

Exploring sustainable consumption marketing among young adults in Mexico City¹

Estudio exploratorio sobre el marketing de consumo sustentable entre los adultos jóvenes de la Ciudad de México

Mélanie S. Picard²

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Abstract

This study explores sustainable consumption among young adults in Mexico City to improve marketing strategies. Through interviews with experts and consumers, it examines individual and collective drivers of sustainable consumption for greater marketing effectiveness. The results emphasize the importance of offering trendy products and raising perceived value by highlighting personal and family benefits, such as health and collective benefits for the local or national community. Recommendations include enhancing accessibility by leveraging small shops and street markets and modernizing promotion through external influencers and user-generated content. It is also recommended that trust be fostered through public policies like sustainability scoring. Sustainable marketing can reshape consumer perceptions, making eco-friendly products more accessible, trustworthy, and valued as investments in both personal well-being and societal progress.

Keywords: Sustainable consumption, sustainability, marketing, green marketing, sustainable product

Resumen

Este estudio explora el consumo sostenible entre los jóvenes adultos en la Ciudad de México para mejorar las estrategias de marketing. A través de entrevistas con expertos y consumidores, se analizan los factores individuales y colectivos que impulsan el consumo sostenible para lograr una mayor efectividad en el marketing. Los resultados destacan la importancia de ofrecer productos de moda, aumentar el valor percibido al resaltar los beneficios personales y familiares, como la salud, así como los beneficios colectivos para la comunidad local o nacional. Las recomendaciones también incluyen mejorar la accesibilidad aprovechando los pequeños negocios y mercados, así como modernizar la promoción mediante influenciadores en línea y contenido generado por los usuarios. También se recomienda fomentar la confianza a través de políticas públicas, como la implementación de una puntuación de sostenibilidad, de manera similar al etiquetado de advertencia de alimentos y bebidas en México. El marketing sostenible puede remodelar las percepciones de los consumidores, haciendo que los productos ecológicos sean más accesibles, confiables y valorados como inversiones tanto en el bienestar personal como en el progreso social.

Palabras clave: consumo sostenible, sostenibilidad, mercadotecnia, mercadotecnia verde, producto sostenible.

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² Doctorado en Ciencia de la Administración, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (México). Correo electrónico: melanie.picard75@live.fr. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7207-3757>. Rol Credit de la autora: research.

Introduction

Sustainable marketing, an emerging field at the intersection of consumer behavior and environmental stewardship, has garnered increasing attention as global awareness of ecological issues heightens (M. S. Picard et al., 2024). This academic paper investigates the dynamics of sustainable marketing among young adults in Mexico City, focusing on consumers' sustainability perceptions and collective and individual drivers (Kilbourne et al., 2002; Liu et al., 2010; Ozcaglar-Toulouse, 2005, 2007; Papaoikonomou et al., 2011; Prothero et al., 2011), as well as consumer responses to sustainable marketing mechanisms. This is to explore the factors shaping sustainable consumption behaviors and the challenges and opportunities inherent in promoting sustainable products.

Indeed, despite the general awareness of environmental issues, there is a disparity between individual intentions to adopt sustainable behaviors and the actual implementation of such practices (Papaoikonomou et al., 2011). This phenomenon is particularly observed in transactional sustainable consumption (Young et al., 2010).

This paper aims to reduce the gap inherent to sustainable marketing by qualitatively analyzing key sustainable consumption drivers among the studied population.

To that purpose, consumers' sustainability perception is analyzed by digging into consumerism (Shaw et al., 2006), social inequalities (Martinez & Poole, 2009), and environment topics (Freestone & McGoldrick, 2008); collective drivers are explored through lifestyles (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012) and social influence consideration (Lee, 2008); while individual drivers are examined through a beliefs and knowledge evaluation (Ajzen, 2006). Finally, the components of the sustainable marketing mix are tested.

Thus, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of sustainable consumption factors and offers recommendations for more effective marketing strategies.

Literature Review

Sustainable consumption definition

There is not a consensus on the definition of sustainable consumption, that can also be referred as ethical (Barnett, Cafaro, et al., 2005; Barnett, Cloke, et al., 2005; Bezençon & Blili, 2010; Carrington et al., 2014; Freestone & McGoldrick, 2008) or responsible (Dueñas Ocampo et al., 2014; Francois-Lecompte & Roberts, 2006; Guari & Knorrninga, 2014; Ulusoy, 2015; Villa Castaño et al., 2016).

However, a common aspect is that it relates to all categories of products like food, personal care, clothing, furniture, and services such as financials (Cruz Reyes, 2016) or transport (Fu & Zimm, 2024).

Still, it is predominantly practiced through purchasing products explicitly marketed as environmentally friendly, animal-friendly, or supportive of social causes. Indeed, physical goods simplify consumers' visualization of various ethical considerations associated with their value chain: from design and raw material procurement to production, marketing, usage, and end-of-life disposal (Villa Castaño et al., 2016).

From that perspective, Greenpeace México (n.d.) designs sustainable consumption based on three fundamental criteria: the geographical proximity between producer and consumer, a production process that minimizes or eliminates the use of fertilizers, chemicals, and water, and support of ecosystem resilience. This approach offers a fair distribution of profits with workers and their communities through a relationship of dialogue and respect.

Research lines

A comprehensive literature review by Papaoikonomou, Ryan, and Valverde (2011) on ethical consumption behavior identifies three lines of research applicable to this field.

The first seeks to understand the profile of the ethical consumer, focusing on socio-demographic, environmental, and personality characteristics. It is noted that the concept of ethical consumer remains fragmented due to diverse perspectives, leading to disconnected and difficult-to-exploit knowledge. The second line aims to develop predictive models of ethical consumption behavior by identifying influencing factors, typically using the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991). The third line delves into the forms, drivers, and meanings of ethical consumption.

This paper focuses on the third line, by offering an understanding of consumers' sustainability perception as well as their collective and individual drivers compared to sustainable marketing actions.

Sustainable consumption factors

The roots of sustainable consumption can either result from industry innovation (pull) or from consumer aspirations (push) (Martinez & Poole, 2009).

Pull factors

In the first case, sustainable innovations are launched on the market by producers willing to reduce their

environmental footprint, it is usually the case in the technology or automotive industry (World Business Council of Sustainable Development, 2008).

Indeed, as a collective driver, organizations must meet corporate social responsibility (CSR) obligations. From a European perspective, CSR is seen as an ideological framework akin to sustainable development, aimed at collective well-being, that involves a multidimensional partnering and requires a profound renewal of business models. This contrasts with the North-American perspective, where CSR is synonymous with business ethics, a moralistic ideology with a financial and patrimonial logic, focused on individuals and requiring only an adaptation of business models. (Combes, 2005)

To concretize CSR, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) provides clear guidelines. These include the disclosure of “activities, structure, financial situation, and performance; respect for labor rights by avoiding discrimination and child exploitation and ensuring safe working conditions; monitoring the environmental impacts of operations including health and safety; reduction of raw materials and energy use and utilizing sustainable energy sources; combating corruption; addressing consumer interests by providing quality products and adhering to established marketing practices; contributing to the development of innovation in science and technology within the operating country respecting competition laws; and complying with tax obligations” (OECD, cited by Raufflet et al., 2012, p.71).

For the sake of reconciling theory with business reality, Raufflet et al. (2012) recommend to integrate sustainable development concerns in both economic and social value creation, which takes roots in business models, strategies, value chain and practices; while fostering synergies with various social actors for the common good, rather than merely enhancing the company’s image.

Push factors

In the case where the consumers aspiration drive sustainable consumption expansion, the evolution of the offer results from a change in the demand. For instance, the supply of sustainable food products has grown significantly with organic or fair trade products, in response to more exigent consumers expectations in relation to those aspects (Micheletti, 2003).

Martinez and Poole (2009) explain that the shift towards sustainable consumers is the result of a greater awareness on ecological challenges, poverty mechanisms, and trade inequities. This, associated to the increase in disposable income, that has allowed consumers to access higher quality products in terms of social and environmental production conditions.

Kilbourne et al. (2002) expand the analysis by introducing a hierarchical model consisting of six critical collective to individual factors influencing green consumption : public policies, values, society environmental beliefs, individual beliefs, behavioral intention, and behavior. Their study indicates that most research predominantly targets behavioral intention and behavior, focusing on the symptoms of green consumption rather than of its root causes originated in collective factors.

Giesler & Veresiu (2014) agree in that direction by emphasizing the positive and decisive role of institutional influence for the widespread adoption of sustainable consumption. They demonstrate that public institutions can guide consumer behavior towards greater responsibility through policies that treat consumers as moral individuals. The shift is supported by a process of educating consumers about their potential to contribute to collective solutions and is reinforced by experts confirming the relevance of sustainable consumption for resolving such problems.

Specially applied to young adults in Hong Kong, Lee’ scale (2008) evaluates eight dimensions similarly to Kilbourne et al. (2002), that is to say incorporating from collective to individual aspects : social influence, environmental attitude, environmental concern, perceived seriousness of environmental problems, perceived environmental responsibility, perceived effectiveness of sustainable behavior, concern for the image reflected through environmental protection, and ecological purchasing behavior.

This analysis shows that the most significant factor among this study’s population is social influence (friend network), followed by emotional concern for the environment, concern for self-image in environmental protection, and perceived effectiveness of individual behavior. This differs from models typically observed among adults, where sustainable consumption is primarily driven by rational and cognitive thinking, an important input for the present study.

At an individual level only, among the decision models applicable to sustainable consumption is to be highlighted the theory of planned behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991).

TPB is a psychological framework designed to predict and explain human behavior based on three key factors: attitude toward the behavior (positive or negative evaluation), subjective norms (perceived social pressure), and perceived behavioral control (ease or difficulty of performing the behavior). These factors shape an individual’s behavioral intention, which is the primary predictor of actual behavior. If perceived control is high, intention strongly predicts behavior; if low, even strong intentions may not lead to action.

Complementing TPB, Gossling (1996) refines the concept of attitude by introducing two distinct components: affective sources, which encompass the beliefs, feelings and mood associated with the behavior, and cognitive sources, which involve the knowledge, explanation capacity and later understanding of behavior's outcomes. This distinction enhances the understanding of how attitudes are formed and how they, in turn, influence behavioral intentions, particularly in the context of sustainable consumption.

More recently, and specifically designed for sustainable consumption, Ozcaglar-Toulouse (2005) spots identity as a key driver of responsible consumption, setting it at the intersection of various processes: the awareness of oneself uniqueness compared to others, the awareness of similarities with others, the affective involvement, the aspiration for others to last, and the evolution of oneself identity to pursue personal values.

This concept is further explored by Lavuri et al. (2023) in the emerging markets of India and China, where they examine identity through a personality lens. They identify several factors that influence sustainable consumption behavior, including egoism, altruism, and social consumption motivation, all of which are found to positively impact pro-environmental identity.

Sustainable marketing

As marketing practices have traditionally been grounded in the assumption of boundless resources and minimal environmental consequences, recent shifts in environmental awareness necessitate a re-evaluation of these strategies. As the awareness of resource constraints and the high environmental impact becomes more prominent, it is crucial for marketers to reassess their approaches. This involves revisiting policies related to product development, pricing, distribution, and branding to align with sustainable practices. (Kotler, 2011)

As per Picard & Ávila Montes de Oca (2020), sustainable marketing can be defined as the association of the concepts of sustainability and marketing.

Since the Brundtland Report of 1987 which was presented to the United Nations General Assembly, sustainability is usually understood as the ability to "satisfy present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland, 1987, p.1). More broadly, sustainability can design as a social and political project aimed at ecological order or the condition of global equilibrium (Cruz Reyes, 2016), specially between economy, social development and ecology (Alhaddi, 2015; Elkington, 1998).

On the marketing side, Lendrevie & Lévy (2014) refers to "a strategy that organizations use to impact the behavior of their target audience by providing an offering

with perceived value that exceeds that of competitors over time." For the private sector, this means creating revenues by delivering value that customers find worthwhile enough to pay for. While for other kind of organizations, it can be extrapolated as the power of influencing an audience for their own best.

Considering the above, sustainable marketing can be defined as the action of influencing towards sustainability. Concretely, it means to create a marketing mix for a product, a service or an idea, at a price and through distribution channels and promotion policies that are economically viable, socially equitable in its benefits distribution, and supportive of the environmental preservation and regeneration. According to Chan (2013), the Internet is particularly well-suited as a medium for promoting sustainable attributes.

This is reflected in (Rakesh Bhargava, 2023) study, which examines the critical role of educating consumers through informative storytelling to raise awareness, explores how social media and influencer marketing can broaden audience reach, emphasizes the role of eco-friendly packaging in enhancing the appeal of sustainable products, and highlights the significance of third-party certifications.

Greenwashing

In this context, some companies have been criticized for emphasizing the environmentally friendly aspects of their products while failing to meaningfully reduce their environmental impact or even engaging in contradictory practices. An increasing number of firms are overstating their sustainability efforts (Dutta-Powell et al., 2024).

This practice, known as greenwashing, involves making false or misleading claims—often through symbolic gestures—to create the appearance of a strong commitment to environmental sustainability and protection. Such practices highlight the flaws in contemporary capitalism, raising questions about the true potential of this economic model to support genuine ecological progress. (Williams, 2024).

In addition, this contributes to consumer distrust, due to a perceived discrepancy between claim and facts (Steenis et al., 2023).

Thus, many individuals report avoiding "green" products due to skepticism about their environmental claims or concerns about their actual effectiveness. Paradoxically, however, the rising demand for natural foods, hybrid vehicles, and other eco-friendly products suggests that consumers are still willing to pay a premium for them—even if their motivation is not always driven by environmental concerns. (Ottman et al., 2006)

This highlights the need to further explore marketing opportunities in sustainability claims.

Method

This article is part of a broader study on sustainable consumption factors among young adults in Mexico (M. Picard, 2020) employing a mixed-methods approach. It represents the first exploratory phase, using in-depth interviews to investigate sustainable consumption factors identified in the literature, including those related to sustainable marketing. This approach is justified by the absence of prior studies focused on young adults in Mexico City, particularly those addressing factors identified in research conducted in developed countries or those centered exclusively on young people. Consequently, it was important to assess whether these factors are relevant to the study population. A separate article (currently under revision) presents the resulting quantitative framework designed for subsequent quantitative analysis.

The interviews were conducted with sustainable consumption experts and young adults in Mexico City. Experts included sustainability professionals, educators, and employees from public institutions identified in the professional social media LinkedIn with the key words of “Sustainability” and “Mexico City” and who accepted to participate to the study. While young people were selected through a snowball sampling method starting with a convenience selection that was aiming to diversify perspectives based on gender, age, and social class.

The interviews were conducted between April and November 2017, in two stages.

First, six experts were interviewed to investigate various aspects of sustainable consumption, including preferred product types, associated pricing, and existing or proposed marketing strategies aimed at encouraging young adults to adopt more sustainable behaviors. The interviews also examined the most effective distribution channels, public policies related to education, taxation, regulations, and legislation, as well as media communication channels and cultural factors specific to Mexico.

Second, fourteen interviews were conducted with young adults to explore both collective and individual drivers of sustainable consumption and compare them with their perceptions of sustainable marketing. Collective drivers encompassed public policies, lifestyle influences, and social dynamics, whereas individual drivers included personality traits such as empathy, belief in one's ability to impact global challenges (e.g., climate change and social inequalities), socio-environmental concern and engagement, knowledge of verified facts related to these

issues, and the intention to consume sustainable products as well as sustainable consumption behaviors as defined by Picard et al. (2024).

1. By product type: This includes local, green, organic, fair trade, environmentally friendly, or cruelty-free products purchased through mass retail channels.
2. By channel type: These are the same products bought through alternative distribution channels, such as direct-to-producer, short supply chains, local markets, small shops, and private individuals.
3. By collaborative consumption: This includes shared purchases, product rentals, or the acquisition of second-hand items.
4. By Non-Monetary Practices: These practices involve recycling, reusing, reducing consumption, repairing, redistributing unused goods (the 5Rs), bartering, and boycotting.

The discussions also compared their perceptions and interpretations of sustainable marketing, their interest in products labeled as sustainable, their preferred channels for purchasing these products, and their willingness to pay a premium price

The interviews were recorded and transcribed with the participants' consent, ensuring accuracy through the use of verbatim notes and recordings. The data was then processed using Atlas.ti, where responses were consolidated, standardized, summarized, and analyzed to identify frequencies, correlations, and emerging trends.

In total, six experts and fourteen young people were interviewed. The tables below detail the sample of experts and young people interviewed.

Table 1
Expert sample

Organization	Number of interviewees
Danone	1
Teachers	2
Federal Commission for the Protection against Sanitary Risk	1
Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources of Mexico	1
Total	6

Table 2
Young adults sample

Gender	Age	Main activity	Marital status	Household composition	Monthly income in USD
Woman	25-29	Formal salaried worker	Married	Complete (father-mother-siblings)	610-1,780
Woman	20-24	Student	Single	Complete (father-mother-siblings)	<610
Woman	20-24	Student	Single	Unipersonal	<610
Woman	20-24	Student	Single	Complete (father-mother-siblings)	<610
Woman	25-29	Formal salaried worker	Single	Complete (father-mother-siblings)	610-1,780
Woman	25-29	Formal salaried worker	Single	Horizontal (with friends or siblings)	610-1,780
Woman	30-34	Formal salaried worker	Single parent	Own family home	610-1,780
Man	30-34	Formal salaried worker	Single	Complete (father-mother-siblings)	<610
Man	30-34	Student	Single	Single-parent	610-1,780
Man	30-34	Formal salaried worker	Common-law	Own family home	>1,780
Woman	30-34	Formal salaried worker	Married	Own family home	>1,780
Woman	30-34	Formal salaried worker	Single	Complete (father-mother-siblings)	>1,780
Woman	30-34	Independent worker	Common-law	Own family home	>1,780
Man	30-34	Formal salaried worker	Single	Unipersonal	610-1,780

Results

Atlas.ti analysis

To gain deeper insights into consumer perceptions of sustainable consumption, the verbatim transcripts of in-depth interviews were systematically analyzed using Atlas.ti. A coding framework was developed to categorize key themes, enabling a structured examination

of the factors shaping sustainable consumer behavior in relation to sustainable marketing.

The groups formed analyze various aspects of sustainable marketing from the consumer's perspective. They explore product attributes, the most credible distribution channels, consumers' willingness to pay a premium for sustainability, and the promotional strategies brands should adopt to align with consumer concerns. These insights are then compared to key influencing factors of sustainable consumption identified in the literature. Collective drivers include public policies, lifestyle, social influence, inhibitors, and motivators, while individual drivers encompass personality, beliefs, knowledge, purchase intention, and behavior.

Table 3
Coding of verbatim in Atlas.ti

Topic	Groups	Theme	Description
Sustainable Marketing	Sustainable Marketing perception	Brand Messaging	Exploration of how sustainability efforts are perceived by consumers.
	Sustainable marketing offer	Product Attributes	Focus on the features and benefits of sustainable products, including quality, animal welfare, eco-friendliness etc.
	Sustainable marketing channels	Distribution Methods	Examination of the channels preference to deliver sustainable products, such as local small shops vs large stores.
	Sustainable marketing price	Cost Considerations	Insights into consumer attitudes towards pricing of sustainable products, willingness to pay and perceived value.
	Sustainable marketing promotion	Marketing Strategies	Analysis of promotional tactics that effectively

			communicate sustainability effort and value to consumers.				sustainable products.
				Beliefs	Values and Attitudes		Examination of underlying beliefs that drive consumer interest in sustainability.
				Knowledge	Awareness and Understanding		Level of consumer knowledge about sustainability and its impact on purchasing decisions.
				Intention	Purchase Intent		Insights into consumers' intentions to buy sustainable products based on various influencing factors.
				Behavior	Effective sustainable consumption		Consumers practices in terms of sustainable products buying, channels selection, collaborative consumption and non-monetary actions taken.
Collective drivers	Public Policies	Regulatory Influence	Impact of government policies on consumer behavior and brand practices related to sustainability.				
	Social Influence	Peer and Community Effects	Role of social networks and community in shaping consumer attitudes towards sustainable products.				
	Lifestyle	Consumer Habits	How personal lifestyle choices and habits influence sustainable consumption behaviors.				
	Sustainable consumption inhibitors	Barriers	Identify what are the main barriers of sustainable consumption.				
	Sustainable consumption motivators	Drivers	Identify what are the main drivers of sustainable consumption.				
Individual drivers	Personality	Individual Traits	Influence of personality traits on consumer preferences for				

consumption as a shared societal goal, media campaigns can cultivate a broader understanding of its significance, encouraging consumers to consider the broader implications of their purchasing behavior beyond immediate convenience.

Effective promotional slogans could include: "Try local," "Choose sustainability daily," "Prioritize care," "Consume less," and "Experience the benefits of responsible consumption."

Figure 2

Words treemap key words frequency in interview verbatim

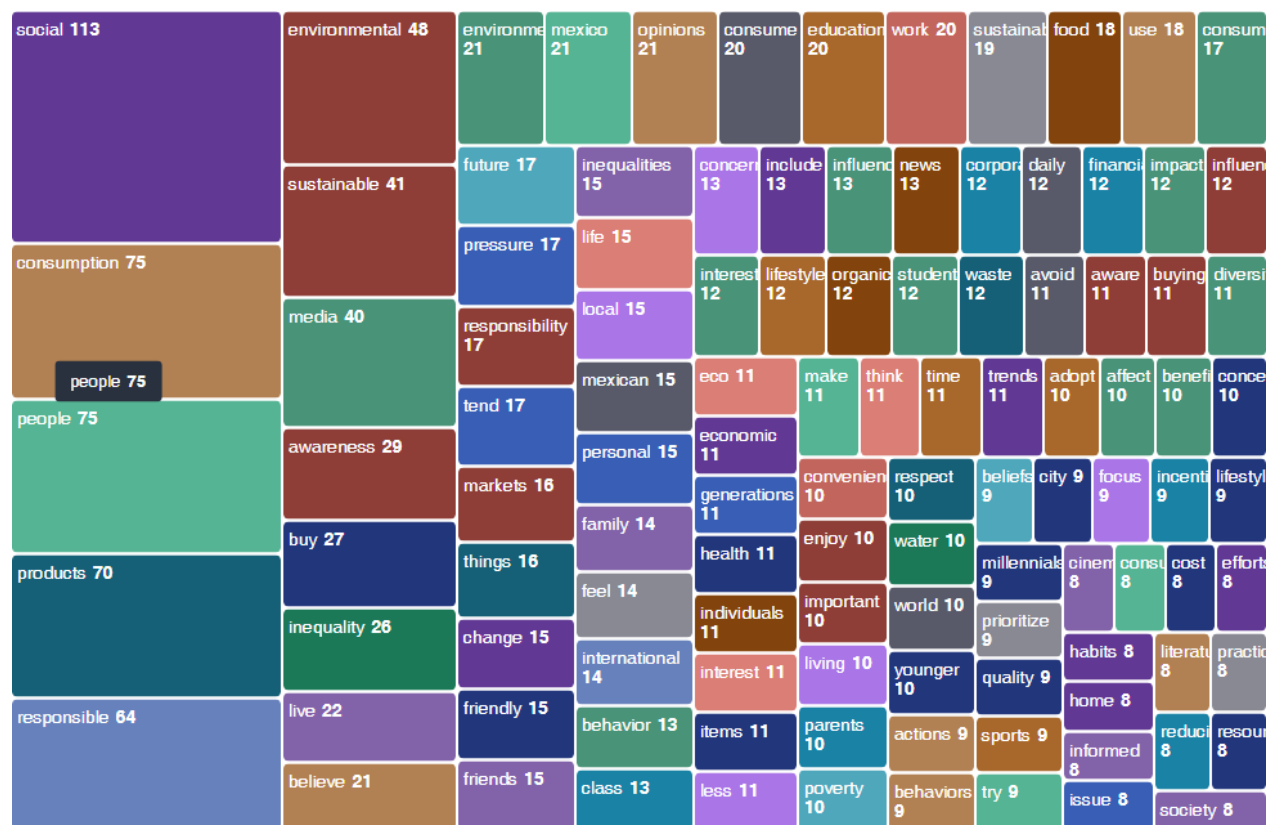


Figure 2 presents concepts similar to those in Figure 1, linked to the frequency of words spoken. This supports the initial analysis, highlighting the prominence of terms

such as "social," "consumption," "people," "products," "responsible," "environmental," and "sustainable," each mentioned over forty times.

Figure 3

Mapping of sustainable marketing relation with key drivers

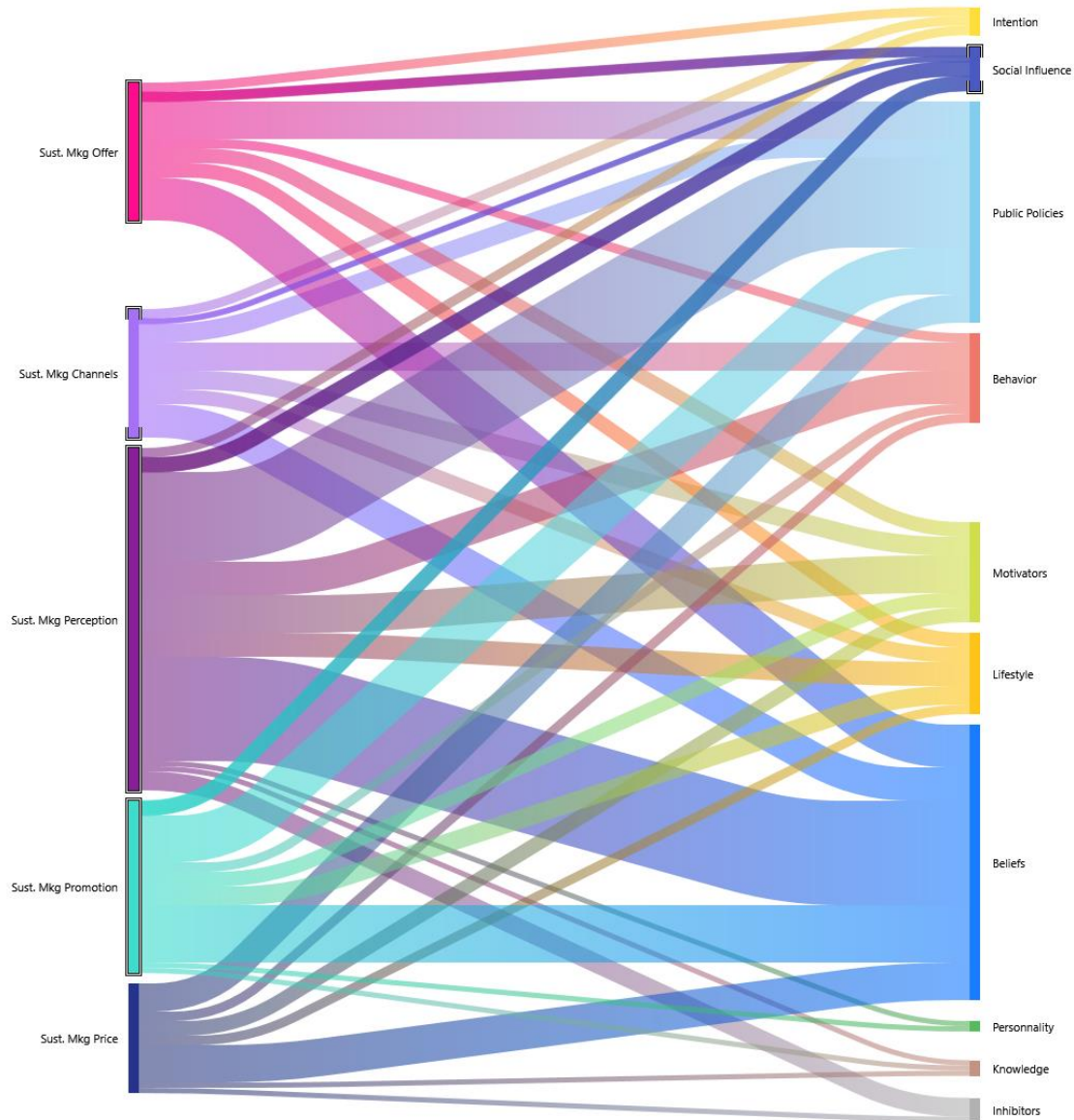


Figure 3 illustrates the relationships between the identified codes, highlighting the influence of both individual and collective drivers on sustainable marketing. In general, the themes most frequently addressed in relation to sustainable marketing are beliefs and public policies.

The perception of sustainable marketing is primarily correlated with beliefs and public policy considerations. Within the beliefs category, concerns related to sustainability and sustainable consumption emerge as the most significant factors. This suggests that individuals' values and awareness levels play a crucial role in shaping

their understanding and expectations of sustainable marketing.

In the realm of public policies, the most prominent theme is the importance of public-private collaboration in promoting sustainable consumption. This underscores the expectation that both government initiatives and private sector commitments should work synergistically to advance sustainability efforts. The findings indicate that the degree of consumer concern about sustainability directly influences how sustainable marketing is interpreted. Specifically, individuals with heightened sustainability concerns are more likely to demand a stronger alignment between public policies—including education, taxation, and regulatory frameworks—and the sustainability initiatives undertaken by private enterprises.

This dynamic reflects a growing societal expectation for an integrated approach to sustainability, where businesses and policymakers share responsibility in fostering a more responsible and ethical marketplace. Strengthening policy mechanisms that incentivize sustainable business practices, while simultaneously raising public awareness and engagement, could enhance the effectiveness of sustainable marketing strategies and drive meaningful behavioral change among consumers.

Secondly, the sustainable marketing offer is closely linked to beliefs and public policies. Once again, the level of concern for socio-environmental issues plays a critical role in shaping consumer appreciation of sustainable products, particularly concerning the negative impacts of certain components on health, the environment, and animal welfare. Consequently, traceability and certification are seen as important attributes. However, distrust in product claims pushes consumers with heightened awareness to engage in conscious consumption through more reliable, straightforward methods. Consumers tend to prioritize short supply chains, reflect on actual needs before making purchases, and favor local, durable, or health-oriented products. Surprisingly, these preferences align with long-term concern decision-making, which contrasts with the more short-term time orientation typically observed in Mexican culture, as identified by Hofstede (2017).

From a public policy perspective, interviewees highlighted the challenges related to identifying and accessing sustainable products. This suggests the need

for governmental interventions to improve marketplace transparency. A standardized sustainability rating system, akin to existing health or nutritional scoring frameworks, could facilitate informed purchasing decisions by making sustainability more visible and comprehensible to consumers. Such an initiative could also provide vendors with a competitive advantage, enabling them to differentiate their offerings and attract sustainability-conscious customers.

Third, sustainable marketing channels are primarily associated with beliefs and behavior. Regarding beliefs, environmental concerns and a sense of responsibility toward sustainable practices emerge as the most significant factors influencing channel preference. Consumers who are attuned to environmental issues are more likely to prioritize channels that align with their sustainability values.

From a behavioral perspective, non-monetary practices such as reuse and recycling are often associated with a preference for local shops, small markets, direct-to-producer purchases, and individual sellers. These channels emerge as the most prominent sustainable consumption practices among the interviewees. The focus on accessibility during the discussions suggests that these practices are particularly appealing due to their convenience. This hypothesis is supported by the widespread presence of independent retail channels in Mexico City, which offer consumers easy access to sustainable options. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MiPyMEs) account for approximately 95% of all economic units in Mexico (INEGI, 2021), underscoring the central role these businesses play in shaping consumer access and purchasing behaviors. The dominance of MiPyMEs is crucial in the context of sustainable marketing channels, as these enterprises provide consumers with direct, accessible alternatives to conventional retail outlets, further promoting sustainable consumption habits.

Fourth, sustainable marketing pricing is primarily linked to beliefs and public policies. Similar to previous sections, it is closely tied to the level of concern for socio-environmental issues, with consumers expressing a willingness to pay a premium for products that align with their values of sustainability and ethical responsibility. However, it is also recognized that the cost of products is not always proportionally related to their origin or

quality. It is also suggested that higher quality standards often result in higher prices, which intermediaries within the supply chain may further inflate. As such, cost remains a significant barrier to the consumption of sustainable products. Despite a willingness to pay more for environmentally and socially responsible products, consumers often face financial constraints that complicate their ability to purchase them consistently.

Fifth, sustainable marketing promotion is also primarily associated with beliefs and public policies. As illustrated in Figure 1, the primary reasons for consuming sustainable products are health-related values, while the materialism of younger generations—driven by the desire for social approval and the pursuit of the latest trends—emerges as the main inhibitor to sustainable consumption. This materialism is often reflected in the desire for products that enhance social appearance, even if not all features are utilized. Additionally, consistent with the findings in Figure 1, social concerns tend to take priority over environmental concerns. To address this, marketing strategies could focus on adapting the codes of common products into sustainable alternatives, such as launching trend-oriented or fashionable sustainable products to appeal to younger consumers, not all of whom may be fully socially conscious. To this end, alternative communication strategies could highlight satisfying real needs, collective societal benefits, and individual advantages such as improved well-being, social recognition, and financial savings.

Figure 4
Co-occurrence of code groups table

	● Sust. Mkg Channels Gr=16	● Sust. Mkg Offer Gr=27	● Sust. Mkg Perception Gr=37	● Sust. Mkg Price Gr=13	● Sust. Mkg Promotion Gr=16
● Behavior Gr=29	6	5	8	2	2
● Beliefs Gr=85	7	11	22	8	12
● Inhibitors Gr=10	0	0	4	1	0

● Intention Gr=10	1	2	2	0	0
● Knowledge Gr=5	0	3	1	0	0
● Lifestyle Gr=47	3	3	5	2	4
● Motivators Gr=33	4	3	8	3	3
● Personality Gr=8	0	0	1	0	1
● Public Policies Gr=49	4	8	19	6	10
● Social Influence Gr=37	1	2	3	0	3

GR = number of citations

Figure 4 illustrates the co-occurrence of code groups between drivers and sustainable marketing concepts. Consistent with the patterns observed in Figure 2, the distribution of codes across sustainable marketing dimensions further underscores the dominant influence of beliefs (Gr=85) and public policies (Gr=49) in shaping perceptions, offerings, channels, pricing, and promotional strategies.

Beliefs emerge as the most significant factor across all categories, reinforcing the idea that sustainability-related values and awareness play a critical role in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors. Public policies also hold substantial importance, particularly in sustainable marketing perception (Gr=19) and promotion (Gr=10), reflecting consumer expectations for stronger regulatory frameworks that support responsible consumption.

Behavior (Gr=26) is notably linked to sustainable marketing perception (Gr=7) and channels (Gr=6), suggesting that consumers' actual purchasing practices align with sustainability values when convenient and accessible alternatives are available.

In contrast, inhibitors (Gr=10) and intention (Gr=10) exhibit relatively low influence across all dimensions, indicating that while barriers to sustainable consumption exist, they do not serve as primary determinants of marketing strategies.

Similarly, social influence (Gr=37) appears to have a limited presence, with a more notable role in shaping perception (Gr=3) rather than other aspects of sustainable marketing. This suggests that while external influences can drive initial awareness, internalized beliefs and policy interventions are stronger determinants of sustainable consumption behaviors.

These findings emphasize the need for marketing strategies that leverage consumer values, strengthen policy support, and improve accessibility to sustainable options, ultimately fostering behavior-driven solutions that encourage responsible consumption.

Figure 5

Frequency of groups of codes

	In-depth Interviews codes Citations=294; Interviews=20
Behavior Gr=28; GS=8	28
Beliefs Gr=84; GS=8	84
Inhibitors Gr=11; GS=6	11
Intention Gr=22; GS=7	22
Knowledge Gr=1; GS=3	1
Lifestyle Gr=49; GS=32	49
Motivators Gr=55; GS=75	55
Personality Gr=9; GS=5	9
Public Policies Gr=49; GS=5	49
Social Influence Gr=37; GS=8	37
Sust. Mkg Offer Gr=12; GS=19	12
Sust. Mkg Channels Gr=16; GS=4	16
Sust. Mkg Price Gr=13; GS=3	13
Sust. Mkg Promotion Gr=18; GS=18	18

Sustainable Marketing Perception Gr=86; GS=16	86
Total	490

GR= number of codes, GS = number of citations

Focus on sustainability perception

Sustainable consumption

Within the beliefs section, the majority of interviewees expressed that sustainable consumption involves respecting the environment, with frequency of 16 interviewees mentioning it. This includes considering the global lifecycle of products, avoiding the overuse of natural resources, making them last longer, using renewable energy, recycling or buying recycled products, purchasing green, fresh, organic, and natural products, choosing durable goods, making homemade items, consuming only what is necessary, being vegan or vegetarian, and having plants. One respondent mentioned looking good while helping the planet as a trend rather than genuine concern.

On the other hand, for the majority of interviewees though less emphatically, sustainable consumption also involves consideration for the social environment with frequency of 14 interviewees mentioning it. This includes a preference for national or local consumption, buying directly from producers or at markets, helping those around you through your purchases, being conscious of others, having ethics, supporting the circular economy, and in one case, contributing to a fair distribution of resources to ensure everyone has access to basic needs and housing.

Nearly half of the respondents believe that sustainable consumption involves both social and environmental aspects, with a dual responsibility to society and ecology.

Other aspects were mentioned, but not deeply explored as they were outside the scope of our project, include health care by reducing sugar consumption or maintaining healthy finances.

This indicates that, although social concerns were more prominent than environmental ones, participants did not explicitly associate either concept with sustainable consumption.

Consumerism

All interviewees perceive consumerism negatively. When asked about their views, they associated it with concepts such as mental programming, indoctrination, aggressive marketing, temptation, compulsive buying, limitless consumption, extreme waste, fashion, superficiality, materialism, status, aspirational

consumption, and the pursuit of appearance-based satisfaction. Many expressed concerns about the disconnect between available resources and spending, often resulting in excessive debt. However, one respondent acknowledged consumerism as inevitable.

Social Inequalities

The majority of respondents understand social inequalities as extreme economic conditions with frequency of 14 interviewees mentioning it, confusing poverty with the result of unequal wealth distribution. A perceptual filter is possible, as several respondents claim not to encounter social inequalities in their daily lives while its reality is confirmed by the country's Gini index of 0.498 (CONEVAL, 2016)

Key comments include the issue of discrimination, whether towards indigenous people, differential treatment based on appearance, or sexism. Social concern is perceived to be low among the upper and upper-middle classes. Some describe living in a bubble, not perceiving poverty.

In contrast, social concern seems higher among the lower and lower-middle classes, who feel more affected. Among young people, social awareness is described as virtual in the sense it is based on shared videos and content on social media, but lacking action to change reality.

Illustrating the above, a respondent suggested that social inequalities are the root cause of all problems in Mexico, creating two blocs: one driven by resentment for lack of access to a decent standard of living, and the other by fear of criminality, and economic instability.

Environment

Environmental concern is more uniform among respondents, with the majority considering the situation very worrying, particularly regarding air pollution, contingency situations, excessive waste, and exposure to harmful chemicals. Six respondents reported direct health impacts from environmental deterioration, such as allergies, headaches, and rhinitis. Key challenges identified include water conservation, waste management, reducing the use of disposable plastics and contaminating detergents. Paradoxically, excessive personal car use is not mentioned.

Young people claim to be more aware than their parents' generation, whom they try to sensitize. However, some feel that young people lack awareness, being absorbed in their personal lives, technology, and ignoring environmental issues.

The millennials generation is described as two-faced, taking half-measures.

Focus on collective drivers

Public policies

Discussions on public policies were organized around topics such as taxes, education, regulation, and communication.

The findings from the experts revealed significant institutional weaknesses in promoting sustainable consumption, primarily due to a lack of political interest. Additionally, there is an insufficient understanding of the socio-environmental stakes, reflected in an inappropriate vision and strategy on these issues, which are often addressed in silos across different institutions (e.g., public education versus industry development). Furthermore, there is a shortage of financial and human resources.

According to young adults, feedback was positive regarding incentive measures, such as the proposal of a lower VAT rate for sustainable products. However, there was resistance to the idea of specific taxes on household waste or penalties for failing to comply with waste sorting regulations.

Most participants expressed a strong desire for more information related to sustainability, whether through dedicated communication campaigns—which are currently lacking—or through a specific educational curriculum integrated throughout the educational system.

Lifestyle

This section examined interviewees' perceptions of sustainable lifestyles in relation to others and own behaviors and practices.

Fifteen variables were tested in an attempt to relate them to sustainable consumption levels. These were: 1) available resources, 2) occupation, 3) stance on globalization (national identity vs. global citizenship), 4) use of social networks and associated feelings (social pressure vs. freedom), 5) religion, 6) opinions (conservative vs. progressive), 7) hobbies, 8) fashion, 9) innovation (early adoption vs. majority vs. late adoption), 10) risk-taking, 11) education level, 12) information on socio-environmental challenges, 13) conformity vs. uniqueness, 14) life plans (short, medium, and long-term), and 15) level of socio-environmental concern.

After analyzing the interviews, it appears that the variables to consider when evaluating lifestyle in terms of sustainable consumption are:

1) Resources : It is observed that greater resources lead to higher sustainable products consumption but also increases car usage, while fewer resources result in lower sustainable products consumption but more reliance on public transport.

2) Level of socio-environmental concern: Individuals who adhere to the highest standards of sustainable consumption also demonstrate the greatest socio-environmental concern. As this level of concern diminishes, the gap between attitudes and behavior widens

3) Household composition: Individuals raising a family tend to be more sensitive to health considerations when selecting products, prioritizing the well-being of their youngest members. However, young adults also value quality products, seeking the best for themselves as well.

Social Influence

The primary social influence agents for respondents include family, partners, friends, colleagues, in-laws, having a baby, virtual groups, social networks, and university environments. When asked who specifically encouraged their shift toward more sustainable consumption, participants mentioned various sources: a boss, an older coworker, a father, a husband, close friends, a daughter, posts from Greenpeace or vegan groups on social media, a documentary, a book, university experiences, or self-driven research.

Interestingly, those with higher levels of sustainable consumption often cited influence agents outside their immediate social circles. Key triggers for behavior change included reading books on animal welfare, watching environmental documentaries, or engaging with virtual communities dedicated to socio-environmental issues.

This presents an opportunity to leverage influencers and user-generated content on social media to drive behavioral change, as external change agents.

In terms of how social influence affects sustainable consumption, both subjective norms and perceived control are generally low. There is little social pressure to adopt sustainable practices, and irresponsible consumption does not typically harm one's social image.

However, when individuals are exposed to compelling external sources of information or join communities focused on sustainability, these factors can become significant drivers of behavior change.

Focus on individual drivers

Beliefs

Beliefs about the impact of sustainable consumption on sustainable development are generally positive. Most interviewees believe that adopting sustainable behaviors contributes to a more equitable and ecologically sound world. However, some view this as an illusion, feeling that individual efforts are insignificant, and that global youth engagement is essential for meaningful change.

When it comes to purchasing sustainable products, many perceive challenges such as limited availability, difficulty finding these products, and the need to carefully read labels. Reducing overall consumption is particularly difficult for those accustomed to buying pre-packaged, ready-made items.

On the other hand, waste separation is seen as easier, as it has become a routine practice for many. Most participants consider recycling and using short supply chains as simple yet effective ways to make a positive environmental impact.

Knowledge

To gauge personal knowledge and compare it with knowledge about socio-environmental issues, interviewees were first asked if any current international conflict concerned them and if so, which one.

In response, four people could not answer. Others mentioned Syria, the Islamic State, Afghanistan, Qatar, Russia, Ukraine, Venezuela, Israel, or North Korea.

In comparison, when asked to name an international agreement on climate change, nine people could not answer correctly. Answers provided were the Paris and Kyoto agreements.

This reflects a greater knowledge of international conflicts over environmental challenges, despite interviews being conducted during a period when U.S. President Donald Trump decided to withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement (Le Monde, 2017).

Intention

At the end of the interviews, all participants expressed an intention to adopt more sustainable consumption behaviors. However, not all product categories were identified as priorities.

Food was the most commonly cited category, primarily because it directly affects health, and participants were motivated to take care of themselves.

Hygiene and personal care products were the second most mentioned, for similar reasons.

Clothing was only identified by two participants as a potential area for changing habits, with a preference for locally made and independent brands.

Regarding transportation, three participants expressed a preference for walking short distances, but those who owned cars were generally reluctant to switch to public transportation due to concerns about safety, convenience, and lifestyle standards.

Focus on sustainable Marketing

Perception of sustainable marketing

For the interviewees, sustainable marketing is understood as “positively influencing consumers to purchase sustainable products”, “promoting something that genuinely meets environmental standards”, or “highlighting the benefits of responsible consumption without criminalizing other products”.

Most interviewees perceive sustainable marketing as rare, with many struggling to identify clear examples.

A significant degree of skepticism surrounds this form of marketing. Some respondents express doubts due to the limited availability of organic products, with one noting, “I would be skeptical because there isn't much organic production”. Others view small, independent businesses as more credible providers compared to large corporations, saying, “If it's an artisanal product or comes through a direct channel, I believe it more than if it's from a big business”. One individual even remarked, “Corporate social responsibility and other certifications are lies; these aren't clean products, and it's unclear what is being certified”.

However, a few others trust large companies, citing their internal controls and adherence to international standards as essential for ensuring product integrity.

Tangible aspects of sustainable marketing (product and distribution channels)

Regarding the products themselves, interviewees find sustainable items such as detergents, food products, and personal care items most appealing due to their perceived health benefits, quality, and taste.

These products are typically purchased from supermarkets, independent stores, fairs, street markets, natural food stores, and online platforms.

However, respondents believe these products should be more readily available in shopping malls, convenience stores, and formal markets.

Intangible aspects of sustainable marketing (price and promotion)

Local media, billboards, point-of-sale communications, and online platforms are considered the most effective for promoting sustainable products.

The key messages should focus on health benefits, environmental impact, social benefits, certification of sustainability, loyalty programs, and discounts.

Despite the generally higher prices of sustainable products, most interviewees are willing to pay more for them.

Comments and conclusions

Confirming the study of World Business Council of Sustainable Development (2008), among the interviewees, there is a general awareness of environmental issues. While social awareness may be less prominently emphasized, it remains the most frequently discussed topic, indicating an underlying concern and interest that is not always explicitly acknowledged. Within this context, its significance could be enhanced by strategically emphasizing and communicating the ethical attributes of fair trade products.

Moreover, socio-environmental concern is identified as a key motivator for sustainable consumption, consistent with previous research (Valero-Gil et al., 2023; Yue et al., 2020). Among these motivations, individual health emerges as the primary driver for purchasing responsible products, particularly in categories such as organic food, personal care, and household hygiene items.

Conversely, factors such as aesthetic appeal, convenience, and affordability are commonly cited as the main barriers to adopting these products.

This should prompt marketers to reconsider and adapt their strategies accordingly, drawing on established models such as the methodology proposed by McKenzie-Mohr (2000). His approach to fostering sustainable behavior through community-based social marketing involves identifying and addressing key barriers—in this case, appearance, convenience, trust, and perceived value relative to cost.

Strategies to overcome these obstacles could include designing aesthetically appealing sustainable products with frequent updates to address psychological resistance. Additionally, trust and identification-related barriers could be mitigated by introducing a clear and visually accessible sustainability score for products. This initiative could be developed through a consortium of key industry players or, ideally, coordinated by public institutions as part of an incentive-based public policy. To ensure credibility and transparency, the scoring system should be based on a publicly available and standardized calculation method.

Also to build trust, key elements should include prominently showcasing the company's sustainability initiatives, with a particular focus on third-party audits that independently verify sustainability claims.

For instance, live-streamed audits at farms, factories, and other facilities, supported by photos and testimonials from farmers, workers and customers, can enhance transparency and reinforce the credibility of sustainability efforts.

Related to affordability, marketing strategies should emphasize the added value of sustainable products by highlighting both their personal and collective benefits.

Accessibility is a critical factor, especially in an emerging economy like Mexico, where financial vulnerability remains a significant concern—three-quarters of the population face economic challenges (OCDE/CEPAL/CAF, 2016). To mitigate this barrier, marketing efforts should focus on reframing the perceived cost of sustainable products by emphasizing their tangible benefits.

At the individual level, and considering family and close social circles as part of this dynamic, key advantages include improved health, superior taste, and higher product quality. These attributes not only enhance personal well-being but also justify the financial investment, positioning sustainable products as a rational choice rather than a luxury. By shifting the narrative from cost to long-term value, marketers can increase the perceived accessibility of sustainable alternatives to a wider audience.

At the collective level, the focus should be on the broader social and environmental benefits, particularly within local communities. Sustainable consumption supports job creation, fair wages, and improved working conditions, fostering economic stability and social equity. Additionally, reducing negative ecological impacts—such as waste generation, resource depletion, and pollution—strengthens the long-term sustainability of these communities. By framing sustainable choices as direct contributions to societal well-being, marketing strategies can foster a stronger sense of collective responsibility, encouraging consumers to view their purchases as a means of driving positive change in their immediate environment.

By reinforcing these advantages, marketers can shift consumer perception from viewing sustainable products as expensive to recognizing them as a meaningful investment in both personal well-being and societal progress. This approach directly addresses concerns that resonate with Mexican consumers—real, tangible issues that are often overlooked in favor of aspirational messaging in traditional marketing campaigns. A more problem-solving-oriented communication strategy could better align with consumer priorities and foster deeper engagement with sustainable consumption.

Additionally, alternative distribution channels should be prioritized, such as small neighborhood stores (*tienditas*), street markets, and independent vendors, given their prevalence in Mexico. These channels already distribute national and international brand products individually rather than in bulk packaging, presenting an opportunity to integrate higher-quality sustainable products at a premium price while ensuring better profit margins for vendors in a mutually beneficial approach. A communication strategy could further publicize these efforts to generate consumer awareness and engagement.

To modernize communication efforts, social media should play a central role, with an emphasis on storytelling and leveraging external change agents such as influencers and everyday users. Showcasing real-life examples of behavioral change through user-generated content, interactive challenges, and online community engagement can foster a sense of collective action.

Identifying individuals within these groups to track progress and personally engage members can further reinforce emerging social norms around sustainable consumption. Encouraging individuals to make an initial small commitment can significantly increase the likelihood of adopting more advanced sustainable behaviors over time. Additionally, the promotion of new habits could be reinforced through visual or auditory prompts designed to remind individuals to take specific actions.

To ensure effectiveness, the proposed strategy should first be tested on a small scale through a pilot program. This would allow for evaluation, refinement, and iterative improvements over time to maximize its impact and long-term success.

Implementing such a strategy aligns with the well-documented attitude-behavior gap in sustainable consumption (Dueñas Ocampo et al., 2014). While most interviewees perceive themselves as relatively responsible consumers, they acknowledge that their actual behaviors fall short of their stated values. A key barrier is their limited awareness of the collective impact of individual choices and the urgency of socio-environmental challenges. Although they express criticism of the prevailing consumerist model, they simultaneously recognize their own participation in it.

This marketing strategy directly addresses a significant opportunity for behavioral change, as all respondents demonstrate a willingness to increase their sustainable consumption. By bridging the gap between intention and action, the approach leverages targeted interventions to encourage meaningful shifts in consumer habits, fostering a more sustainable consumption culture.

Analyzing respondent affirmations from Hofstede's cultural dimensions (2017), Mexican culture appears to tend to inhibit sustainable consumption. Indeed, collectivism dilutes individual responsibility contributing to an underestimation of the impact of personal actions on sustainability; as well as overshadowing personal willingness by the preferences of reference groups. Masculinity drives the desire for social recognition, often leading to the display of expensive and excessive possessions. Indulgence encourages unsustainable consumption with a "no problem" attitude, while short-term orientation hampers young adults' ability to envision long-term scenarios, such as those in 2050. Additionally, the low tolerance for

uncertainty complicates changing habits but does support the preservation of sustainable traditional practices, like purchasing local food at street markets. On the positive side, the hierarchical nature of Mexican society highlights the need for implementing legal frameworks to enforce sustainable consumption practices.

Regarding personality, the sense of ethical obligation regarding sustainability, as described by (Oh & Yoon, 2014), tends to be weak in its negative form—such as feeling guilty for harming the environment. In contrast, the positive aspect of changing behavior to contribute to global well-being is more readily embraced. This aligns with the high value placed on actions that promote collective well-being, which generate a sense of happiness from helping others and position altruism as a key motivator for sustainable consumption.

This optimistic perspective presents an opportunity for sustainable marketing to craft messages that harness this powerful driver of behavior change. Even a simple gesture, such as receiving a "thank you" from someone who benefits, can serve as a compelling incentive for consumers. A notable example is the French brand *Merci* (which translates to "thank you" in French), launched in 2018 by a national distributor with the aim of promoting fairer compensation for local producers. Initially introduced with milk, the brand has since expanded to encompass more than thirty products, including eggs, honey, flour, butter, meat, and poultry. In 2024, it is the largest citizen-driven offering in the French retail sector. The distributor ensures that over 40 to 50% of the product price is returned directly to farmers, reinforcing the brand's commitment to ethical and sustainable sourcing. As part of their partnership, the farmers involved in *Les Eleveurs vous disent Merci !* (The Farmers Say Thank You!) commit to improving the living conditions of their animals through a portion of the funds received. Additionally, they plant trees and shrubs. This holistic approach not only supports farmers and animal welfare but also contributes to sustainable farming practices. (Intermarché, 2025)

Conclusions

The challenges facing sustainable marketing are multifaceted, including widespread skepticism, limited product availability, and difficulties in accessing sustainable options at mainstream retail locations. Despite a clear willingness among consumers to support sustainable products, overcoming barriers and translating willingness into long-term behavior change requires targeted and comprehensive strategies.

Effective sustainable marketing strategies must focus on enhancing the entire process, from creating appealing product designs to ensuring easy access to distribution channels for consumers.

Communication should emphasize both the individual and social collective benefits of sustainable products while enhancing their perceived value and building trust.

The messaging should emphasize respect for both nature and people, from producers to consumers, ultimately contributing to a healthier and more positive local environment.

It should also acknowledge and celebrate the commitment of consumers who prefer sustainable options, offering ways to recognize and reward these conscientious decisions both online, in physical stores, and through external initiatives.

Collaborations with public institutions could play a vital role in promoting sustainable consumption, leveraging tools such as VAT, regulation, messaging, and public education—from early schooling to university levels—to more actively foster consumer engagement with sustainability. Similarly to Nutri-Score in Europe (Santé Publique France, 2025), a public policy on sustainability scoring could be a game changer for products in this category, providing consumers with clear, accessible information and incentivizing sustainable choices.

In conclusion, while sustainable marketing faces inherent challenges, there is a clear opportunity to enhance consumer engagement and drive long-term behavioral change. By addressing barriers through dedicated programs and amplifying the power of multiple motivators, its impact could be significantly greater.

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