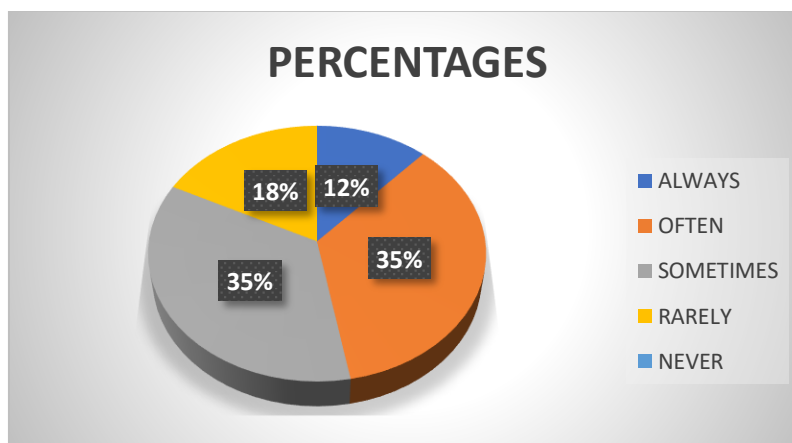


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3. How often do you consider the environmental impact of a product before purchasing ?

S.NO.	Impact	PERCENTAGES
1.	Always	11.8%
2.	Often	35.3%
3.	Sometimes	35.3%
4.	Rarely	17.6%
5.	Never	Null

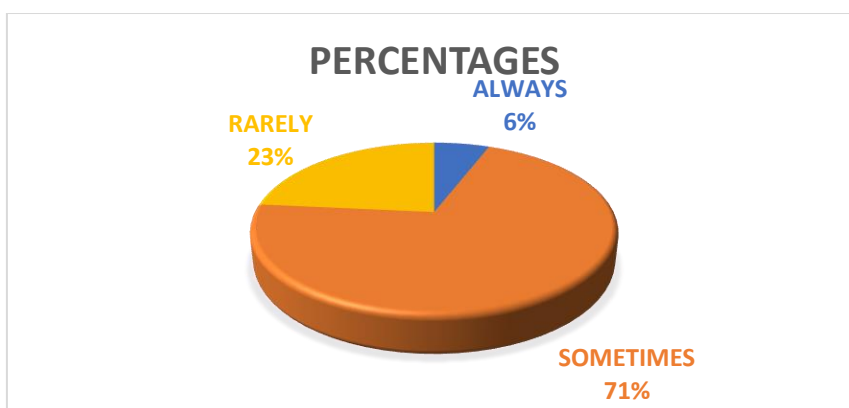


INTERPRETATION:

From the above table, it is inferred that responses are split between "Often" (35.3%) and "Sometimes" (35.3%), with a notable portion (17.6%) answering "Always." This indicates a moderate level of awareness about environmental impacts among the respondents.

4. How often do you purchase from brands that promote ethical practices ?

S.NO.	HOW OFTEN	PERCENTAGES
1.	Always	5.9%
2.	Sometimes	70.6%
3.	Rarely	23.5%





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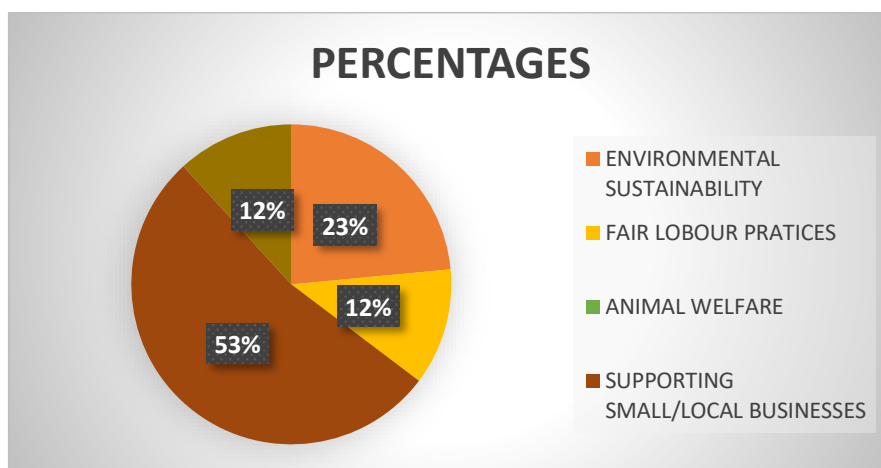
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INTERPRETATION:

From the above table, it is inferred that a majority (70.6%) of respondents sometimes purchase from ethical brands, while 23.5% always do so. This suggests that ethical considerations are important but not always a priority for the participants.

5. What motivates you to buy from ethical brands ?

S.NO.	Motivates	PERCENTAGES
1.	Environmental sustainability	23.5%
2.	Fair labor practices	11.8%
3.	Animal welfare	0%
4.	Supporting small/local business	52.9%
5.	Corporate social responsibility	11.8%



INTERPRETATION:

From the above table, the top motivation (52.9%) is supporting small/local businesses, followed by environmental sustainability (23.5%). Other factors like fair labor practices and corporate social responsibility are less prominent, indicating a strong preference for local support and sustainability.

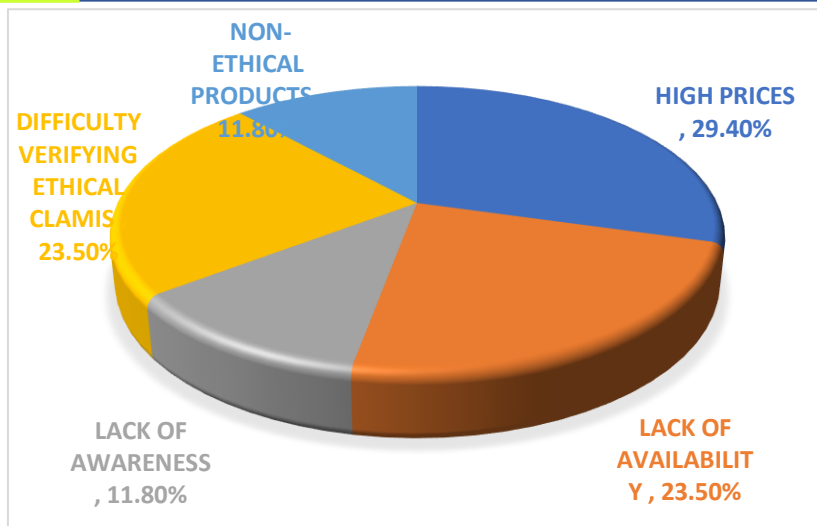
6. What are the main barriers that prevent you from making more ethical purchases ?

S.NO.	BARRIERS	PERCENTAGES
1.	High prices	29.4%
2.	Lack of availability	23.5%
3.	Lack of awareness	11.8%
4.	Difficulty verifying ethical claims	23.5%
5.	Convenience of non-ethical products	11.8%



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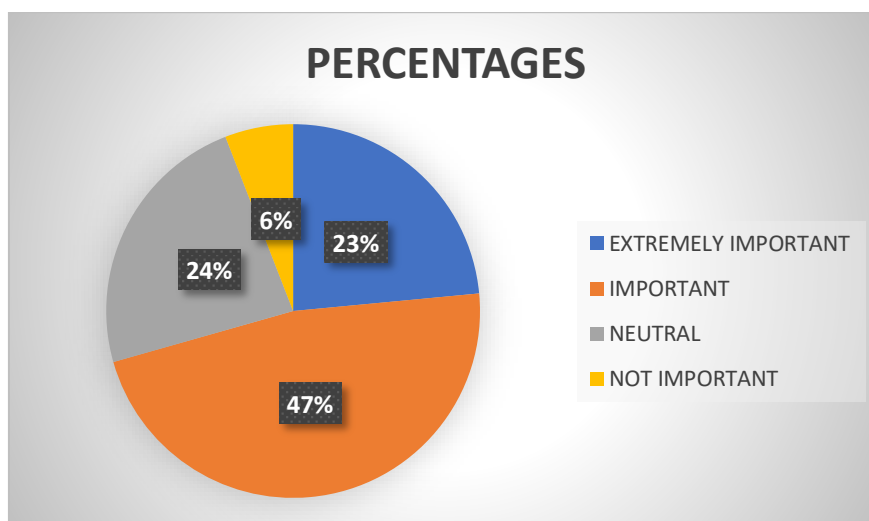


INTERPRETATION:

From the above tables, it is inferred that the top barriers are high prices (29.4%) and lack of availability (23.5%), indicating that cost and accessibility are major concerns preventing more ethical purchases. Other barriers like lack of awareness and difficulty verifying claims also play a role but to a lesser extent.

7. How important is environmental sustainability of a product to you when making a purchase ?

S.NO.	HOW IMPORTANT	PERCENTAGES
1.	Extremely important	23.5%
2.	Important	47.1%
3.	Neutral	23.5%
4.	Not important	5.9%





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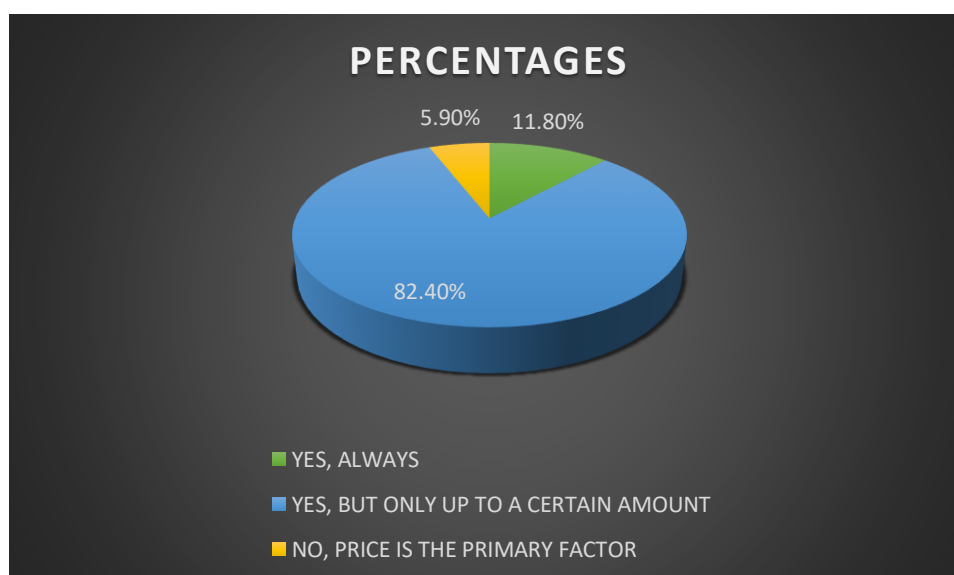
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INTERPRETATION:

From the above tables, it is inferred that a large portion (47.1%) of respondents find environmental sustainability "Important" when making purchases, while 23.5% find it "Extremely important." This shows that sustainability is a significant factor for a majority of respondents.

8. Would you be willing to pay more for a product from an ethically responsible brand ?

S.NO.	PAY MORE OR LESS	PERCENTAGES
1.	Yes, always	11.8%
2.	Yes, but only up to certain amount	82.4%
3.	No, price is the primary factor	5.9%



INTERPRETATION:

From the above tables, it is inferred that most respondents (82.4%) are not willing to pay more for ethical products, prioritizing price over ethics. Only 11.8% are always willing to pay more, showing a strong preference for affordability.

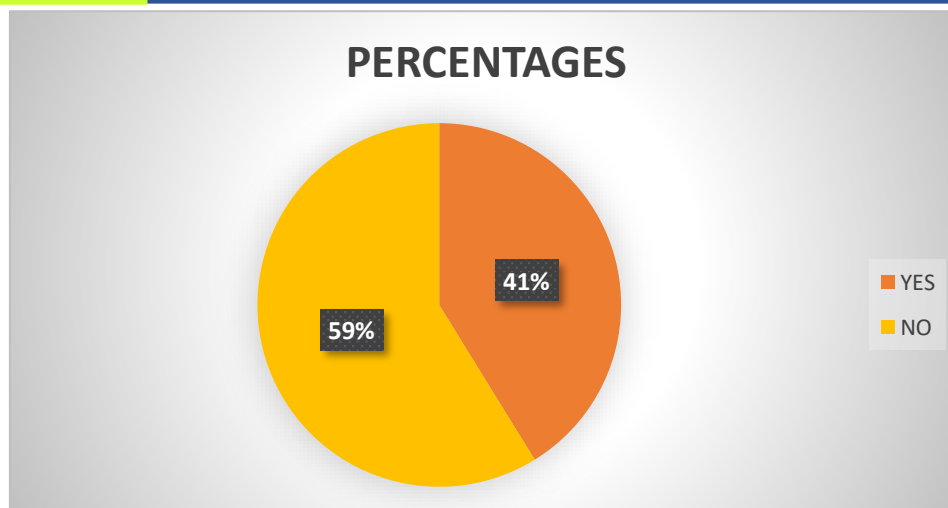
9. Have you ever boycotted a brand due to its unethical practices ?

S.NO	YES/NO	PERCENTAGES
1.	Yes	41.2%
2.	No	58.8%



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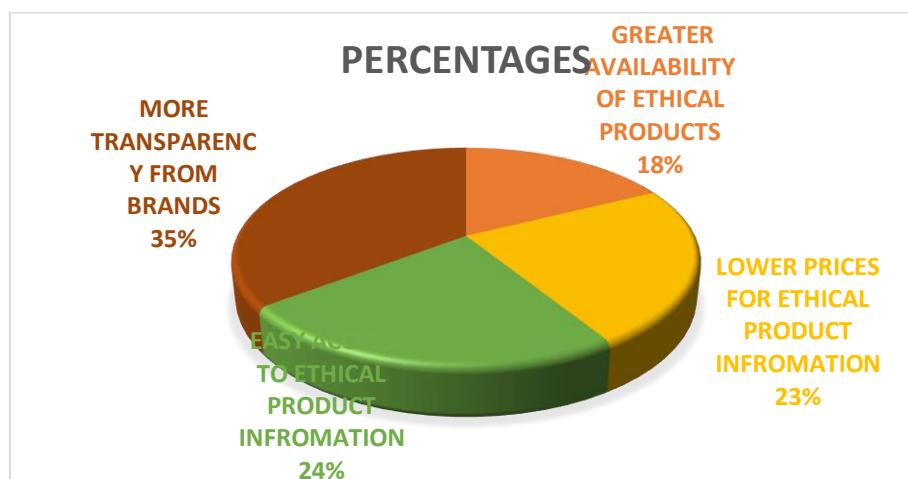


INTERPRETATION:

From the above table, it is inferred that 58.8% of respondents have boycotted a brand for unethical practices, showing a substantial level of ethical consumerism where actions align with beliefs.

9. Which one of the following would encourage you to shop more ethically ?

S.NO	ENCOURAGEMENT	PERCENTAGES
1.	Greater availability of ethical products	17.6%
2.	Lower prices for ethical product information	23.5%
3.	Easy access to ethical products information	23.5%
4.	More transparency from brands	35.3%





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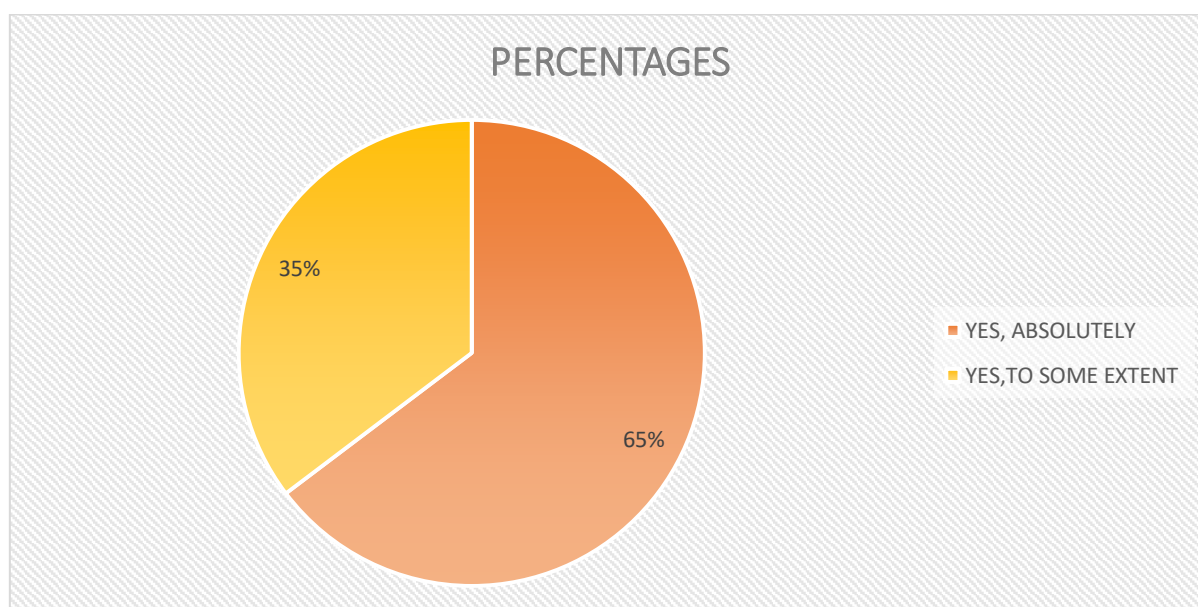
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INTERPRETATION:

From the above table, it is inferred that majority (35.3%) say greater availability of ethical products would encourage them to shop more ethically, followed by lower prices (23.5%). Easy access to product information (17.6%) also plays a significant role, highlighting practical improvements that could drive more ethical consumption.

11. Do you believe ethical consumerism can significantly impact global issues like climate changes, inequality and labour rights ?

S.NO.	SIGNIFICANTLY IMPACT	PERCENTAGES
1.	Yes, absolutely	64.7%
2.	Yes, to some extent	35.3%



INTERPRETATION:

From the above table, it is inferred that a significant majority (64.7%) believe that ethical consumerism can absolutely impact global issues like climate change, inequality, and labor rights, while 35.3% think it can to some extent. This reflects a strong belief in the power of ethical consumption to drive social and environmental change.

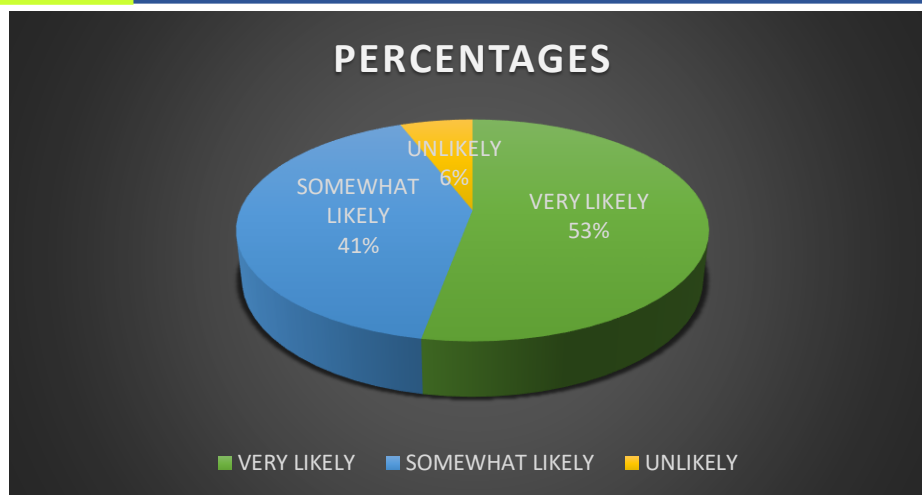
12. How likely are you to recommend ethically made products to others ?

S.NO.	HOW LIKELY	PERCENTAGES
1.	Very likely	52.9%
2.	Somewhat likely	41.2%
3.	Unlikely	5.9%



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INTERPRETATION:

From the above table, it is inferred 52.9% of respondents are very likely to recommend ethically made products, while 41.2% are somewhat likely. This indicates a high level of willingness among participants to advocate for ethical brands, potentially influencing others to follow suit.

Interpret your findings in relation to your research questions and existing literature

1. Price and Ethical Consumption

Key study: Ngobo(2011)

One key area of focus has been how pricing influences ethical consumption. A study by Ngobo (2011) observed that lower prices and wider availability can sometimes make ethical products less appealing to consumers. This seems counterintuitive, as lower prices usually encourage more purchases. However, in the case of ethical products, the perception of exclusivity seems to play a significant role. When prices drop, some consumers may no longer view the product as special or high-quality.

Implications: This suggests that brands may face a challenge when trying to scale ethical products while maintaining their premium image. Keeping prices higher, even when expanding distribution, might help sustain the product's ethical appeal. This raises a key research question about whether brands can strike a balance between affordability and maintaining the perceived value of ethical goods.

2. Consumer Perception of Brand Intentions

Key study: Gershoff et al (2015)

Another significant factor is how consumers perceive the brand's motives for emphasizing ethical attributes. Research by Gershoff et al. (2015) shows that consumers tend to be sceptical when they believe a company is intentionally marketing ethical features. For instance, if it appears that a brand is only focusing on sustainability to appeal to trends rather than genuine commitment, consumers may react negatively.

Implications: Brands should be careful when promoting their ethical initiatives. Marketing strategies that feel too deliberate may lead to distrust. Subtler, more integrated messages might work better, especially in industries where consumers are highly sensitive to authenticity. This suggests that ethical communication strategies need to be nuanced to avoid backfiring.

3. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Brand Perception

Key study: TORELLI ET AL (2012)

Corporate social responsibility can sometimes complicate things, especially for luxury brands. Torelli et al. (2012) explored how promoting CSR can backfire for luxury brands, as it may clash with their image of indulgence and exclusivity. When a brand focuses too much on altruistic CSR efforts, it may lose its appeal among consumers who are drawn to luxury products for personal satisfaction rather than social responsibility.

Implications: For luxury brands, this suggests that CSR should be approached carefully. Instead of broad social initiatives, luxury brands might find it more effective to tie CSR efforts to the premium nature of their products. For example, using sustainable materials in a limited-edition collection might align better with their brand image.



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4. Brand and Ethical Attribute Congruity

Congruity between a brand's core values and its ethical attributes plays a crucial role in consumer evaluations. When ethical attributes align with the existing benefits that the brand provides, consumer responses tend to be more positive. For instance, a brand known for practicality and durability is likely to benefit more from promoting sustainability, as this feels like a natural extension of what the brand already stands for.

Implications: This finding underscores the importance of consistency between what a brand represents and the ethical attributes it promotes. A brand's existing values should guide how it approaches ethical marketing. For brands offering utilitarian products, promoting ethical attributes tied to practicality (e.g., environmental sustainability) may resonate more with consumers than symbolic ethical claims.

5. Resource Synergy Beliefs and Consumer Response

A newer area of research involves resource synergy beliefs, which refer to consumers' perceptions that combining a brand's traditional strengths with ethical attributes creates greater value. For example, if a consumer values both luxury and sustainability, they may view a high-end, eco-friendly product as offering the best of both worlds.

Implications: Brands targeting consumers with strong resource synergy beliefs should emphasize how ethical attributes enhance, rather than detract from, their core product benefits. For instance, a tech brand could promote how sustainable practices improve product durability and performance. This could be particularly effective for brands in sectors like electronics, where quality and sustainability are both valued.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to foster ethical consumerism and enhance the role of brands in driving sustainability-focused consumer behavior:

1. **Enhancing Consumer Awareness:** Brands should invest in transparent and informative marketing strategies to educate consumers about ethical products and sustainability practices. This can include:
 - Developing educational campaigns that highlight the environmental and social impact of consumer choices.
 - Providing clear labeling and certifications on product packaging to guide purchasing decisions.
 - Organizing community workshops, webinars, and collaborations with NGOs to promote sustainable consumption.
2. **Improving Brand Accountability:** Companies should implement third-party sustainability certifications and increase transparency in their supply chains to gain consumer trust. To achieve this:
 - Brands should disclose their sourcing, manufacturing, and labor conditions through regular sustainability reports.
 - Engaging in independent audits to verify compliance with ethical standards can enhance credibility.
 - Establishing grievance redressal mechanisms for consumers to report unethical business practices.
3. **Encouraging Government Regulations:** Policymakers should establish stricter guidelines to prevent greenwashing and ensure businesses adhere to sustainability standards. Steps to be taken include:
 - Mandating standardized sustainability reporting for businesses.
 - Introducing incentives such as tax benefits for companies that meet sustainable production criteria.
 - Enforcing penalties for misleading environmental claims and non-compliance with sustainability regulations.
4. **Bridging the Attitude-Behavior Gap:** Brands should focus on making ethical products more accessible and affordable to encourage consumers to align their purchasing behaviors with their ethical values. Strategies include:
 - Implementing fair pricing models to make sustainable products competitive with conventional alternatives.
 - Partnering with retailers to expand the availability of ethical products in mainstream marketplaces.
 - Offering subscription models, bulk purchase discounts, and rewards programs for sustainable choices.
5. **Strengthening CSR Initiatives:** Companies should integrate Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) efforts into their core business strategies rather than treating them as secondary marketing tools. Effective measures include:
 - Aligning CSR initiatives with key business operations to create long-term impact.
 - Encouraging employee engagement in sustainability projects through volunteer programs.
 - Measuring and reporting the impact of CSR activities on social and environmental parameters.



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6. Leveraging Digital Platforms: Social media campaigns and influencer partnerships can be used to promote ethical consumerism and highlight the sustainability efforts of brands. Key actions include:
 - Collaborating with ethical influencers to reach wider audiences authentically.
 - Utilizing interactive content, such as live Q&A sessions, infographics, and videos, to educate consumers on sustainability.
 - Encouraging user-generated content by incentivizing consumers to share their ethical shopping experiences.
7. Longitudinal Studies for Deeper Insights: Future research should track consumer behavior over time to assess the evolving impact of brand influence on ethical decision-making. This can be achieved by:
 - Conducting multi-year studies to analyze trends and shifts in consumer preferences.
 - Exploring the role of generational differences in ethical consumerism.
 - Using data analytics and AI-driven insights to assess long-term brand-consumer relationships.
8. Cross-Cultural Studies: Expanding research to different cultural and economic contexts can provide a more holistic understanding of ethical consumerism worldwide. Future research can:
 - Compare consumer behavior in developing and developed economies to identify unique challenges and opportunities.
 - Examine how cultural values shape ethical purchasing decisions in various regions.
 - Study the impact of globalization on sustainable consumerism across different markets.
9. Advancing Technological Innovations: Brands and researchers should explore innovative technologies that can enhance sustainable consumer practices. These could include:
 - Blockchain technology for transparent supply chains and verifiable sustainability claims.
 - AI-driven recommendations for personalized ethical shopping experiences.
 - Biodegradable packaging solutions to reduce environmental impact.
10. Strengthening Multi-Stakeholder Collaborations: Collaboration between governments, businesses, academia, and non-profit organizations can amplify the impact of sustainability efforts. Actions include:
 - Establishing industry-wide sustainability alliances to set ethical benchmarks.
 - Creating public-private partnerships to drive sustainable innovation.
 - Engaging with academia for research-driven policy recommendations.

By implementing these recommendations, businesses, policymakers, and researchers can contribute to fostering a more ethical and sustainable consumer culture globally.

VII. CONCLUSION

This research has provided valuable insights into the influence of brands on consumer decision-making within the framework of ethical consumerism and sustainability. The study underscores that brands play a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior through strategic marketing, corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, and the communication of sustainable practices. As consumers become more conscious of environmental and ethical issues, their purchasing decisions are increasingly driven by a brand's commitment to sustainability, transparency, and ethical sourcing. However, while ethical consumerism is on the rise, several barriers persist, including greenwashing, price sensitivity, lack of awareness, and accessibility of sustainable alternatives.

One of the key findings of this research is that consumer trust is a significant factor in the success of sustainable brands. Brands that are perceived as authentic in their sustainability efforts tend to foster stronger consumer loyalty and long-term engagement. However, deceptive marketing practices, such as greenwashing, undermine consumer confidence and create skepticism about sustainability claims. This highlights the importance of clear and verifiable sustainability standards, which can be enforced through third-party certifications and stricter regulatory frameworks.

Moreover, the study emphasizes that while brands hold substantial power in shaping consumer attitudes, the responsibility does not lie with them alone. Consumers themselves must be proactive in making informed purchasing decisions by researching brands, verifying sustainability claims, and supporting companies that demonstrate genuine ethical commitments. Additionally, policymakers and regulatory bodies play a vital role in ensuring transparency, accountability, and ethical compliance in corporate sustainability practices. Governments and international organizations must continue to implement and enforce policies that promote responsible business practices while discouraging misleading claims.



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Looking ahead, future research can explore the evolving relationship between digital media and ethical consumerism, particularly how social media, influencers, and online communities contribute to shaping consumer perceptions and driving sustainable choices. Furthermore, longitudinal studies can assess the long-term impact of sustainability initiatives on consumer behavior and brand performance.

Ultimately, achieving a truly sustainable and ethical marketplace requires a collective effort from businesses, consumers, and regulatory bodies. By fostering an ecosystem where transparency, accountability, and ethical responsibility are prioritized, society can move toward a more sustainable future where consumer choices actively contribute to environmental and social well-being.

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