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Consumer Behavior
Micro, Meso, and Macro Perspectives

Edited by Şenay Sabah and Irem Buran



Consumer Behavior - Micro, Meso, and Macro Perspectives

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Meet the Series Editor



Prof. Choudhry holds a BSc degree in Economics from the University of Iowa, as well as a Masters and Ph.D. in Applied Economics from Clemson University, USA. In January 2006, he became a Professor of Finance at the University of Southampton Business School. He was previously a Professor of Finance at the University of Bradford Management School. He has over 80 articles published in international finance and economics journals. His research interests and specialties include financial econometrics, financial economics, international economics and finance, housing markets, financial markets, among others.

Meet the Volume Editors



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Preface

Consumer Behavior – Micro, Meso, and Macro Perspectives has the potential to significantly deepen our understanding of consumer behaviour across three distinct levels: individual (micro), social group (meso), and societal (macro). The book explores how consumers think, feel, and act not only as individuals but also in the context of interpersonal interactions and broader societal dynamics. At the micro level, the chapters address topics such as brand loyalty in sports fandom, the impact of self-esteem on consumption, and the influence of artificial intelligence within the attention economy. At the meso level, the focus shifts to consumer engagement with artificial intelligence and the role of social influence on consumption. At the macro level, the discussions expand to include sustainable business models and the motivations driving consumer participation in the circular economy. Across these levels, the book demonstrates that consumption is not merely an economic act but also a cultural, psychological, and environmental phenomenon.

The first three chapters of the book adopt a micro perspective on consumer behaviour. The first chapter, titled “AI and Consumer Engagement: Leveraging the Attention Economy for Enhanced Brand Loyalty”, discusses the significance of artificial intelligence in the attention economy, particularly in terms of consumer engagement and brand loyalty. The second chapter, “Perspective Chapter: Self-Esteem – A Theoretical Approach”, explores the emergence of self-esteem in the context of consumption, considering consumers’ desires and needs at the individual level. The third and final chapter, written from a micro perspective, is titled “Perspective Chapter: The Psychology of Brand Loyalty in Sports – A Micro Perspective”. This chapter examines consumer behaviour in the context of sports fandom, investigating individual and cultural factors that influence consumers’ cognitive, emotional, and behavioural loyalty toward sports brands.

The second section of the book provides a meso-level perspective on consumer behaviour. The fourth chapter, titled “Perspective Chapter: The Impact of Generative AI in Shaping Customer Engagement – Humanising Conversational Marketing”, analyzes the interactivity between brands and consumers in the context of artificial intelligence and its human-like features. It emphasizes the importance of generative AI and anthropomorphic design in facilitating dynamic and personalized consumer engagement. The fifth chapter, written from a similar meso perspective, is titled “Perspective Chapter: The Role of Social Influence on Consumer Behavior”. This chapter addresses the impact of social groups, such as reference groups, opinion leaders, and societal norms, on consumer decision-making and behaviour.

The third section of the book presents a macro-level perspective on consumer behaviour. The sixth chapter, “Sustainable Business Models and their Impact on Consumer Behaviour and Motivation”, examines the relationship between sustainable

business models and consumer behaviour in the context of sustainable products and services. The final chapter of the book, titled “The Role and Motivations of Consumers to Join the Circular Economy”, also adopts a macro perspective. It focuses on consumers’ intentions and motivations to participate in the circular economy and their perspectives on sustainability.

The book integrates theoretical frameworks with contemporary approaches to consumer behaviour. It applies both classical and modern theories from behavioural economics, psychology, marketing, social psychology, and sustainability studies. As such, it offers valuable insights for researchers and practitioners across a variety of disciplines.

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Section 1

The Individual Consumer

AI and Consumer Engagement: Leveraging the Attention Economy for Enhanced Brand Loyalty

Ioseb Gabelaia

Abstract

In the digital space, brands compete for attention, and AI-powered insights can stimulate more effective consumer connections and brand loyalty. Artificial intelligence helps marketers identify behavior patterns, preferences, and engagement stimuli essential for strategic planning. Consequently, brand strategists can provide personalized and timely experiences, offering high brand presence and retention. There is limited research on the impact of AI on the attention economy. This research explores how brands use AI within the attention economy to improve consumer engagement and foster brand loyalty. A mixed methodology was used. A structured online survey via Qualtrics was distributed. Two hundred and forty-four respondents completed the surveys. Moreover, 15 marketing professionals and AI experts across various industries provided qualitative insights. As a result, individuals with greater awareness and positive attitudes toward AI are more engaged with it. This engagement, strengthened by personalized experiences, improves trust and overall consumer involvement in AI approaches. The results offer theoretical and practical value, emphasizing how brands distinguish themselves in a complex digital landscape by capturing and maintaining consumer attention. AI-powered insights allow brands to create continuing consumer relationships, drive engagement, and maximize customer lifetime value.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, marketing, attention economy, brand loyalty, consumer behavior

1. Introduction

Today's digital content extensively competes for consumer attention [1]. According to Statista, in 2023, nearly 70% of customer service specialists noted that AI positively impacted problem resolution times, improving customer satisfaction and engagement. Moreover, in 2024, approximately 84% of respondents pointed out that digital engagement, including AI-driven chatbots, strengthened customer expectations for speed and convenience in interactions with brands. Hence, the attention economy has become a necessary framework to understand how brands can capture and sustain consumers, especially when consumers are confused between user-generated content and brand-generated content [2, 3]. Incorporating artificial

intelligence into marketing strategies is complex; however, it offers remarkable results by screening consumer data. AI enables brand marketers to decode behavioral patterns, preferences, and engagement triggers. This allows brands to remain applicable and impactful in a chaotic marketplace [3].

Despite the significant progress in AI-driven marketing, many brands fail to fully use the power of AI in building consumer relationships. The issue is not only in deploying AI tools but also in aligning these instruments with the principles of the economy to achieve significant customer engagement [1, 3]. This reveals a significant problem of cohesive strategies to integrate AI insights with consumer behavior analysis. As a result, businesses have missed opportunities to improve brand loyalty and retention.

The purpose of this research is to close the gap between AI-driven personalization and brand loyalty, suggesting a comprehensive context that improves consumer engagement and business results. Thus, this research explored how AI can maximize brand engagement and loyalty in an increasingly competitive digital landscape through the attention economy framework. Therefore, the main research question explored with quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews was to what extent integrating AI-driven personalization and consumer engagement strategies within the attention economy influences brand loyalty.

Therefore, to explore the research problem, the author established the following objectives such as to explore the principles of the attention economy and their relevance to modern marketing practices, to analyze how AI influences consumer engagement and brand loyalty, to identify best practices for incorporating AI into marketing strategies to capture and sustain consumer attention, to assess the impact of personalized AI-driven marketing on consumer retention and lifetime value, and to explore probable limitations associated with AI in marketing.

The author used a mixed method to explore how brands can use AI within the attention economy to improve consumer engagement and foster brand loyalty. A structured online survey was distributed using snowball and convenience sampling on LinkedIn, targeting individuals who have interacted with AI-driven marketing campaigns. The survey captured consumer perceptions, engagement levels, and brand loyalty outcomes. Furthermore, in-depth interviews were conducted with 15 marketing professionals from various industries. These interviews provided qualitative insights into the strategies, challenges, and opportunities of executing AI in marketing.

Additionally, this research is essential to understanding how AI-driven consumer engagement strategies can navigate the attention economy's complexities to improve brand loyalty, which is necessary for competitive advantage. Using AI effectively, brands can develop long-lasting consumer relationships, cause continuous engagement, and maximize CLV. Theoretically, this research contributes to the growing knowledge of AI integration in marketing strategies, progressing consumer behavior, AI marketing, and brand loyalty theories. Practically, the results provide actionable insights for marketers and businesses, offering strategic guidelines on using AI instruments to personalize experiences and differentiate their brands in a congested traditional and digital business marketplace.

The results based on survey and interview emphasize the interaction between AI and the attention economy, showing actionable insights that empower brands to succeed in a competitive digital environment. The results advance theoretical and practical knowledge and equip brand practitioners with mechanisms to create lasting consumer relationships.

2. Literature review

Attention is a limited resource, so one must learn to control and distribute it efficiently [4]. Moreover, the easy access to overwhelming amounts of information and the fact that you often do not have to pay for it does not mean that information comes for free; to obtain information, we pay attention [5]. The attention economy guides the concept that human attention is a limited resource in a world flooded with information, making it one of the most valuable commodities in the digital age [6]. Moreover, the term “attention economy” generally refers to the economy of digital worlds, especially the internet [2, 4]. With numerous platforms, brands, and media competing for consumer attention, businesses focus on strategies to seize, sustain, and monetize it [7].

According to Ref. [8], the new attention economy is the data attraction model. You may have access to loads of details, but to take it in, process it, and possibly act on it, you spend your attention on it [5]. Besides, the market attention economy is growing with the spread of information technology based on intermediation, calculation, and decision-making tools [4]. Thus, attention has evolved as an area of significant interest in marketing research as a dependent or moderating variable [9].

Demand for consumer attention will continue to escalate [10]. Consumer attention is a rare but valuable resource [6]. Consumers will gravitate to trusted brands to manage their choices [11]. Therefore, consumers exercise more power in the attention economy to shape content and experiences [10, 12]. To obtain information about matters beyond our immediate environment, the media is a must as vehicles and presenters of information [5]. Companies must use a more sophisticated electronic infrastructure and market to ever-smaller, more finely targeted segments [10]. Successful brand-owning business models will form cooperative alliance networks [10]. It links to a longstanding idea [4]. Attention is an interesting resource compared to economic means since it is more equitably distributed [5]. The growth will center on strategies that capture the attention of selected targets through deep responsiveness to the consumer’s experience of the brand and on new business models that respond proactively to the rise of digital media [13]. Attention, once captured, rarely lasts. This is a problem for marketers and researchers [9].

The attention economy requires a more extensive scope of buyers so that businesses can attract global consumer attention through media intermediation [12]. In addition, the attention economy thus connects to the structure of information and knowledge in two different respects. First, it represents a market environment where economic initiatives are set in an information-rich market attention economy. Second, the term means the behavior of individuals in social media, the participatory attention economy [4, 12]. Furthermore, the information is, to a large extent, received via channels created by the media [5]. The rise of social media, streaming services, and personalized content delivery has strengthened this competition as algorithms are developed to maximize user engagement by presenting highly relevant and appealing content [14].

Some people can focus longer and more intensively than others. Thus, there are only marginal differences in how much attention each of us can spend [5]. In the attention economy, success often hinges on understanding consumer behavior, leveraging data analytics, and employing creative storytelling to stand out amid the noise [15]. However, this dynamic also raises ethical concerns about the potential for overloading users or exploiting their attention, emphasizing the need for balanced and responsible marketing practices [16].

A constant challenge for marketers is bargaining with today's fractured, almost broken, attention economy [9]. Marketing is naturally linked to attention harvesting. Hence, marketing aims to influence behavior [5]. With competition at an all-time high for people's attention, marketing professionals face a challenge that's impossible to ignore: How do we evolve our decision-making in today's data-rich world to cut through the noise? [17]. Marketing is about persuading consumers to buy a product [12, 15]. Finally, attention is the outlet to people's minds and a critical condition for all successful communication, from teaching and knowledge presentation to persuasion, seduction, and manipulation [5]. Attention is extremely valuable for everyone with something to sell [5].

AI has become one of the most important drivers in digital marketing today, revolutionizing the marketing practice among today's businesses [18]. Artificial intelligence-generated content (AIGC) revolutionizes media creation and consumption [19]. Consumer behavior and AI are increasingly twisted as AI changes how brands understand, predict, and influence customer decisions [20]. AI is a transformative power in fast-changing advertising, transforming designated methods and opening up previously unthinkable opportunities [21].

Moreover, consumer behavior contains the processes by which individuals select, purchase, use, and dispose of goods and services, operated by preferences, motivations, and external influences [1]. In the rapidly evolving digital era, combining Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning (ML) with marketing strategies is a transformative force [22]. AI improves this understanding by analyzing vast datasets, identifying patterns, and providing actionable insights into consumer preferences, buying habits, and decision-making processes [2].

Furthermore, through machine learning algorithms, AI can predict future behavior, enabling brands to create personalized marketing strategies and deliver tailored experiences [3]. AI also enhances real-time interaction through tools like chatbots and virtual assistants, aligning services with consumer expectations and behaviors [21]. AI can personalize messages based on consumer behavior and demographics, affecting the processing route and maximizing engagement [23]. By closing the gap between data and actionable insights, AI significantly improves the effectiveness of marketing strategies designed to influence consumer behavior [24].

Today's hyperconnected world has resulted in a paradigm shift that is confusing and widening the boundaries of branding [25]. Brand loyalty guides a consumer's emotional and behavioral attachment to a specific brand, leading to repeat purchases and advocacy over time [26]. Brand loyalty refers to the extent to which customers repeatedly purchase products or services from a particular brand over time, despite competitor efforts to attract them [26]. It is built on constant positive experiences, trust in the brand's quality, and the perceived value it delivers compared to competitors [26, 27]. Besides, various factors influence it, including product quality, customer service, price competitiveness, and emotional connections with the brand [26]. Brand loyalty is a crucial driver of long-term business success, as loyal customers are less likely to switch to competitors even when faced with similar offerings or promotional incentives [28]. It mirrors deep connections between consumer behavior and brand identity, shaped by how consumers perceive and interact with the brand over time [29, 30].

Increasingly, marketing is expected to form a better world, and brands are held accountable for their societal impact [25]. With advancements in artificial intelligence, the correlation between brand loyalty and consumer behavior has become more pronounced [27]. AI allows marketers to analyze vast amounts of consumer data, identifying patterns and preferences to deliver highly personalized experiences [26, 30].

Predictive analytics, powered by AI, can anticipate consumer needs, ensuring timely and relevant engagement that strengthens loyalty [27]. Additionally, AI-driven tools such as chatbots and recommendation systems enhance customer satisfaction by enhancing service quality and convenience [31]. By understanding and influencing consumer behavior, AI allows brands to build and sustain more serious loyalty in increasingly competitive markets [27, 31, 32].

3. Research methodology

This research used mixed methods, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, to explore how brands use AI within the attention economy to improve consumer engagement and foster brand loyalty. This approach allowed the author to synthesize quantitative and qualitative data to understand better the research problem [33].

3.1 Quantitative method

Survey design: A structured online survey built in the Qualtrics software was used to collect data from the respondents who have interacted with AI-driven marketing campaigns. The survey included Likert-scale questions to measure agreement levels and multiple-choice questions to identify preferences. Questions were created to evaluate consumer perceptions of AI-driven marketing, levels of trust, and the impact on brand loyalty.

In this research, independent variables are predictors. It is divided into two parts: demographic and constructed variables, offering 12 independent variables.

Independent Demographic Variables (7). These provide a basis for segmentation and analyzing different respondent groups.

- *Age: It captures generational trends and was grouped into ranges such as 18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55 and more.*
- *Gender: This study explores differences in marketing perceptions and preferences. Respondents were grouped as Male, Female, Non-binary, or prefer not to say.*
- *Education level: It provides insights into how knowledge influences attitudes toward AI. It was grouped as high school, bachelor's degree, Master's degree, and Doctorate.*
- *Income level: Identifies purchasing power and its relationship to engagement. It ranged such as <\$30 k, \$30 k–\$50 k, and so on.*
- *Geographic location: Explores regional trends in AI marketing effectiveness. I ranged in urban, suburban, and rural areas.*
- *Employment status: This indicates economic stability, which may impact purchasing and brand loyalty. It ranged from Full-time to part-time, Unemployed, and other.*
- *Marital status: Links personal circumstances to marketing engagement and loyalty. It ranged from Single, Married, Divorced, to other.*

Constructed Independent Variables (5). These concentrate on perceptions and behaviors related explicitly to AI in marketing.

- *Perceived trust in AI-driven marketing: Measures the trust level consumers have in AI's relevance and reliability. 10 Likert-scale questions, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree.*
- *Perceived personalization: Assesses how well consumers feel AI understands and meets their preferences. 13 Likert-scale questions, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree.*
- *Engagement with AI marketing campaigns: Quantifies interaction frequency or depth with AI-driven campaigns. 8 Likert-scale questions, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree.*
- *Awareness of AI use in marketing: Gauges consumers' knowledge of AI's role in marketing strategies. 10 Likert-scale questions, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree.*
- *Attitude toward AI in marketing: Captures overall sentiment (positive/negative) toward AI-based marketing tools. 9 Likert-scale questions, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree.*

Dependent Variables.

- *Consumer engagement: Operationalized through metrics like time spent on marketing content, click-through rates, or survey-based scales. 10 Likert-scale questions, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree.*
- *Brand loyalty: Measured through behaviors such as repeat purchases, advocacy (e.g., recommending a brand), and emotional connection to a brand. 13 Likert-scale questions, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree.*

Sampling. To reach the target population, a snowball and convenience sampling method was used. The survey link was shared on LinkedIn, targeting all demographics, including age, gender, income level, and geographic location [34]. Five hundred and forty-two respondents opened the link, of which 289 completed the survey. After screening, 45 respondents were eliminated due to incomplete answers. Consequently, an analysis was executed based on 244 respondents.

Data analysis: The survey was administered through an online platform such as Qualtrics to facilitate ease of access and data collection. Follow-up reminders will be sent to improve response rates. Moreover, descriptive statistics were conducted. Inferential statistical analyses studied relationships between independent (Age, Gender, Education Level, Income Level, Geographic Location, Employment Status, Marital Status, Perceived Trust in AI-driven Marketing, Perceived Personalization, Engagement with AI Marketing Campaigns, Awareness of AI Use in Marketing and Attitude Toward AI in Marketing) and dependent variables (Consumer Engagement and Brand Loyalty), including correlation, regression, and ANOVA.

3.2 Qualitative method

Interview design: Fifteen marketing professionals and AI experts were interviewed semi-structured. The questions covered issues such as the strategic integration

of AI, personalization, consumer feedback, and ethical concerns. The questions were sent in advance to the selected respondents.

Sampling: Purposive sampling allowed to select participants with significant experience in AI-driven marketing strategies and consumer engagement. Recruitment focused on professionals from various industries, such as retail, technology, and consumer services, to provide varied perspectives to the data analysis. Furthermore, interviews were conducted via Zoom to accommodate respondents from other locations. Each interview lasted approximately 45–50 minutes. It was recorded on Zoom and transcribed using Otter for further analysis.

Data analysis: Thematic analysis showed the recurring themes and patterns in the interview data. NVivo software helped with coding and categorizing responses. Emergent themes were linked to the principles of the attention economy and AI applications.

Data integration: Quantitative and qualitative research were synthesized to understand the research problem comprehensively. For instance, survey results inform the thematic analysis of interviews, while qualitative results contextualize the interpretation of statistical results. Triangulation will confirm the validity and reliability of the results [35]. All participants were provided with detailed information about the purpose, processes, and rights. Consent was obtained electronically before participation. Moreover, personal identifiers were removed from datasets, and all data were stored securely. Only the research has access to raw data.

4. Research findings

4.1 Literature review findings

In today's digital age, the attention economy explains the success of brands striving to attract and retain consumer interest. The literature review revealed that consumer attention has become insufficient and valuable in a digital world flooded with information and advertisements. Moreover, the attention economy emphasizes this reality, where success relies on a brand's capability to gain and sustain consumer focus. Furthermore, multiple studies indicated that artificial intelligence transforms marketing by allowing targeted, personalized strategies that entertain consumers effectively, encourage loyalty, and improve brand equity.

Nevertheless, the literature review demonstrated that the attention economy highlights the need for brands to stand out in the flood of information. AI handles these challenges by letting brand marketers analyze consumer behavior and preferences at scale. For instance, traditional, one-size-fits-all marketing approaches are ill-suited to this challenge. This is where AI's capabilities become invaluable.

Furthermore, the literature review showed that brands operating in the attention economy must overcome information excess. Consumers receive excessive marketing messages, leading to disengagement. Moreover, using AI to filter, prioritize, and tailor content, brands can cut through the noise. For example, AI-driven mechanisms like dynamic ads and personalized recommendations offer relevance that resonates with consumers, promoting a connection and belonging. AI encourages brand marketers to explore vast amounts of data and derive actionable insights, changing how brands interact with customers.

Table 1 shows AI applications and roles identified in the systematic literature review. Each application demonstrates a distinct factor of consumer engagement.

AI Application	Function	Example
Recommendation Systems	Individualize suggestions based on user behavior and preferences.	Amazon suggests products based on searches.
Chatbots	Offer 24/7 customer service and instant responses to inquiries.	ChatGPT-like virtual assistants for e-commerce.
Sentiment Analysis	Understand consumer emotions and adjust messaging dynamically.	Analyzing social media sentiment post-launch.
Dynamic Pricing	Improve pricing strategies based on demand, competition, and consumer behavior.	Airlines adjust ticket prices in real time.
Predictive Analytics	Predict consumer needs and deliver proactive solutions.	Spotify's Discover Weekly playlist.

Table 1.
AI applications and roles (Developed by the author).

Recommendation systems ensure consumers experience products or content they will likely enjoy, enhancing satisfaction and loyalty. For instance, Netflix’s recommendation engine accounts for a significant percentage of user watch time, indicating how relevance drives engagement. Moreover, chatbots enhance customer satisfaction and decrease frustration by delivering immediate, round-the-clock support, particularly for time-sensitive queries. However, they must balance automation and human empathy to avoid alienating users.

Furthermore, sentiment analysis allows brands to fine-tune campaigns in real time and align messaging with consumer sentiments. For instance, during a product launch, understanding public sentiment can assist in mitigating risks and focusing on opportunities. Nevertheless, dynamic pricing applications maximize profitability while securing competitive pricing. However, overuse and a lack of transparency can deteriorate trust, highlighting the need for ethical practices. Besides, predictive analytics allow brand marketers to anticipate consumer experiences. Foreseeing consumer needs permits brands to be proactive, producing a sense of care and attention. Spotify’s personalized playlists, for instance, keep users entertained by providing content they did not know they wanted.

Table 2, based on a systematic literature review, highlights recurring patterns and themes that characterize effective marketing strategies. Nvivo coding revealed five major recurring patterns and themes. First was hyper-personalization. Today’s consumers anticipate brands to understand their intentions and preferences. Hyper-personalization, facilitated by AI, produces tailored experiences that resonate well with customers. However, there is a risk of alienation if personalization crosses boundaries or feels pushy. Second was real-time interactions. In a world of instant gratification, brands that can respond immediately have a competitive edge. AI-powered mechanisms like live chat or proactive notifications effectively address this demand. The challenge lies in ensuring these relations stay significant and not overwhelming. Third was omnichannel integration. Today, consumers engage with brands across multiple digital platforms. AI ensures that these interactions are consistent, constructing a cohesive brand experience. For instance, a user skimming a product on a website should see a related ad on social media, improving brand recall and interest.

Furthermore, the fourth pattern was emotional intelligence. Understanding and responding to consumer emotions humanizes AI-driven interactions. This creates

Pattern	Theme	Description
Hyper-personalization	Consumer-centric Marketing	Tailoring experiences and content to individual consumer preferences and behaviors.
Real-time Interactions	Instant Gratification	Delivering immediate, context-relevant responses to enhance consumer satisfaction.
Omnichannel Integration	Seamless User Experience	Ensuring consistent messaging and engagement across multiple platforms and touchpoints.
Emotional Intelligence	Empathy and Understanding	Using AI to assess and respond to consumer emotions for deeper connections.
Automation and Efficiency	Scalable Engagement Strategies	Reducing manual effort while maintaining high-quality, personalized interactions.

Table 2.
Patterns and themes (Developed by the author).

trust and connection but requires sophisticated algorithms to interpret emotions accurately. Lastly, automation. By automating routine tasks, AI lets brand marketers concentrate on strategic initiatives. However, brands must ensure that automation does not compromise engagement quality.

While AI offers huge potential, ethical concerns must also be addressed. Transparent data practices are essential to earning consumer trust. Moreover, AI must be designed to avoid reinforcing biases that could lead to discrimination. Lastly, balancing automation and human touch ensures authenticity and emotional resonance, which are necessary for loyalty.

4.2 Interview findings

The interviews were conducted between March 11th and October 17th, 2024. Semi-structured questions were designed for consistency and flexibility. Moreover, purposive sampling was used to select respondents.

This method ensures that the sample is highly relevant to the study of the research goals. Respondents were selected from various industries to provide a comprehensive view of the research problem. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted using the Zoom platform to accommodate respondents. Each interview was approximately 45–50 minutes. Interviews were recorded with permission from respondents. Thematic analysis was conducted using the Nvivo software, which assisted in identifying recurring themes and patterns. This approach ensured that emergent themes were connected to theoretical frameworks, such as the attention economy and AI applications.

Table 3 provides a detailed profile of each interview respondent, including age, professional role, years of experience, educational background, and industry. This diversity adds depth and reliability to the research findings.

Respondents were between 28 and 45 years old, with a median age of approximately 37. Moreover, the work experience ranged from 5 to 20 years, reflecting varying career stages, from early to senior-level professionals. Furthermore, educational qualifications predominantly include master's and MBA degrees, with a few holding PhDs, suggesting advanced expertise in AI, business intelligence, and marketing. Besides, the respondents work across three primary industries: technology, retail, and consumer services, with technology being the most represented. Finally, their roles include marketing management, AI-focused careers, digital strategy, and customer insights, showcasing expertise in traditional and emerging areas like AI and machine learning.

ID	Age	Professional career	Years	Education	Industry
1	34	Marketing Manager	10	MBA in Marketing	Retail
2	41	AI Specialist	15	PhD in Computer Science	Technology
3	29	Digital Marketing Analyst	7	Master's in digital marketing	Consumer Services
4	38	AI Consultant	12	MBA with AI specialization	Technology
5	45	Chief Marketing Officer	20	MBA in Strategic Management	Retail
6	32	Data Scientist	8	Master's in Data Science	Technology
7	37	Customer Insights Manager	12	MBA in Consumer Psychology	Consumer Services
8	30	Performance Marketing Lead	6	Master's in Business Analytics	Retail
9	43	Product Marketing Manager	18	Bachelor's in Marketing	Technology
10	39	AI-driven Campaign Strategist	14	Master's in AI and Marketing	Consumer Services
11	28	Brand Manager	5	MBA in Brand Strategy	Retail
12	36	Machine Learning Engineer	10	Master's in Machine Learning	Technology
13	44	Marketing Technology Advisor	20	PhD in Business Intelligence	Consumer Services
14	35	Senior Digital Strategist	11	MBA in Digital Marketing	Retail
15	40	AI Ethics Specialist	17	Master's in AI Ethics	Technology

Table 3.
Profile of interviewees (Developed by the author).

Furthermore, **Table 4** lists the questions asked during the Zoom interviews. Each question in a semi-structured interview targeted a specific focus area. This approach ensured comprehensive data collection while allowing a deep understanding of respondent insights.

Table 5 highlights the patterns observed from the Zoom interviews. The data was transcribed using the Otter software and later coded in Nvivo. This interview's themes and frequency of AI integration in marketing provided valuable insights. The most significant theme was strategic integration, with an 87% frequency. This emphasizes the overall adoption of AI for predictive analytics, content optimization, and campaign automation, contemplating its transformative role in improving efficiency and decision-making methods. Moreover, the challenges in personalization, at 78%, demonstrated an overall struggle. While personalization is a cornerstone of modern marketing, privacy concerns, data quality, and regulatory compliance restrict its seamless implementation. *Besides*, these challenges exemplify the ongoing tension between technological capabilities and ethical or legal boundaries.

Furthermore, 71% of respondents emphasize ethical concerns, highlighting the need for transparency, fairness, and the mitigation of algorithmic bias. *Therefore*, organizations must prioritize ethical AI practices to create consumer trust and credibility, which is increasingly important in a digitally driven world. Thereafter,

Question	Focus Area
How is AI being integrated into your current marketing strategies?	Strategic Integration of AI
What challenges have you faced in using AI for personalization?	Challenges of Personalization
How do you gather and process consumer feedback in your campaigns?	Consumer Feedback Mechanisms
What ethical concerns arise in your use of AI for marketing?	Ethical Concerns
Can you share a specific example where AI significantly impacted your strategy?	AI Application in Practice
How do you measure the success of AI-driven marketing strategies?	Metrics and Evaluation
How do you maintain consumer trust in AI-driven campaigns?	Consumer Trust and Transparency
What improvements would you like to see in AI tools for marketing?	Future Potential of AI in Marketing

Table 4.
Interview questions (Developed by the author).

Theme	Frequency (%)	Common patterns
Strategic Integration	87	AI used for predictive analytics, content optimization, and campaign automation
Challenges in Personalization	78	Issues with privacy, data quality, and regulatory compliance.
Ethical Concerns	71	Focus on transparency, fairness, and mitigating algorithmic bias.
Consumer Feedback Mechanisms	63	Extensive use of AI for real-time feedback, with manual validation of insights.
Interest in Future AI Trends	75	Desire for more adaptable, privacy-focused, and user-friendly AI solutions.

Table 5.
Patterns observed in interviews (Developed by the author).

consumer feedback instruments show a 63% frequency, showing the extensive use of AI for real-time insights. Nevertheless, the need for manual validation of insights indicates limitations in AI’s ability to understand human feedback fully. *As a result*, hybrid approaches integrating AI and human judgment are becoming fundamental. Finally, 75% interest in future AI trends reflects a decisive desire for adaptable, privacy-focused, and user-friendly AI solutions. *Therefore*, businesses are urged to innovate while managing consumer demands for security and usability.

4.3 Survey findings

The survey was administered using the Qualtrics software from June 1st to November 26th, 2024. It was designed to explore the relationship between demographic and constructed variables and consumer behavior outcomes (engagement and loyalty) in AI-driven marketing. Two hundred and forty-four respondents were selected using snowball and convenience sampling, both non-probability methods. Snowball sampling involves recruiting participants through referrals from initial respondents and creating a network of participants. Further, convenience sampling

involves selecting participants who are easily accessible to the researcher, such as those within a specific location or social circle.

In this research, independent variables are predictors. It is divided into two parts: demographic and constructed variables, offering 12 independent variables. Moreover, descriptive analysis outlined demographic trends and distributions. Moreover, correlation analysis identified relationships between independent and dependent variables. Regression analysis determined the extent to which demographic and constructed variables predict consumer engagement and brand loyalty.

Based on correlation analysis, **Table 6** shows six positive correlations:

Engagement with AI and Awareness of AI use ($r = 0.78$). This is the strongest positive correlation in the matrix. Individuals more aware of AI usage tend to engage more with AI. This creates an instinctive sense as awareness likely leads to familiarity and confidence in using AI systems.

Perceived Trust and Perceived Personalization ($r = 0.55$). A significant positive correlation between perceived trust and personalization suggests that when users perceive AI systems as more personalized, they are more likely to trust them. Personalization is frequently an essential driver of trust in AI-driven solutions.

Consumer Engagement and Engagement with AI ($r = 0.52$). This emphasizes a strong positive relationship, indicating that consumers who are more engaged in general also tend to engage with AI. Engaged consumers might actively explore and adopt new technologies, including AI.

Attitude Toward AI and Awareness of AI use ($r = 0.66$). A strong correlation suggests that individuals with a positive attitude toward AI are likelier to be aware of its uses. This relationship might be attributed to positive attitudes enabling individuals to learn more about AI applications.

Consumer Engagement and Perceived Personalization ($r = 0.53$). This significant correlation indicates that personalized experiences strongly drive consumer engagement. Personalization improves the relevance of content and interactions, promoting higher engagement levels.

Consumer Engagement and Perceived Trust ($r = 0.47$). The relationship between trust and consumer engagement highlights that trust in AI systems fosters more significant interaction and involvement.

These insights can inform strategies to improve AI adoption and usage by stressing trust-building measures, enhancing personalization features, and growing consumer awareness through educational initiatives.

The results demonstrated in the correlation matrix and **Table 5** provide a complete picture of the interplay between consumer engagement, AI adoption in marketing, and the challenges of personalization and ethical considerations in the attention economy. The highest correlations in the matrix, such as between *Engagement with AI* and *Awareness of AI Use* ($r = 0.78$) or *Perceived Personalization* and *Perceived Trust* ($r = 0.55$), highlight that awareness and trust are essential drivers of AI adoption. When applied to the themes identified in the Zoom interviews, these results suggest that strategic integration of AI in marketing in the attention economy, which has a high frequency, aligns with its capability to optimize decision-making through personalized consumer insights despite existing challenges.

The high frequency of challenges in personalization reflects the matrix's result of the significant correlation between *Consumer Engagement* and *Perceived Personalization* ($r = 0.53$). While personalization has transformative potential, practical barriers such as data privacy concerns and regulatory compliance limit its full-scale implementation. As such, businesses must manage these limitations by

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	Age	—												
2	Gender	-.04	—											
3	Education Level	.05	-.07	—										
4	Income Level	.13*	.53	.24**	—									
5	Geo Location	.09	-.01	.25**	.23**	—								
6	Employment Status	.07	.00	.43**	.25**	.25**	—							
7	Marital Status	.01	.03	.34**	.20**	.23**	.51**	—						
8	Perceived Trust	.09	-.08	-.00	.03	.18**	-.12	.04	—					
9	Perceived Personalization	.03	-.03	-.03	.07	.05	-.04	.04	.43**	—				
10	Engagement with AI	-.04	.00	-.08	-.03	.03	-.11	.03	.37**	.55**	—			
11	Awareness of AI use	-.01	-.01	-.05	-.10	.05	-.12	.02	.34**	.44**	.78**	—		
12	Attitude Toward AI	.04	-.10	.01	.01	.07	-.04	.04	.35**	.44**	.66**	.65**	—	
13	Consumer Engagement	-.02	-.15	-.06	.01	.02	-.07	.03	.47**	.53**	.52**	.49**	.47**	—
14	Brand Loyalty	.04	-.05	.09	.08	.11	.00	.07	.22**	.12	.25**	.24**	.17**	.08

Note: * $p < .0005$ Bonferroni adjustment for multiple correlations to minimize chances of a Type 1 error.

Table 6.
 Correlation matrix AI and consumer engagement in attention economy ($n = 244$).

investing in transparent and ethical data-handling practices to create consumer trust and drive engagement. This tension between technological innovation and ethical or legal boundaries also echoes the ongoing balance businesses must create between efficiency, accountability, and responsibility.

The ethical concerns noted by respondents in the interviews further resonate with the correlations in the matrix, particularly between *Attitude Toward AI* and *Awareness of AI Use* ($r = 0.66$). This alignment emphasizes fostering awareness and a positive perception of AI among stakeholders. Ethical considerations, such as mitigating algorithmic bias and ensuring fairness, are central to achieving this. For businesses, including ethical AI practices in their operations can help ease consumer concerns, thereby improving trust and encouraging broader AI adoption in marketing activities.

The consumer feedback instruments in the interviews emphasize the role of AI in providing real-time insights. Nevertheless, the matrix's lower correlations involving *Consumer Engagement* and *Awareness of AI Use* ($r = 0.49$) indicate that while AI effectively analyzes consumer behavior, its ability to interpret human feedback entirely is still limited. This gap points to the need for hybrid approaches, where AI's computational power is complemented by human judgment to improve decision-making and ensure better understanding. Such hybrid models also limit the challenges of personalization noted in the interviews.

Lastly, the interest in future AI trends indicates that businesses are willing to innovate but must balance innovation with usability and privacy concerns. The matrix's correlation between *Brand Loyalty* and *Engagement with AI* ($r = 0.25$) implies that effective AI integration can promote long-term consumer relationships. Thus, businesses should prioritize developing user-friendly and adaptable AI solutions that respect consumer privacy. By addressing these challenges and managing AI's strengths, businesses can improve engagement, build trust, and remain competitive in the rapidly evolving attention economy.

5. Conclusion

This research explored how brands use AI within the attention economy to improve consumer engagement and foster brand loyalty. Based on 244 respondents and 15 experts in the marketing field, the author identified some positive and significant correlations. Engagement with AI and Awareness of AI use, Perceived Trust and Perceived Personalization, Consumer Engagement and Engagement, Attitude Toward AI and Awareness of Consumer, Engagement and Perceived Personalization, and Consumer Engagement and Perceived Trust highlight the complexity of consumer behavior.

The correlation matrix and interview results delivered a thorough understanding of the complex relationship between consumer engagement, AI adoption, and the barriers of personalization within the attention economy. The strongest correlations, such as between Engagement with AI and Awareness of AI Use ($r = 0.78$) and Perceived Personalization and Perceived Trust ($r = 0.55$), stressed the significance of awareness and trust in driving AI adoption. The strategic integration of AI in marketing, with an 87% frequency observed in Zoom interviews, emphasized its key role in optimizing decision-making through personalized consumer insights despite challenges in personalization due to privacy concerns and regulatory constraints. This indicated the delicate balance businesses must keep between using AI's potential for improved engagement.

The significant challenges in personalization (78%) align with the correlation between Consumer Engagement and Perceived Personalization ($r = 0.53$), highlighting the condition for transparent data-handling techniques to build consumer trust. Moreover, 71% of respondents emphasized ethical concerns that resonate with the correlation between Attitude Toward AI and Awareness of AI Use ($r = 0.66$), demonstrating the necessity for ethical AI practices to reduce algorithmic bias and ensure fairness. This balance between technological innovation and ethical responsibility is important for AI adoption in marketing. Similarly, the 63% frequency of consumer feedback instruments shows AI's effectiveness in developing real-time insights. However, limitations in thoroughly interpreting human feedback indicated the need for hybrid approaches incorporating AI's computational power with human judgment for improved decision-making.

Yet, the interest in future AI trends (75%) showed a strong tendency toward innovation while keeping usability and privacy. The correlation between Brand Loyalty and Engagement with AI ($r = 0.25$) indicated that strategic AI integration can promote long-term consumer relationships.

Furthermore, this research is timely and applicable as businesses navigate the complexities of the digital economy. With consumer attention becoming increasingly scarce, understanding how to use AI for attention and loyalty is essential for brands seeking to differentiate themselves. The results will offer actionable insights for brand marketers and contribute to the broader discourse on AI's role in changing consumer relationships.

Theoretically, this research contributes to understanding the convergence between AI, the attention economy, and consumer behavior. It offers a framework for analyzing how technological improvements affect marketing dynamics. Practically, the study offers brands evidence-based strategies for incorporating AI into their marketing efforts, allowing them to earn and sustain consumer attention more effectively.

While this research aims to deliver comprehensive insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. The reliance on self-reported survey data may introduce bias, and the interview sample size may not grasp the full diversity of industry perspectives. Also, the rapidly growing nature of AI technology means that some results may become outdated as innovations emerge.

Future research could address these limitations by expanding sample sizes, incorporating longitudinal studies, and exploring emerging AI applications.


Finally, the results demonstrated that AI's role in building brand loyalty is evident in its ability to provide consistent, personalized, and engaging consumer experiences. Integrating AI into marketing strategies within the attention economy presents transformative potential for improving consumer engagement and brand loyalty.

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Chapter 2

Perspective Chapter: Self-Esteem – A Theoretical Approach

Brindusa Mariana Bejan and Ciprian Marcel Pop

Abstract

The changes in society increasingly emphasize the individual, their personality, and the elements that contribute to their self-awareness. In the case of companies, especially in the service sector, the customer actively participates, being an involved party in the delivery process. In recent years, individuals have become more visibly involved, expressing their desires and needs more vocally. In this context, the question arises, ‘How well do we know the consumers?’ Thus, this chapter aims to explore not only the needs and desires of consumers but also to deeply analyze the factors that contribute to the formation of an individual’s self-esteem. Our goal is to create an inventory of the literature to examine how this concept transcends the boundaries of psychology and enters the marketing field, shaping the individual’s role within society.

Keywords: self-esteem, consumer behavior, measuring self-esteem, ideal self-esteem, society

1. Introduction

Nowadays, individuals increasingly use the phrase “self-esteem” to describe their self-perception and how they believe they are viewed by members of their reference groups and society as a whole. In reality, the meaning of this concept is much deeper, and its foundation has been extensively developed through the field of psychology.

Therefore, an important focus of this chapter is defining the concept of self-esteem and analyzing its components. Additionally, the authors aim to establish the impact of this construct on the individual in particular and on society as a whole.

By conducting a documentary research, it was observed that there is no universally accepted definition of the concept of “self-esteem,” as its scope varies depending on the field analyzed: marketing or psychology.

In this context, the research aimed to identify the most important definitions and determine common elements. At the same time, one of the research questions was, “How does self-esteem influence consumer behaviour?”

The main argument for analyzing the sphere of influence of self-esteem lies in the effects it generates. From the perspective of companies, understanding the factors

that individuals consider based on the form and level of their self-respect can serve as a market differentiator and a source of competitive advantage.

2. Theoretical approach to self-esteem: Concepts and distinctions

The concept of “self-esteem” first emerged from the desire of specialists to explain the factors contributing to its development and its role in the evolution of individuals. According to the specialized literature, the earliest attempt to define this concept dates back to 1893, when psychologist William James described self-esteem using the following formula: “ $Selfesteem = \frac{Success}{Aspirations}$.” James argued that “such a fraction can increase by either reducing the denominator or increasing the numerator” [1]. Based on this definition, it can be concluded that an individual considers the opinions of others regarding their achievements. Therefore, even if a person feels they have not achieved their goals, as long as others recognize their success, their self-esteem remains high.

Later, “self-esteem” was analyzed by specialists to explain individual differences, continuing to be an important subject of study in psychology. In 1951, Carl Rogers revisited the term, redefining it independently of earlier notions and introducing three dimensions: the self-image (*actual self*), the ideal perception of one’s image (*ideal self*), and the social projection of the self or how the individual is perceived by others (*social self*) [2].

In 1967, a new definition of self-esteem emerged, emphasizing the role of parental influence in shaping an individual’s education and values. According to Coopersmith, these acquired principles enable individuals to appreciate their success and acknowledge their value [3]. This was the first definition to argue that self-esteem could be shaped throughout life, influenced by parental upbringing rather than being an innate trait. Coopersmith maintained that parents, through their education of children, significantly impact their level of self-esteem.

The concept of self-esteem was further analyzed by psychotherapist Nathaniel Branden, who provided extensive insights into the term. In 1969, Branden [4] published his seminal work, *The Psychology of Self-Esteem*, focusing solely on the dimension of self-image, as identified by Rogers. Branden defined self-esteem as a basic need that must be met and proposed that self-esteem is the sum of self-confidence and self-respect. A high level of self-esteem, paired with confidence in one’s competencies, enhances personal efficiency, with studies showing a direct link between high self-esteem and increased individual effectiveness. Branden suggested that the foundation of self-esteem lies in the desire to gain knowledge about oneself and the surrounding world. However, he overlooked the potential influence of early childhood experiences, focusing solely on self-perception formed during adolescence and adulthood.

Efforts to define and explain self-esteem have extended into other fields. Since 1951, perspectives on self-esteem have influenced marketing, where specialists sought to understand its relationship with consumer behavior, purchasing processes, and its role in developing marketing strategies. In 1967, William Tucker associated self-esteem with consumer personality, defining it through the way individuals use various products. Tucker hypothesized that consumers could be classified based on the goods they purchase and use and the meanings they ascribe to these items [5].

An important contribution to understanding self-esteem in the marketing context was made by Joseph Sirgy. Through numerous articles on the subject, Sirgy argued

that self-esteem is optimally correlated with consumer behavior. He introduced new concepts such as “self-image meaning,” defined as the strength attached to a specific actual self-image corresponding to the ideal self-image, and “self-image perception” (the actual self-image) [6]. Sirgy focused on the actual self and its ideal projection, neglecting the influence of reference group members, who shape individual values and norms.

Joseph Sirgy’s work became a cornerstone for other marketing specialists, who built on his definitions and explanations. One notable figure is Michael Solomon, whose 1992 book *Consumer Behavior* has been revised annually to incorporate updated insights [7]. Solomon’s writings reflect a consensus among specialists regarding the general definition of self-esteem, describing it as “a person’s opinion or perception of their qualities and how they evaluate these attributes” [8]. Subsequent researchers offered simpler interpretations, defining self-esteem as “an individual’s perception of themselves” [9] or “the collection of attributes and beliefs possessed by an individual” [10].

Considering individual differences, self-esteem is recognized as a subjective concept influenced by multiple factors. The personal expectations an individual holds for themselves determine their level of self-esteem. For instance, individuals with easily attainable goals and a fear of failure may exhibit low self-esteem, avoiding challenges that could push them beyond their comfort zone [11]. Conversely, individuals with high self-esteem are more inclined to take risks, having successfully overcome past challenges and anticipating similar outcomes in the future [11].

Recent studies have shown that purchased products and personal possessions are components of an individual’s displayed image and, implicitly, their self-esteem [12]. The services and products we choose contribute to defining our persona. However, contradictions arise, as possessions do not always define us but consistently shape our social role and the image we project within reference groups. For example, while clothing choices may not define a person, the brands they wear contribute to their social image, which can be interpreted differently by others.

Despite sharing similar social, economic, and political contexts, individuals place varying levels of importance on the goods they acquire to satisfy their needs. This “natural hierarchy” [13] allows marketing specialists to implement diverse strategies. Some consumers purchase products solely for their utility, while others do so for the social image they convey. Additionally, some buyers act on impulse or respond to marketing communications.

In this context, Solomon [11] stated that products that help individuals achieve their ideal self and are considered “a part of them” represent the “extended self” (**Figure 1**) [11].

The first level, the individual level, refers to the personal possessions owned by an individual that contribute to the definition of self-image. The phrase “We are what we wear” frequently defines this first level. Not only do elements such as cars, jewelry, or clothing contribute to the evolution of self-esteem. The home and its decor are symbols of the second level in the pyramid of the extended self [11]. In practice, the space in which we carry out our daily activities and spend our leisure time provides an image that reflects our values, habits, or beliefs.

The third level, the community level, contributes to the expansion of self-esteem by relating to the collective in which the individual lives and the neighbors they have [11]. By living in the same locality or neighborhood, a sense of belonging develops among community members, and constantly, the image perceived by others becomes an important element for individuals. Thus, along with the first two levels, the community level reflects personal possessions, and their impact increases the

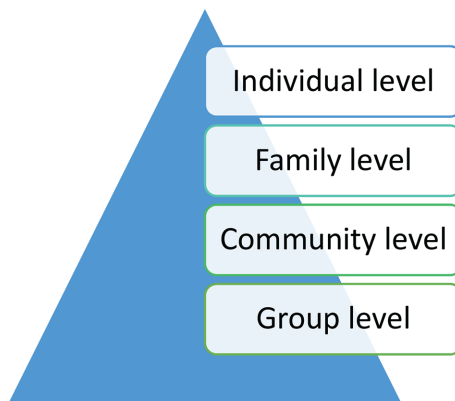


Figure 1.
Levels of the extended self. Source: Adapted from Solomon and Blek [11, 14].

more they are publicly consumed. Of course, by cohabiting in a community, the individual belongs to various social groups, with the opportunity to interact with different people. The group level is the fourth element in the pyramid proposed by Belk [15]. The criteria by which a community is segmented into different groups are diverse, and individuals tend to aspire to those cohorts with which they have the most in common or target categories in which individuals display an image aligned with the person's ideal self. Both Belk and Solomon include social groups, also seen as subcultures, in the fourth level of the pyramid. Thus, in this special situation, the community to which an individual belongs is subordinated to the group, becoming a component of it.

Certainly, the extended self also encompasses an individual's experiences or ideas, along with the people and objects to which they are attached. The choices we make regarding friends, reference groups, and the purchase of products or services are a result of our past experiences [15]. Although studies conducted over time and the pyramid reflecting the levels of the extended self-focus primarily on possessions and relationships, it is essential not to overlook the internal processes and life experiences acquired along the way.

Self-esteem represents the outcome of the interplay of all these factors, with its varying levels shaped by individual characteristics and each person's ability to make decisions in alignment with their principles.

In conclusion, self-esteem encompasses the entirety of an individual's attributes and experiences related to their self-concept, as well as the traits they aspire to acquire or enhance in the future.

3. The relationship between an individual's perception and the ideal self-projection

Both in psychology and particularly in marketing, the distinction between a consumer's real image and the image they aspire to have and project outward becomes increasingly important. According to experts, the actual self-image refers to an individual's perception of their current qualities and attributes, while the ideal self refers to traits they wish to acquire and the way they aspire to evolve [16]. Individuals with high self-esteem tend to exhibit more stable and predictable behavior [17]. Similarly,

being aware of their self-worth, they are more objective in describing their behavior and explaining habits developed throughout their lives. Those who are conscious of and accept their current level of self-esteem, without making the pursuit of the ideal self their primary life goal, are more likely to achieve their objectives and have greater confidence in their interactions with others.

Self-esteem, as a dynamic and multidimensional concept [18, 19], changes with age, with evidence suggesting that the foundation for its development originates in childhood. Depending on an individual's age, self-esteem can be organized into a hierarchy [20]. Its development sees rapid growth starting in early childhood (pre-school years) and progresses steadily through school and adolescence. During this period, parental influence and the attention given to the child's education and personal development play a significant role. By fostering a positive direction, instilling cultural values, and nurturing social life, parents contribute to the enhancement of their child's self-esteem.

Thus, the real self is not seen merely as a "conglomerate, but as a unified product, which can be considered as having its own autonomy" [21]. Starting its development at a young age, self-esteem evolves throughout life, being influenced by numerous factors. Education, reference groups, or lifestyle are among the elements that can alter the initial trajectory regarding the ascension and direction of the self's evolution, contributing to its development by reaching a high level or inhibiting its expansion through the emergence of pseudo-self-esteem or by placing it at a low level.

Although some researchers [22] argue that the real self primarily concerns an individual's possessions and material belongings, while the ideal self encompasses qualities or skills a person wishes to acquire, studies indicate that the real self also includes cognitive acquisitions, consumer habits, and behavior developed through exposure to various situations [18, 19]. In this context, parental influence extends to all areas, teaching children to appreciate the objects they possess and understand their value while transmitting behavioral models that can be applied throughout their lives.

The impact of self-esteem on personal development is significant. Studies [23, 24] have shown that the discrepancy between the actual self and the ideal self determines an individual's predisposition to negative emotions. In other words, feelings of frustration coupled with a fear of failure often result from low self-esteem. Personal issues arising from these feelings also impact social life [25]. Such difficulties affect an individual's image within the community, reducing adaptability to a certain lifestyle and, consequently, hindering personal development.

In marketing, the real self is increasingly highlighted. Major organizations often feature real-life stories in their advertisements, presented by ordinary people. The similarities consumers identify with in these stories foster brand appreciation, contributing to loyalty formation. Conversely, some companies continue to appeal to celebrities or highly popular figures. These advertisements evoke the ideal self-component of self-esteem. Consumers may choose products different from their usual preferences due to a desire to align with novelty or because they believe their current products no longer match their evolved image or newly acquired attributes. Recent studies [26] reveal that individuals tend to form attachments to brands represented by ordinary people whose image aligns with the consumer's real self-esteem rather than their ideal projected image in society.

The real self defines each of us [10]. Important steps toward achieving a high level of self-esteem include accepting personal characteristics, emotions, experiences, and values accumulated over time. This awareness helps individuals shape their ideal self-image, representing their aspirations and desired behavior. From this perspective,

we see that the ideal self can include attributes, personality traits, purchasing habits, and material possessions. These elements contribute to a sense of self-acceptance and satisfaction, enabling individuals to project the desired image in society. Nevertheless, the easiest way to achieve the ideal self is not through personal changes but through acquisitions. Behavioral changes are more difficult to achieve, and consumers often believe they can attain their ideal self through purchases. In such cases, individuals increasingly tend to “connect” with a brand, believing its possession will enhance their social image [27].

Conversely, some researchers believe that personal development is an effective way to achieve the ideal self, with education being the key to this endeavor. The attention given to education and the material resources invested in the learning process contribute to reducing the gap between the real self and the ideal self [28]. As has been demonstrated, self-esteem is a dynamic concept that, similar to individuals, changes throughout life, with its evolution being a consequence of the choices made by each person. Expanding the range of knowledge and continuously updating the information one possesses contributes to the increase of self-esteem. Cognitive acquisitions represent a result of an individual’s personal development, made possible through education as well as the people with whom the individual interacts during this process. If we start from the premise demonstrated and mentioned over time by various researchers that self-esteem develops starting from childhood [29], the influence and impact of education become paramount. From the first social interactions, the child is part of an educational system, spending a large portion of their time with educators, teachers, or professors. Therefore, attention paid to education from a young age can facilitate the process of reaching a high level of self-esteem. In this case, as an adult, the individual will continue the process to which they were accustomed, with the increase of self-esteem and the achievement of its ideal component not being realized solely through material acquisitions. Thus, the modification of self-esteem in relation to the ideal attributes desired by an individual will not be achieved only through material acquisitions but also through cognitive ones.

The ideal self can be a strong motivator for many people [9]. For example, someone aspiring to achieve a certain social position or professional success that is only possible in another country may decide to relocate [30]. Here, professional success or social status becomes a factor contributing to the attainment of the ideal self, enhancing self-perception and self-image. The decision to move to an unfamiliar country, confronting a new culture or unknown norms and values, does not hinder the pursuit of the ideal self. In this endeavor, the individual’s education and self-confidence play a crucial role in supporting the decision.

Thus, achieving the ideal self depends on an individual’s level of motivation and aspirations. A person who avoids challenges and is content with their life’s favorable outcomes, with low self-esteem, is unlikely to view personal growth and self-esteem enhancement as important. Such individuals accept their circumstances, rejecting the idea of personal and social progress. Conversely, individuals with higher education levels and broader social spectra set ambitious goals, whose achievement represents significant life success. However, human nature is in constant evolution. Present satisfactions, resulting from achieving set objectives, lose importance over time, with individuals seeking greater accomplishments as they progress. Consequently, the concept of the ideal self is in continuous flux, evolving as new experiences and interactions reshape aspirations. This evolution leads to the formulation of new habits and reevaluation of values and rules, culminating in the consumer’s final behavior. From

a marketing perspective, personal changes reflect in social and, implicitly, purchasing behaviors. Preferences shift, prompting marketing specialists to design new products to meet evolving expectations.

The influence of self-esteem stems from the comparison made by the consumer, which is performed between certain attributes they possess and a predetermined ideal. The responses to the questions formulated based on these comparisons can determine the way in which a consumer's behavior may change or improve. The definition provided by Birdwell in 1968 continues to be accepted over time and can also be found in the recent works of Michael Solomon. According to the American author, people choose certain products because they align with their current self-esteem. As they evolve and seek to advance in the social hierarchy, consumers will purchase other items that help them achieve their established ideal [11]. In the desire to modify the image others have of them, individuals tend to "manipulate" their purchases and behavior, with the hoped result being acceptance by those around them. This aspect becomes much more visible in decisions regarding the selection of clothing items or other products for public consumption, as consumers seek to present themselves in the "best light."

Self-esteem remains a constant focus for researchers, with studies analyzing its implications in marketing becoming increasingly prevalent. The correlation between an individual's real self-image and their ideal projection rests on the premise that the self takes multiple forms, with attributes shaping it varying according to circumstances. Recent studies [31] show that individuals may display different behaviors in various situations, with these discrepancies observed not only in relation to others. Research reveals that a person may have a real self-image shaped by interactions, with certain habits varying depending on these contacts. For instance, individuals may behave differently with parents, adopt different manners with friends, or alter certain norms in formal settings such as school or work [31]. These behavioral shifts compose the "relational self" [32, 33]. This revisits the concept of authenticity debated over time [34, 35]. Authenticity, according to these studies, emerges when individuals act in alignment with their real selves, focusing on their current attributes rather than on their ideal self and aspirations.

Building on the initial definition of the relational self, researchers decided to analyze this component in depth. Thus, it was concluded that the relational self, a component of self-esteem, encompasses interpersonal relationships between individuals, examining the connection and attachment to family members and close friends and specifying an individual's roles within these relationships [36, 37]. In practice, the relational self represents the second stage in the formation of self-esteem. Based on the premise that the current self constitutes the first step in this process, reflecting an individual's opinion of the attributes and traits they possess, the relational self presents the attitude toward those in the proximal environment, with whom there is frequent and intense interaction. Individuals with a high level of relational self-esteem place greater importance on family members and friends, taking into account the advice and opinions they receive from them regarding major decisions [38]. The support offered by those around them is highly valued, serving as a benchmark for the correctness of the decisions made. Interaction with family and close friends is governed by attachment, which determines the behavior individuals adopt [37].

Furthermore, we can assert that the relational self contributes to shaping the ideal self. The support received from the people around us and the trust we place in them facilitate the shaping of each individual's personality, allowing them to evolve along an upward path, which corresponds to a high level of self-esteem. People differ, with

distinct habits and behaviors. This premise was confirmed in the study conducted by Agrawal and Maheswaran [39], which showed that the way individuals structure their self-esteem differs based on interactions with other people. Naturally, culture plays a significant role in this context [36, 40]. The social norms adopted and considered acceptable in various countries differ, which is reflected in individuals' conceptions and, implicitly, in the behaviors and self-esteem they manifest. Culture and the characteristics of a country also influence an individual's self-esteem. For example, in countries with a collectivist orientation, citizens tend to have a high level of relational self-esteem, as they are taught to rely primarily on those around them [41]. In general, when it comes to relational self-esteem, the main element consumers consider when ranking their self-esteem is their close relationship with those around them. When individuals think about their self-esteem and the influence it has, they analyze the goods they own or the services they have contracted, which may contribute to the image they have projected in society. In contrast, individuals who have developed relational self-esteem, a component of the real self, define and analyze their image in society through the people with whom they interact. In other words, their circle of friends and relationships contribute to their definition.

Individuals with a high level of relational self-esteem interact much more easily with others, display more openness toward them, and are more influenced by their friends [42]. Their aversion to risk is lower, as they believe they can always rely on their friends, and the possibility of conflict is reduced. Not only does relational self-esteem develop, but so does social self-esteem, with the influence of the reference group becoming more significant. In reality, the development of relational self-esteem occurs precisely because of social interactions and the opportunity individuals have to come into contact with others.

Relational self-esteem generates multiple benefits for individuals. Studies conducted over time [38, 43] have demonstrated that people with a more developed relational component integrate more easily into society, and for them, finding a job is easier. This action ultimately results in the generation of a sense of satisfaction, reflected in better job performance and, consequently, a satisfactory income. Blustein [29] argued that the success an individual achieves in life is largely due to relational self-esteem. From childhood through adolescence, individuals move beyond their family environment, become part of society, and engage with others. Moreover, Blustein [29] stated that if a person only considers their interests or uses a single problem-solving method based on their personality type, it provides a first clue about their lack of preparation for a job. These elements will be reflected in insufficient preparation to face difficulties or challenges encountered in life. This conclusion strengthens the view formulated by Kohut [44], who argued that it is only through interactions with others that individuals develop practical sense, which enables them to self-analyze and discover who they are.

Thus, self-esteem develops from childhood, with parents being its promoters. Through the education they provide and by their own example, parents can help children attain a high level of self-esteem. However, the actual manifestation of self-esteem is observed through interactions with others. The behavior adopted in their presence, as well as consumption habits, is reflected in society. The influence of those around us and social interactions shape an individual's self-esteem. An additional argument is represented by the research conducted by various authors who segment the real self, referring also to its social component [6, 45]. Thus, when we analyze the meaning of self-esteem, explanations of this concept include the way individuals are perceived by members of their reference groups. Similarly, the ideal self changes

concerning this community and the norms and beliefs of the people in the group. In other words, the impact of the relational component on self-esteem is just as important as that of the social component, and often the boundary between the two becomes blurred, transforming into a whole. Like the ideal self, relational self-esteem can be seen as a dynamic concept, with its boundaries constantly changing. As people evolve and grow older, their social circle expands, and the number of individuals they come into contact with increases, often leading to heterogeneous behaviors. Interactions with new acquaintances reflect on self-esteem, often adopting their customs, which facilitate personal development or professional progress. Of course, there are many rules and habits that we subconsciously adopt, and their use is not always desired. However, it must be noted that most of the time, individuals are products of the family they were born and raised in, as well as the society in which they coexist.

Over time, it has been shown that not only the real and ideal selves have a major influence on an individual and their behavior in society. Discovering the importance of the relational self, more and more specialists have directed their research in this direction, blurring the line between the influence of reference group members and that of society, incorporating them into a single component. Based on these premises, researchers have proposed a new definition of self-esteem, encompassing four key dimensions [45–47]:

- *Actual self*: The real and current image an individual has of themselves.
- *Ideal self*: The way an individual wishes to see themselves or the ideal prototype they aspire to achieve.
- *Social self*: The way an individual believes they are perceived by others.
- *Ideal social self-image*: The way an individual wishes to be seen by others or the image they aim to project to their social environment.

Researchers have found that there is often a positive relationship between an individual's current image and their ideal image [45]. Depending on the aspect they wish to promote, individuals are more motivated to acquire desired characteristics or correct perceived flaws, resulting in an image they consider perfect. Additionally, the ideal self-image often correlates with the social image. In this case, individuals seek attributes not only to satisfy their ego but also to enhance how they are perceived by others.

4. The impact of self-esteem on society

As recent studies have shown, when attempting to define the concept of “self-esteem,” we must consider not only a person's real and imagined self-image but also how they are perceived by others and how they wish to be perceived [45, 48]. A brief review of the literature reveals that, from the perspective of social interaction, a person's self-esteem is based on the perception others have of them and the response they provide, which aligns with the image they have created of themselves [49]. The first attempt to define self-esteem from the perspective of its influence on society appeared as early as 1967, but it was not until 2014 that this approach was presented as a component of self-esteem.

Considering these aspects, we believe that, regarding its impact on society, not only does the individual play a distinct role in defining the concept, but also the interaction between individuals and their desire to be accepted and liked by those around them. As we know, people live in a social environment and interact with others at every moment of their existence. For this reason, individuals value the opinions others have of them and wish to integrate these opinions positively into their behavior as consumers.

Within the community, self-esteem is reflected in its social component, which is represented by the projected image, containing attributes that contribute to the way people wish to be perceived by those around them. Socially, individuals are not “heterogeneous islands”; interactions exist between people, and the resulting behavior is a primary indicator of their level of self-esteem. Analyzing behavior through the lens of society inevitably leads to creating a parallel between individuals’ daily habits and their attitudes toward purchasing behavior. By distinguishing between products and services and the consumer behavior an individual exhibits when making a purchase decision, we observe a shift in the level of self-esteem. For example, in the tertiary sector, due to the intangibility of services, the role of personnel often becomes much more significant compared to the role employees play in the purchase of a tangible product. For instance, studies conducted in the healthcare sector [50] have shown that adherence to ethical principles by personnel in this sector is a key indicator of their self-esteem. Starting from the premise that self-esteem is based on the acceptance of others without considering social, economic, or opinion differences, we can assert that the development of relational and social self allows employees in this sector to establish easier contact with people with health problems. A high level of self-esteem is a guarantee of higher-quality healthcare [51].

Therefore, self-esteem not only influences personal development but also encourages us to evolve toward achieving the image outlined in our vision (the ideal self). Analyzing this example, we can conclude that self-esteem positioned at a high level leads to adherence to norms and generates, at the same time, greater respect for others. Correlating this information with the importance of education [3, 20], we believe that regardless of the field of activity or situational circumstances, self-esteem, through its components (real self, relational, social, or even the ideal component), contributes to personal development as well as the formation of a role in the community, determining not only the evolution of each individual but also that of society as a whole.

Thus, it is important to recognize that self-esteem has a significant influence on interpersonal relationships [52]. According to studies [52], it has been shown that people tend to be kinder and feel more comfortable with others who have a similar level of self-esteem. Likewise, strong self-esteem also extends to the behavior toward others. Such individuals will treat their acquaintances or loved ones with more consideration, fairness, and goodwill.

An individual’s success on a personal level is determined by their self-esteem. When self-esteem is higher, the person experiences feelings of contentment and satisfaction, which are reflected in how they carry out their daily activities, indicating their performance at work. Of course, when considering an individual’s success in their job, we must take into account the significance of this concept, which may differ from one individual to another. According to the literature, people most frequently define job success by how well they perform their assigned tasks and responsibilities or by their efficiency and effectiveness [53]. Of course, many individuals associate success with the amount of money earned or the material satisfaction experienced in their job. Starting from the premise that self-esteem is a conglomerate of factors,

including an individual's values and beliefs and social and family norms, we can establish a correlation between these concepts. Recent research [54] has shown that people with higher self-esteem feel more confident and socialize more easily. Thus, they interact more easily, and others appreciate their company, with job satisfaction reflected in all their activities [38].

The impact of self-esteem on society also extends to unemployment rates. Studies [55] have shown that people with low self-esteem are much more likely to remain unemployed compared to those with higher self-esteem. It seems that self-esteem not only varies with age, showing an upward trend over time, but also with gender. Research has highlighted a connection between self-esteem and work performance, particularly among women. It has been observed that a deterioration in self-esteem, manifested by a lack of self-appreciation, despair, or disappointment from performance outcomes, results in a decline in work capacity in women. Additionally, studies show that this relationship is bidirectional: a decline in self-esteem contributes to job loss, and conversely, the emergence of unemployment affects the level of self-appreciation felt by the individual [55]. The gender disparities identified by researchers are also supported by Solomon [11], who argued that self-esteem cannot be analyzed without considering the differences between women and men. Although they are part of the same society, the consumption habits of individuals are distinct, as are their preferences in selecting the optimal product to meet their needs. In marketing, in particular, these disparities play a much more significant role. Researchers in this field have observed over time the differences between women and men, including their desires and needs, and subsequently, how these needs are satisfied [48]. Given the changes in buying or consumption habits, we must also consider the behavioral differences found in self-esteem, as some authors also take into account social interactions (especially the relational component) within a cultural context [41]. In each state, the role of women and men is different, and self-esteem is correlated with this role. This opinion has been shared by many authors, though there are studies that contest this notion. Some studies [56] have shown no differences between women and men regarding self-esteem, while earlier works [57, 58] proved that men, both in adolescence and adulthood, have a higher level of self-esteem compared to women. Of course, the results of these studies cannot be generalized, as they require adaptation to cultural particularities and individual consumption habits.

Bandura [59] stated that individuals with developed self-esteem can self-motivate by thinking that they are strong and good, thus being confident in their abilities. Based on this assertion, studies over time [60, 61] have supported this claim and proven that through proper self-appreciation, people tend to contribute more to the development of interpersonal relationships, which is also reflected in their success. In other words, by being confident in their abilities and knowing their strengths and weaknesses, individuals gain greater security and have a significant capacity to interact and socialize with others. In these conditions, high self-esteem facilitates acceptance by others in the community, eliminating the fear of failure as well as feelings of guilt and frustration that may arise when goals are not achieved [62].

Recent studies have demonstrated that social support and the assistance provided by those around us can influence an individual's entire life [63]. This situation is especially visible among young people. During adolescence, the social sphere changes and undergoes significant expansion. Interactions with new peers, changes in the environment, and reduced contact with parents due to attending high schools or schools in other towns increase the importance of social interactions. The lack of acceptance from friends, often reinforced by social stigmatization, can influence a young person's behavior, leading them to adopt a negative attitude and develop harmful habits.

Studies conducted over time have shown that the absence of social support is accompanied by low self-esteem, both of which manifest in behavior rejected by society, generating frustration for the individual [64]. Based on these considerations, we can conclude that although many studies [58, 64] claim that self-esteem develops from childhood, its effective manifestation is much more visible during adolescence, a fact also due to the changes experienced by young people. During this period, personality traits continue to form, and parents' tendency to hold their children accountable becomes more pronounced. As responsibilities increase and young people become more aware of their obligations, the pressure on them intensifies. Thus, in the absence of self-esteem grounded on a solid foundation, adolescents' behavior will undergo significant changes without a clear positive trajectory. The embrace of vices that may contribute to self-destruction and behaviors that lead to exclusion and stigmatization by society are among the frequent practices that emerge from negative behavior.

Certainly, the impact of self-esteem is not reflected only in the activities of adults. Studies have shown that procrastination, increasingly common among students, is based on varying levels of self-esteem and the degree of perfectionism exhibited by students [65]. In support of this theory, we can also consider motivational factors or the goals set by young people. If the goal is hierarchically high and holds great importance for the individual, they will be more motivated to achieve it. In this process, the student uses various skills to demonstrate their cognitive potential, as well as the abilities they possess to apply their acquired knowledge. Watson [66], as well as Alexander [67], demonstrated that low self-esteem, inability to focus on the goal, or fear of failure are elements that hinder students in their task resolution and goal achievement. The tendency to procrastinate and delay tasks is not limited to young people. Individuals also feel the urge to avoid situations that generate negative emotions or worsen their mood. In this context, Freud [68] argued that individuals resort to procrastination to protect their ego. This tendency is even more common among those with low self-esteem. The desire to maintain a fragile balance between self-esteem and life events, along with feelings experienced from past experiences, makes individuals avoid or delay tasks that may be challenging and lead to failure. People with low self-esteem are more concerned about risk, avoiding circumstances that are unknown and have distinct probabilities, with the final scenario being uncertain. In conclusion, the tendency to accept risk is minimal in people with low self-esteem.

According to the anxiety estimation theory, individuals assess situations based on their perceived risk level and their previous experiences [69]. If a person faced a similar situation in the past and the outcome was negative, significantly impacting their self-esteem, they will tend to avoid the new circumstance. If avoidance is not possible, they may tend to procrastinate in resolving the issue.

When analyzing the impact of self-esteem on society, we must also consider that this influence is reflected in purchasing decisions [45]. In society, this impact is shaped by reference groups. Throughout life, each individual is part of various cohorts. Society influences purchasing decisions by encouraging people to follow the opinions of others and consider their influence. At the same time, through their self-esteem, individuals influence society by projecting a real image of themselves and following a series of steps to achieve the ideal self-image, which later transforms into the social image of the ideal self.

When discussing the importance of self-esteem within society, it is necessary to define the concept of "identity." Initially, this term referred to both an individual's ability to accept themselves and live in harmony with their flaws, as well as their psychological strength to accept criticism from others and reconcile with it. Expanding

this definition, the current conceptualization of the term refers to an individual's identification with a group or, to some extent, with an organization [70].

Given this new meaning, we can consider that individuals manifest numerous identities throughout their lives that correspond to the groups they belong to: family, friends, or work. From a marketing perspective, the durability of an identity and its influence on consumer behavior become important. In other words, marketers must identify if there are significant differences between the image an individual projects within their friend group and the purchases they make from this position, as well as the decisions they make at work and how their colleagues' perceptions of them affect their decision-making or purchasing criteria.

It is considered that an individual will identify more easily with a group when they share opinions with as many members as possible. Of course, it must be noted that an individual can belong to multiple cohorts. Conversely, when a person accepts the opinions of individuals who are not part of the group, their visibility among other members significantly decreases [70].

However, due to technological development, interactions among individuals have undergone numerous changes. Leisure time, sharing happy moments, and life experiences are increasingly happening online via social media. Through these virtual social spaces, individuals can create their ideal image with the help of information provided or images shared with friends and acquaintances. Experts claim that technological evolution has contributed to the development of a new concept in the study of self-esteem and consumer behavior. Thus, the "digital self" refers to the image built and distributed through social networks [11], an image that is updated much more easily compared to the real or ideal self. Interactions between people still occur, with the most significant difference being their translation into the online environment. Even in these circumstances, the opinions of others regarding the shared information play an important role in self-esteem. Studies conducted over time [71, 72] have shown that, for example, receiving positive feedback regarding blog posts encourages individuals to continue sharing experiences with others, often leading to feelings of satisfaction and a rise in self-esteem. This is also the case with feedback received on the Facebook social network. Appreciation from acquaintances regarding shared images is correlated with valuing the individual, which translates into an increase in self-esteem [73].

People desire respect and acceptance from others. In this context, these elements take precedence over face-to-face communication, and the medium of interaction is not an obstacle. However, some experts argue that information transmitted online is not analyzed as deeply as in personal interactions, as this lack of influence leads to a more permissive behavior in providing information, often accompanied by the recipient's inability to perceive non-verbal cues. Expressions or gestures, which can provide more insight into us than verbal aspects, are absent in online interactions, resulting in a carefree attitude [74]. Thus, eliminating these constraints generates a state of comfort and a good mood, both of which reflect a higher level of self-esteem.

In the online environment, consumers more easily adopt their ideal self. In many cases, this only refers to the displayed image, which is not always supported by purchases or the possession of attributes that allow the acquisition of the ideal image. Therefore, when an individual's goal is to project a vision considered perfect within society, this becomes much easier to achieve through social networks. In the online environment, individuals are represented by photographs or video clips [15]. When compared to individuals in their reference group or those they admire, this information may be distorted, as various programs are frequently used to adjust the real imperfections of an individual, thus providing the desired appearance. The desire

of individuals to share experiences and personal moments with family or friends demonstrates the importance of the ideal self-esteem for each of us. Today, social media encourages socializing among individuals, even without physical proximity, and the phenomenon of “pseudo-friendship” is more present.

From a marketing perspective, specialists need to analyze the image individuals and their respective groups project when designing a product and establishing its marketing mix. The stronger the desire of an individual to belong to a group, the more visible their rejection of a product or service that does not fit the image of those around them will be [48].

In conclusion, self-esteem can be analyzed based on its components, being measured on multiple levels [36]. According to social identity theory, self-esteem can be derived from both the personal self (real self) and the social self [75]. Studies [76, 77] have shown that the social self can be divided into the relational self, which includes interactions with close family and friends, and the collective self, which refers to extended social groups with less intense relationships among their members. Regardless of the segmentation of self-esteem and its components, the concept, which has been most frequently analyzed in psychology due to the influence of the real self, has surpassed the boundaries of this field and extended into economics. From a marketing perspective, the importance of self-esteem and the need to analyze it lie precisely in the interactions between individuals and the influences they exert on one another. Through relating and socializing, people exchange opinions, sharing not only life experiences but also habits, norms, values, and lifestyles. The motivations that drive an individual to evolve and their intensity contribute to defining self-esteem, marking its development and dynamics. Supporting personal wills are reference groups that, through their power, exert a high aspirational potential, reflected in individuals' desire to change to reach the ideal self-component, which, from the outset, is similar to the image of the group they wish to be part of. Naturally, there are numerous situations where the ideal self is shaped by an individual's experiences, without considering the opinion of others as the main factor. Nevertheless, when analyzing self-esteem, we must recognize the impact and influence exerted by those around us, especially since people do not live in isolation, and social development is often an important element in their lives.

As highlighted in this chapter, opinions regarding the meaning of self-esteem have evolved, whether in psychology or marketing.

5. Conclusions

With the growing concern for personal development, the role of self-esteem has become increasingly important. On an individual level, understanding one's self-esteem level has allowed for the explanation of behaviors, preferences for certain companies, and ways of spending leisure time. Similarly, in recent years, self-esteem has been used to explain individuals' personalities, attitudes, and behavioral intentions.

Having evolved significantly since its first use in psychology, the concept of self-esteem has also entered the field of marketing, being explained concerning self-confidence and the reference to where an individual belongs.

On a micro level, self-esteem is a key factor in shaping emotional and behavioral stability. Studies conducted over time have shown that individuals with high self-esteem are more objective in self-evaluation, have greater confidence in their decisions, and are less affected by discrepancies between their real and ideal selves.

Likewise, individuals with high self-esteem tend to be more motivated, increasing their chances of achieving success. Conversely, individuals with low self-esteem are more prone to procrastination, avoiding challenges, resisting change, and steering clear of situations that could lead to failure.

On the meso level (family and reference groups), studies have shown that personal relationships contribute to strengthening self-esteem. Within the family and reference group, individuals receive validation, which supports social integration and facilitates adaptability to challenges.

Some studies also include the community at the meso level, emphasizing workplace relationships. In fields such as healthcare, individuals with high self-esteem are more likely to adhere to ethical standards. Additionally, self-esteem influences purchasing behavior, as individuals tend to buy products and services that align with their social self-image.

At the macro level, through the values and norms it promotes, society plays a role in shaping individuals' self-esteem, influencing how they define their identity.

For companies, understanding the level of consumer self-esteem is crucial for product positioning and promotion. Studies have shown that companies that emphasize the consumer's real self foster stronger brand loyalty compared to those that make unrealistic promises.

Similarly, on a macro level, self-esteem influences economic performance and employability rates. Individuals with low self-esteem face higher risks of unemployment and workplace dissatisfaction, which negatively impacts productivity.

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Perspective Chapter: The Psychology of Brand Loyalty in Sports – A Micro Perspective

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Abstract

This study explores the psychology of brand loyalty in sports from a micro perspective. It examines how cognitive, emotional, and behavioral factors, influenced by individual personality traits and cultural contexts, contribute to fan loyalty toward sports brands. Social Identity Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and the Multi-attribute Attitude Model provide theoretical frameworks for understanding this complex relationship. The study highlights the importance of shared identities, values, and experiences in fostering brand loyalty, exemplified through case studies of successful sports organizations like Manchester City and FC Barcelona. The role of artificial intelligence (AI) in personalizing fan experiences and predicting behavior is a central focus of this research, as it represents a transformative force in modern sports marketing. By leveraging AI, sports organizations can tailor marketing strategies to resonate with fans' psychological needs and cultural values, thereby cultivating deeper and more enduring brand loyalty. However, this study also critically examines the ethical implications of using fan data in AI-driven marketing strategies. The research underscores the need for sports marketers to adopt innovative, fan-centric approaches that balance personalization with ethical considerations. Future research should explore the intricate interplay of psychological, cultural, and technological factors in various sporting contexts, addressing the ethical challenges posed by AI-driven marketing strategies.

Keywords: brand loyalty, sports marketing, consumer psychology, social identity theory, artificial intelligence

1. Introduction

Brand loyalty in sports transcends mere preference for a team or athlete; it represents a complex, multifaceted relationship rooted in the deep emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagements of fans with sports brands [1]. This connection stems from shared identities, values, and collective memories, serving as powerful drivers of brand loyalty [2, 3]. In the competitive and ever-evolving landscape of professional sports, retaining and attracting loyal fans is paramount for the long-term success

and sustainability of teams and leagues. However, the dynamics of brand loyalty in sports are increasingly influenced by technological advancements, particularly the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into sports marketing strategies [4, 5]. AI has emerged as a game-changer, enabling organizations to analyze fan behavior, personalize experiences, and predict future engagement patterns with unprecedented precision.

The primary problem addressed in this research is the lack of a comprehensive understanding of how micro-level psychological factors—such as cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes—interact with emerging technologies like AI to shape brand loyalty in sports. While traditional theories such as Social Identity Theory [6, 7], Social Cognitive Theory [8], and the Multi-attribute Attitude Model [9] provide valuable insights into fan behavior, they do not fully account for the transformative impact of AI on sports marketing. This gap in the literature highlights the need for a more nuanced exploration of how psychological factors and technological innovations intersect to influence brand loyalty.

This study aims to address this gap by examining the psychological underpinnings of brand loyalty in sports, with a specific focus on the role of AI in enhancing fan engagement and loyalty. By integrating theoretical frameworks with practical insights from case studies of successful sports organizations like Manchester City and FC Barcelona, this research seeks to provide a holistic understanding of the factors that drive brand loyalty in the modern sports industry. Additionally, the study critically evaluates the ethical implications of using AI to collect and analyze fan data, emphasizing the need for responsible and transparent marketing practices [10, 11].

Psychological research in consumer behavior and marketing reveals the influence of complex micro-level psychological factors on sports brand loyalty. These factors significantly shape how fans interact with teams, athletes, and the overall sports brand [12, 13]. A profound understanding of these micro-level factors is key to designing effective marketing strategies that cultivate lasting fan loyalty. Social Identity Theory [6, 7] plays a crucial role in this relationship. This theory posits that individuals derive part of their identity from the social groups to which they belong, including sports team fan groups. For instance, fan identity is reinforced through team apparel and collective celebrations, fostering a strong sense of belonging and solidarity [14].

Beyond social identity, Social Cognitive Theory [8] highlights the impact of observational learning and social modeling on fan attitudes and behaviors. Fans observe and emulate the actions and values of athletes and teams. This modeling directly influences fans' attitudes and behaviors, impacting brand loyalty. If a star athlete consistently endorses team products, this behavior serves as a model for fans, strengthening brand loyalty [15].

The Multi-attribute Attitude Model [9] offers a framework for understanding loyalty-related attitudes. This model demonstrates that attitudes toward a brand are formed from a collection of beliefs and feelings about its attributes. In sports, these attributes might include team performance, athlete reputation, team culture, and historical successes [16, 17]. For example, a team with a positive team culture, emphasizing camaraderie and collective effort, is more likely to cultivate stronger brand loyalty. Shared values such as success, solidarity, belonging, and a passionate team spirit further motivate loyal fan behavior [15].

In the context of AI, these psychological factors are further amplified. AI enables sports organizations to analyze vast amounts of fan data, identifying patterns and preferences that can be used to create highly personalized marketing campaigns [4, 5].

For instance, AI-driven algorithms can predict which types of content or products are most likely to resonate with specific fan segments, thereby enhancing engagement and loyalty. However, the use of AI in sports marketing also raises important ethical questions, particularly regarding data privacy and the potential for manipulation [10, 11]. This study explores these issues, emphasizing the need for ethical guidelines to govern the use of AI in sports marketing.

The academic contribution of this research lies in its integration of psychological theories with emerging technological trends, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding brand loyalty in the digital age. Practically, this study offers actionable insights for sports marketers, helping them design strategies that leverage AI while respecting fan privacy and autonomy. By addressing both the psychological and technological dimensions of brand loyalty, this research aims to contribute to the sustainable growth of the sports industry while fostering ethical marketing practices.

Teams cultivate loyalty by creating unique experiences that resonate with fans' values. Examples include:

- *Manchester City*: Manchester City's successful digital marketing and engaging content creation significantly enhance fan loyalty. By understanding online fan needs and involving them in team-related content, they set a successful example.
- *FC Barcelona*: FC Barcelona's strong connection with fans and organization of unique fan events fosters a strong sense of belonging and solidarity, resulting in long-term loyalty.
- *NBA*: Teams like the Golden State Warriors, through strong branding, interactive fan programs, and personalized spectator experiences, have achieved lasting fan loyalty.
- *Diverse fan cultures*: Fan loyalty varies across cultures. In some, national identity is strongly linked to a sports team, highlighting the importance of cultural factors in sports marketing.

Ultimately, understanding these micro-level psychological factors is crucial for developing effective sports marketing strategies. By addressing fans' needs, values, and identities, lasting loyalty can be cultivated.

2. Attitude and brand connection: Cognitive, emotional, and behavioral foundations

Brand loyalty in sports emerges from the dynamic interplay of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral factors. A deep understanding of these dimensions and their impact on fan-brand connection is crucial for sports marketing professionals and consumer behavior researchers alike [17]. This section offers a comprehensive framework for understanding sports brand loyalty by meticulously examining these three dimensions, leveraging theories and models from social psychology and marketing.

2.1 Cognitive dimension: Beliefs, knowledge, and information

The cognitive component of attitude centers on fans' beliefs, knowledge, and information regarding a sports brand. These beliefs, shaped by various sources such

as team performance, club reputation, player popularity, and media coverage, form the basis of fans' rational evaluations of the brand [18]. For instance, strong performance and consistent victories (e.g., Real Madrid's numerous Champions League titles) create positive beliefs about the team's ability and competence, potentially leading to increased brand loyalty. Multi-attribute attitude models, such as the Fishbein and Ajzen model [16], illustrate how overall brand attitude is constructed from individual evaluations of various brand attributes and the importance each attribute holds for the individual. In this framework, brand loyalty is viewed as a consequence of a positive attitude toward various brand aspects, including product quality, brand values, and team performance.

2.2 Emotional dimension: Feelings and emotions

While the cognitive dimension emphasizes rational assessments, the emotional dimension highlights the powerful role of feelings and emotions in fostering brand connections. Love for team colors, positive memories of games, and emotional bonds with favorite players all exemplify the profound influence of emotions on brand loyalty [19]. For Liverpool FC fans, the anthem "You'll Never Walk Alone" transcends a simple song; it symbolizes collective identity, passion, and a deep emotional connection with the team's history. Theories of emotion, such as Cognitive Appraisal Theory [20], show that positive emotional experiences, such as the joy of a team victory, strengthen the emotional bond with the brand and enhance loyalty.

2.3 Behavioral dimension: Fan Behaviors

The behavioral component of attitude focuses on fans' actions and behaviors toward the sports brand. Repeated purchases of merchandise, consistent game attendance, fan club memberships, and active social media engagement are all indicators of brand loyalty [21]. Loyal Los Angeles Lakers basketball fans, for example, regularly attend home games, purchase team merchandise, and actively support the team on social media. These behaviors not only signify brand loyalty but also reinforce it over time. The more frequent and intense these behaviors, the stronger the brand bond becomes, further increasing loyalty [22].

3. Social identity and brand loyalty

Social Identity Theory [6, 7] provides a robust framework for understanding the link between group identity and brand loyalty in sports. This theory suggests that fans, by identifying with a specific team's fan base, integrate that group's values and norms into their self-concept. This shared identity serves as a powerful force in shaping and maintaining brand loyalty. Borussia Dortmund fans in Germany, known for their passionate support ("Yellow Wall"), strongly identify with the team and its vibrant fan culture. This deep connection to group identity strengthens their brand loyalty.

In conclusion, these three dimensions—cognitive, emotional, and behavioral—are interconnected, dynamically shaping brand loyalty. Understanding these intricate interactions is crucial for sports marketers seeking to cultivate lasting fan loyalty.

3.1 Personality traits and brand loyalty: A deeper dive into individual factors

Personality, encompassing enduring traits that shape patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior, plays a pivotal role in consumer decision-making, including brand loyalty. This section delves into the significant influence of personality traits on sports brand loyalty, focusing on four key traits: need for belonging, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and self-concept alignment with brand values. Understanding these connections empowers sports marketers to craft effective strategies for attracting and retaining loyal fans [23].

3.2 Need for belonging: The social connection imperative

Humans are inherently social beings, and the need for belonging and connection with others is a fundamental psychological need [14]. In the context of sports, this need is often fulfilled through affiliation with a particular team's fanbase. By joining this group, fans experience a sense of belonging, shared identity, social support, and a feeling of value and importance [2]. The fervent supporters of SSC Napoli in Italy, for example, demonstrate exceptional passion and loyalty, forming a cohesive and powerful fan community that strengthens the sense of belonging and shared identity. This robust sense of belonging reinforces brand loyalty, increasing the likelihood of merchandise purchases, consistent game attendance, and unwavering support. Sports marketers can leverage this need by creating opportunities for increased social interaction among fans, such as organizing special events, establishing online communities, and designing loyalty programs that reward participation and engagement.

3.3 Conscientiousness: Social responsibility and ethical values

Conscientiousness, one of the Big Five personality traits, encompasses characteristics such as responsibility, organization, dependability, adherence to ethical principles, and attention to detail [24]. Highly conscientious fans tend to exhibit loyalty toward brands aligning with their personal values, particularly in terms of social responsibility and ethics. For example, fans who prioritize social and environmental issues are more inclined to support sports brands that are actively involved in such initiatives. Teams demonstrating commitment to sustainable practices (e.g., using renewable energy sources in stadiums) or engaging in charitable activities attract and retain conscientious fans. Bayern Munich, for instance, through its responsible social and environmental actions—such as building a solar-powered stadium and supporting local charities—has successfully cultivated a loyal following of conscientious fans.

3.4 Openness to experience: Embracing novelty and excitement

Individuals high in openness to experience demonstrate a penchant for adventure, novelty, creativity, and exploring the unfamiliar [12]. In sports, this trait translates to a willingness to embrace emerging teams, novel sports, or innovative fan engagement methods. Fans seeking new and exciting experiences might gravitate toward newly formed teams or emerging leagues, even if these lack a substantial history of success. The rapid growth of sports like MMA and esports

can be partly attributed to attracting fans high in openness to experience, drawn to the thrill and innovation these sports offer [25]. Sports marketers can capitalize on this by providing innovative and unique fan experiences, such as utilizing virtual and augmented reality technologies in stadiums, or creating interactive video games and mobile applications.

3.5 Self-concept and brand congruence: Aligning values and identity

Self-concept, encompassing an individual's beliefs and attitudes about themselves, significantly influences brand choices and loyalty [26, 27]. Fans subconsciously seek brands whose values and identity align with their self-perceptions. Fans with strong social identities and traditional values might gravitate toward established teams with rich histories (e.g., Juventus FC in Italy), while those valuing modernity and innovation might prefer teams employing cutting-edge marketing and management strategies (e.g., RB Leipzig in Germany). This congruence between brand values and personal identity fosters emotional connections and enhances brand loyalty. Sports marketers can effectively leverage this understanding of self-concept and its alignment with brand values to tailor their marketing messages and strategies, maximizing their appeal to specific fan segments.

4. Cultural influence on brand loyalty in sports: A deep dive into cultural roots of fandom

Culture, a complex and dynamic interplay of shared values, beliefs, norms, traditions, symbols, and behavioral patterns within a society, exerts a powerful and undeniable influence on consumer behavior, including brand loyalty. In the passionate, identity-driven, and competitive world of sports, culture profoundly shapes fan preferences, attitudes, behaviors, and, ultimately, brand loyalty [28]. This section delves into the multifaceted impact of culture on sports brand loyalty by thoroughly examining three key aspects: cultural norms and values, shared experiences and rituals, and the strategic use of cultural symbolism in marketing.

4.1 Cultural norms and values: Shaping brand preferences

Culture provides a framework of shared values and beliefs that profoundly influence individual choices and preferences across various aspects of life, including sports [29]. These values and beliefs act as filters through which individuals interpret the world, shaping their attitudes and behaviors. In some cultures, success, competitiveness, and winning are paramount values, leading fans to gravitate toward teams with a history of championships and strong performance. In American culture, for example, with its emphasis on individualism, achievement, and competition, fans are often drawn to winning teams and star athletes with impressive records. Conversely, other cultures may prioritize values such as community solidarity, teamwork, respect for tradition, and loyalty to local roots. This can result in strong loyalty to local, established teams with unique cultural identities. Athletic Bilbao fans in Spain, deeply rooted in Basque regional and cultural identity, exemplify this, accepting only players of Basque origin into their team. This showcases the profound impact of cultural values on brand loyalty in sports [28].

4.2 Shared experiences and rituals: Forging emotional bonds and collective identity

Shared experiences and rituals, such as attending games, watching matches collectively in pubs or homes, celebrating victories with fellow fans, mourning defeats, participating in team-related events and festivals, and engaging in team-focused social media interactions, create strong emotional bonds between fans and the brand and foster a sense of belonging and collective identity [3]. These shared experiences shape collective memories and allow fans to be part of a larger community, sharing common values and beliefs. The pre-game ritual at Anfield (Liverpool FC), accompanied by the anthem “You’ll Never Walk Alone,” creates a unique and memorable experience, strengthening the emotional bond with the team. Similarly, street celebrations following major victories, such as a World Cup win, represent shared cultural experiences that amplify feelings of national unity and loyalty to the national team.

4.3 Leveraging cultural symbolism in marketing: Connecting with deep-seated values

Cultural symbols, encompassing colors, songs, slogans, imagery, logos, and even specific foods, are powerful marketing tools in sports. They connect with fans’ cultural values and strengthen brand loyalty [30]. Using national colors and symbols in team apparel and merchandise, for example, can evoke feelings of patriotism and national pride, boosting brand loyalty and a sense of unity. Similarly, incorporating local music and traditional songs into sporting events and television advertisements can create a familiar and welcoming atmosphere, enhancing fans’ sense of belonging and emotional connection. The creative and appropriate use of cultural symbols in sports marketing fosters deeper engagement and strengthens brand loyalty. Using a lion as a symbol of power and courage in a team logo, or employing a well-known local phrase as a team slogan, can enhance brand identity and appeal to fans. Even incorporating local and traditional food items into stadium experiences can serve as cultural symbols, enriching and making the fan experience more memorable.

It is crucial to acknowledge cultural diversity and avoid cultural stereotypes when using cultural symbolism in sports marketing. In our increasingly interconnected world, a sports team’s fanbase may represent a wide range of cultural backgrounds. Marketers must be sensitive to the diverse cultural identities within their fanbase, avoiding symbols or messages that might be offensive or inappropriate to specific cultural groups. Instead, they should seek universal and inclusive symbols and messages that resonate with a broader spectrum of fans, irrespective of their cultural background. A sports brand entering a new market, for instance, should thoroughly research the country’s cultural values, beliefs, traditions, and symbols, designing its marketing strategy accordingly [29].

Culture is dynamic and ever-evolving. Sports marketers must continuously monitor cultural shifts and evolving fan needs, adapting strategies to remain connected and build enduring brand loyalty. This requires ongoing market research, analysis of fan behavior data, and collaboration with cultural and sociological experts.

5. Artificial intelligence and the future of fan engagement: A technological revolution

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming various industries, and the sports industry is no exception. In sports marketing, AI offers powerful tools for

gaining deeper insights into fan behavior, personalizing fan experiences, enhancing marketing strategies, and, ultimately, fostering stronger brand loyalty. This section explores the transformative role of AI in the future of fan engagement, focusing on three key areas: personalized fan experiences, predictive modeling of fan behavior, and the ethical considerations surrounding AI in sports marketing [5].

5.1 Personalizing fan experiences with AI: Tailoring the fan journey

AI's ability to analyze big data and leverage machine learning empowers sports marketers to create uniquely tailored and personalized fan experiences. By collecting and analyzing diverse data—purchase history (tickets and merchandise), social media activity, website behavior, email marketing interactions, and even biometric data (heart rate and brain activity during games)—AI algorithms can precisely identify each fan's preferences, interests, and behavioral patterns [31]. This granular data enables marketers to deliver precisely targeted and personalized content (news, videos, and social media posts), special offers (discounted tickets and merchandise), and unique experiences (player meet-and-greets, stadium tours, and exclusive competitions). A football club, for instance, could use AI to identify fans who frequently purchase away-game tickets and offer them customized travel packages including hotel stays and city tours. Or, for fans showing a preference for a particular player, the club might offer a signed jersey with a personalized message. This level of personalization not only enhances fan satisfaction and loyalty but also deepens emotional connections with the brand, leading to increased revenue and improved marketing efficiency. The key is to move beyond simple demographic segmentation toward truly individualized experiences that resonate with each fan's unique profile.

5.2 Data analytics and predictive Modeling of fan behavior: Anticipating fan needs

AI's capacity to analyze massive datasets allows sports marketers to identify behavioral patterns and predict future fan actions with remarkable accuracy. Machine learning techniques and advanced statistical algorithms enable the creation of models that forecast the likelihood of fans purchasing tickets, merchandise, or participating in specific events [4]. These models consider various factors such as age, gender, geographic location, purchase history, social media engagement, and even weather conditions to provide more precise predictions. This foresight allows marketers to design more targeted and effective marketing strategies, optimizing resource allocation. A basketball team, for instance, might use AI to identify fans most likely to purchase playoff tickets and offer them special incentives. Social media data analysis can reveal the content resonating most strongly with fans, guiding content strategy. AI can also predict game attendance, enabling teams to optimize resource allocation for fan services and avoid potential issues [5]. This predictive capability is transforming how sports organizations understand and engage their fanbase, maximizing marketing ROI and creating smoother, more satisfying experiences for fans.

5.3 Ethical considerations of AI in sports marketing: Responsibility, transparency, and fairness

While AI offers substantial benefits, its application in sports marketing also presents significant ethical challenges demanding careful attention. The collection

and use of personal fan data raise critical concerns regarding privacy, data security, and responsible data handling. Sports marketers must ensure that fan data is collected, stored, and used securely, adhering to strict privacy standards and respecting fan rights [10]. Transparency regarding data collection and usage, as well as providing fans with clear and easily understandable information about these practices, is also vital. Fans should know what data is collected, how it's used, and what rights they retain over their personal information. Clubs should publish clear, concise privacy policies and allow fans to opt out of data collection.

Beyond privacy and security, the issue of fairness and bias in AI-driven sports marketing requires careful scrutiny. AI algorithms operate based on training data, and if this data reflects societal biases (racial, gender, etc.), it can lead to unfair and discriminatory outcomes. For example, an AI algorithm designed to identify high-potential VIP ticket buyers, trained on biased data, might unfairly exclude certain fan groups. Therefore, ensuring the fairness and impartiality of AI algorithms is paramount, as well as preventing discrimination in service delivery and opportunity provision. Algorithmic transparency and accountability are essential to mitigate these risks [11].

In conclusion, AI is revolutionizing sports marketing, offering unprecedented opportunities for personalized fan engagement and improved marketing strategies. However, responsible and ethical AI implementation is non-negotiable, demanding a commitment to transparency, fairness, and the protection of fan privacy. This requires ongoing dialog and collaboration among AI experts, sports marketers, club management, and regulatory bodies to establish ethical frameworks and regulations governing AI's use in sports.

6. Conclusion: Navigating the future of sports marketing

This chapter has explored the multifaceted nature of brand loyalty in sports, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding this complex phenomenon. By examining cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, alongside the influence of culture and individual personality traits, we have constructed a detailed picture of the factors driving sports brand loyalty. Furthermore, the chapter has highlighted the transformative potential of emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), in personalizing fan experiences and optimizing marketing strategies, while acknowledging the ethical responsibilities inherent in this technological advancement. This concluding section summarizes key findings, outlines practical implications for sports marketers, proposes avenues for future research, and discusses the opportunities and challenges facing sports marketing in the years to come.

The analysis presented reveals brand loyalty in sports as a dynamic and multifaceted construct arising from the interplay of numerous factors. Cognitive factors, such as beliefs and knowledge regarding team performance and club reputation, form the basis of fans' rational evaluations. Positive beliefs strongly correlate with increased brand loyalty. Emotional factors, encompassing the emotional connection with players, collective memories, and exciting stadium experiences, are crucial in forming a deep, emotional bond with the brand. This emotional connection can sustain loyalty even during challenging times or periods of team underperformance. Behavioral factors, including repeat purchases, game attendance, and social media engagement, represent the outward manifestation of fan loyalty, reinforcing and solidifying it over time. Cultural factors—shared values, beliefs, and rituals—significantly shape fan

preferences and loyalty. Individual personality traits, such as the need for belonging, conscientiousness, and openness to experience, further influence brand choice and loyalty. Finally, AI, with its capacity for personalization and strategic marketing enhancements, is emerging as a critical factor in the future of sports marketing. However, ethical considerations surrounding data privacy and responsible data usage must be carefully addressed.

These findings hold significant practical implications for sports marketers in developing effective loyalty programs. Strategies should prioritize personalizing fan experiences using AI and other advanced technologies, cultivating strong emotional connections through shared experiences and culturally relevant messaging, offering added value through rewards and exclusive access, and managing brand identity in alignment with fan values. Crucially, ethical data handling and respect for fan privacy are essential for maintaining trust and loyalty.

Future research should delve deeper into the complex interplay of these factors. Comparative studies across diverse cultures and sports, investigation into the role of social media, and analysis of the effects of AI-driven personalization on fan loyalty and satisfaction are crucial avenues for future inquiry. Establishing ethical frameworks for responsible data usage and AI implementation is also a critical research priority.

Sports marketing faces both exciting opportunities and significant challenges. Emerging technologies offer opportunities for innovative engagement and personalized experiences, while intense competition and evolving consumer behaviors present ongoing challenges. Success in this dynamic landscape hinges on creativity, innovation, a thorough understanding of fan psychology, and the ethical and responsible use of data and technology. Collaboration across disciplines—psychology, marketing, technology, and ethics—is crucial to address the challenges and ensure sustainable growth in sports marketing. This requires ongoing adaptation to technological advancements and cultural shifts, necessitating continuous market research, data analytics, and engagement with experts from diverse fields. The future of sports marketing lies in understanding and anticipating evolving fan needs, embracing ethical practices, and utilizing technology responsibly to build enduring and mutually beneficial relationships with loyal fans.

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Section 2

The Consumer and Social
Interactions

Perspective Chapter: The Impact of Generative AI in Shaping Customer Engagement – Humanising Conversational Marketing

Khalil Israfilzade

Abstract

Following recent advancements, this chapter explores how Generative artificial intelligence (AI) shapes customer engagement by introducing human-like elements into conversational marketing. It examines how Generative AI, enhanced with anthropomorphic design, enables brands to create emotionally resonant, personalised, and dynamic customer interactions. This chapter highlights how AI-driven conversational tools adapt to individual consumer needs, fostering personalised experiences while maintaining scalability. The chapter also addresses the ethical considerations and challenges associated with anthropomorphism in AI, such as managing user expectations and maintaining transparency. Furthermore, it outlines practical strategies for businesses to implement AI-driven conversational tools effectively, ensuring alignment with consumer behaviour at micro, meso, and macro levels. By addressing these dynamics, this work outlines actionable strategies for businesses and offers insights into the evolving relationship between technology and consumer behaviour.

Keywords: Generative AI, conversational marketing, customer engagement, anthropomorphism, AI in marketing

1. Introduction

Particularly because of the rapid advancement of digital technologies and the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), the field of marketing has evolved significantly recently [1]. This research extends into the field of conversational marketing, a paradigm change from traditional broadcast marketing and towards a more interactive, customer-centric approach. Key to this change is the integration of Generative AI, which has stretched the limits of consumer interaction and involvement.

This chapter addresses the central problem of understanding how Generative AI's human-like characteristics (*anthropomorphism*) influence customer engagement, altering traditional consumer-brand interactions. Given the ethical complexities and

potential risks of humanising digital communication, it is crucial to examine these dynamics to harness their full potential responsibly.

Academically, this research fills the existing gap by extending current theories on AI-driven marketing interactions, specifically investigating anthropomorphism's psychological impacts on consumers. *Practically*, the chapter offers businesses critical insights into effectively integrating Generative AI into marketing practices, balancing innovation with ethical responsibility.

Historically, companies treated consumers as passive receivers and broadcast material across several media; hence, marketing techniques were mostly one-way [2]. This method lacked personalisation and interactive involvement, even though it was efficient in attracting big audiences. Driven by the growing number of social media platforms, digital marketing has evolved significantly and calls for a deeper strategy appealing to the informed and interactive modern customer [3–5]. Companies can now create more dynamic and emotionally engaging marketing experiences across digital platforms, challenging traditional customer involvement and brand communication methods.

Generative AI implies a group of algorithms capable of generating novel content (text, graphics, or audio) by recognising patterns within large datasets. In contrast to conventional AI models that mainly assess and predict, generative systems excel in producing dynamic, customised, and contextually relevant interactions [1, 6]. This characteristic renders them particularly advantageous in conversational marketing, where the objective is to humanise digital communication and deliver emotionally resonant experiences for consumers [7].

A key element of this progress is anthropomorphism—that is, the integration of human characteristics with AI-powered conversational tools. Marketers believe that employing emotive language, avatars, or human-like language can increase users' trust in AI systems [2, 8]. However, these humanising aspects raise ethical problems about user autonomy, transparency, and the possibility of dishonest relationships. As a result, understanding the relationship between Generative AI and anthropomorphism will assist someone in determining if technology enhances customer relationships or leads to mistrust and discomfort.

It is undeniable that technological advancements significantly influence consumer behaviour at the individual (*micro*), social (*meso*), and global (*macro*) levels. Recognising this, the *purpose of this chapter* is to explore the transformative role of Generative AI—particularly when enhanced by anthropomorphic features—in shaping customer engagement through conversational marketing. The chapter critically analyses how human-like AI interactions influence consumer perceptions, trust, and emotional connections with brands, as well as their potential impacts on business-consumer interactions across various societal levels. Moreover, it addresses both the opportunities and ethical challenges associated with anthropomorphic AI, emphasising thoughtful, transparent, and ethically responsible solutions. By discussing these dynamics comprehensively, this work provides actionable insights for researchers and practitioners, ultimately aiming to foster a future where AI enhances, rather than undermines, human-centric customer relationships.

2. Overview of Generative AI

Generative AI is a class of algorithms that, using patterns obtained from past data, can generate new content—text, images, or audio, among other things. Generative

models actively create, unlike traditional AI systems that mostly classify or predict, which makes them especially valuable in settings that demand high degrees of personalising, adaptability, and real-time interaction [9, 10]. Once trained, they produce outputs that match or extend internalised patterns, frequently to a degree very similar to human-created content. In the marketing domain, this creative capacity can be harnessed to tailor brand communication and engagement strategies at scale [11–13].

Generative AI is a subfield of AI focused on developing systems that can create novel content such as images, text, and music [14]. Key characteristics include the ability to learn from large datasets, recognise patterns, and generate content resembling human-created works [15]. Generative models like Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) and Variational Autoencoders (VAEs) form the foundation of this technology [14, 15]. Recent advancements have enabled sophisticated, creative tasks across various domains, including healthcare, art, and content creation [16–18].

Due to constant changes, generative models are very good at adapting to shifting market conditions, cultural shifts, and consumer preferences [19]. Moreover, after training, Generative AI tools can make it easier to create content, deal with customers, and come up with campaign ideas with little effort [12, 13].

For example, research that studies how Generative AI and cultural heritage can work together indicates that these technologies can make users more interested in stories by letting them interact with them. Furthermore, because the models can always learn and change, Generative AI is a game-changing tool in many areas, such as marketing and education [20, 21].

2.1 Evolution and current applications of AI in marketing

Marketing has moved from traditional AI, which analyses data and automates processes, to Generative AI, which creates new content. This change has transformed marketing strategies, enabling more personalised and engaging consumer interactions. In the early days of AI in marketing, the focus was on automating routine tasks and improving data analysis [22, 23]. For example, predictive analytics were used for audience segmentation, and recommender systems were used to suggest products [24].

AI applications span a wide range of marketing operations, including service support and promotion optimisation [25]. As a result, ethical issues, user well-being, and the use of Generative AI technologies are critical components of AI's future in marketing [26]. Recently, academics have emphasised the relevance of human-centric and ethical methods, pushing for AI systems that boost efficiency while also respecting customer privacy and trust [1, 23, 27, 28].

AI-driven marketing strategies are expected to become more influential in a variety of industries, including retail and healthcare, by balancing innovation with responsible design. In the end, this will change the way brands interact with customers on both a personal and a societal level. Today's Generative AI offers dynamic and interactive solutions that keep customers engaged. Computer programmes called chatbots use AI to talk to people like real people, help customers in real time, and gather useful information [2, 25, 28]. These systems use large-scale transformer models, like GPT, to understand what the user wants, respond with messages that are customised to the user, and change the way they communicate over time [9, 29]. Brands can build stronger trust and loyalty with consumers by providing interactions that are relevant to the context.

Increasingly, these generative capabilities are being integrated with other advanced technologies, such as augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and

Internet of Things (IoT) platforms, to deliver immersive and interactive experiences across touchpoints [29].

Generative AI improves efficiency in content creation and lead generation [30], while also transforming storytelling to resonate with audiences on a personal level [31]. The technology's applications span predictive analytics, real-time personalisation, and consumer behaviour patterning [32]. Major companies like Google, Netflix, and Stitch Fix are already leveraging Generative AI-driven storytelling in their marketing strategies [31].

In brief, the development of AI in marketing has progressed from static automation to dynamic personalisation and creativity. Generative AI is leading the way in these changes, providing unique opportunities to interact with consumers while also highlighting the importance of ethical and responsible use.

3. Anthropomorphism in Generative AI

The term 'anthropomorphism' comes from the Greek words '*anthrōpos*' (ἄνθρωπος), which means 'human', and '*morphē*', which implies 'shape' or 'form'. The term is based on the combination of these words. This term includes a broader range of interpretations in addition to the practice of attributing life to non-living things, which is known as animism. To engage in anthropomorphism, one must go beyond simply describing actions, whether those actions are imagined or observed [1, 2]. In the context of Generative AI, anthropomorphic design elements, such as human-like communication styles or emotive responses, can profoundly influence how users relate to and engage with AI agents.

Using these humanising aspects, marketing experts have started to build closer emotional ties and trust, so increasing customer involvement and satisfaction and ultimately driving customer engagement and satisfaction [33]. But in Generative AI, the design and implementation of anthropomorphism should be handled carefully since oversimplified or deceptive attempts at humanising can cause user uncertainty or mistrust.

3.1 Conceptual foundations of anthropomorphism in technology

Anthropomorphism in technology is based on broader cognitive and social processes in which people assign human characteristics, intentions, or emotions to non-human entities [34]. One explanation for this phenomenon is the human tendency to seek social connections and interpret stimuli in relational terms [35]. According to these theories, when consumers interact with AI platforms, particularly those designed to mimic human conversation, they unconsciously apply social rules and expectations, assessing the AI's behaviour through a human-centric lens [36].

Recent research shows that anthropomorphism is important in Generative AI, especially in conversational marketing and human-computer interactions. Human-like outputs from anthropomorphic AI systems can improve user experiences but raise ethical concerns [1, 37]. Generative AI models like GPT-4o move from linguistic to emotional anthropomorphism, simulating human empathy and resonance [38].

Complex anthropomorphism in technology, especially AI-enabled systems and social robots, affects user perception and interaction [39]. It improves robot functionality and sociality by giving non-humans human traits [40]. As AI-enabled technologies become more common, anthropomorphism could shift additionally

for young [41]. To ensure significant and reliable interactions, however, its application must be guided by an understanding of human cognitive patterns, careful principles of design, and ethical responsibilities.

3.2 Psychological and emotional responses to anthropomorphic AI

Consumer reactions to anthropomorphic AI often extend beyond functional evaluation, encompassing psychological and emotional dimensions that shape perceptions, trust, and engagement [35, 42, 43]. Because anthropomorphism encourages users to treat AI as though it possesses human-like intentions or emotions, consumers may experience heightened empathy and social rapport with the system [44]. This phenomenon can be traced to the human propensity for social interaction and innate tendencies to interpret non-human agents through a human-centric lens [42, 45].

From a psychological standpoint, anthropomorphic cues—such as warm language, emotive responses, or avatar-based representations—can invoke feelings of companionship and perceived social presence [46]. These feelings can strengthen user satisfaction and foster brand loyalty, as individuals are more inclined to build rapport with systems they perceive as relatable and empathetic [35]. Emotional responses such as trust and comfort are common when users believe the AI ‘understands’ them or can express concern, even if the AI’s emotional expressions are algorithmically generated [47].

The degree of AI anthropomorphism can affect users’ self-congruence and may result in self-AI integration, in which users include AI agents in their self-concept [43, 48]. Positive as well as negative effects of this integration could be digital dementia [43, 49] and emotional connection. These results underline the need to know human-AI interactions since they are rather common in daily life.

People have complicated and different opinions about anthropomorphic AI, just like they do about their own beliefs. It depends on how people feel, how much they anthropomorphise, and how trust works. Figuring out how people react helps people improve AI systems that involve people and make their experiences better. Designers may develop AI that people really connect with by giving it just the right amount of human traits and emotional intelligence. The following creates trust and happiness.

3.3 Anthropomorphic design impact on user trust and engagement

Conversational agents’ anthropomorphic design features can greatly affect user interaction and perception. Studies of anthropomorphic agents reveal that they can raise perceived dialogue support, task performance, and trust [1, 50]. For example, chatbots using personal pronouns, emotional language, or humour could seem more approachable and relevant, thus improving user satisfaction [42].

Moreover, strategic personalisation—tailoring responses to individual user preferences or contextual needs—further strengthens perceived human-likeness [45]. However, deploying anthropomorphic elements must be balanced with operational transparency. Overemphasis on human-like behaviours without clarifying the AI’s non-human nature can lead to user confusion or unrealistic expectations, ultimately undermining trust [34, 43, 48].

Nevertheless, adding persuasive design elements may be counterproductive [50]. Anthropomorphic design can also mitigate trust loss following CA failures, acting as a trust shield [51]. Interestingly, combining anthropomorphic cues can have varying effects; for instance, nonverbal cues alone may harm

anthropomorphism but become positive when combined with verbal or human identity cues [52]. Designers must carefully consider these factors to create effective and appropriate anthropomorphic CAs [53].

Findings from studies on anthropomorphic design in human-machine interfaces show that it has different impacts on user trust and engagement. Some studies [54] found a link between perceived anthropomorphism and trust in self-driving cars, but other studies [54] found that trust levels did not change significantly with different levels of anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphic features, such as humanised voices and interactive communication capabilities, can evoke a sense of social presence that may impact user trust positively or negatively [55]. In customer service contexts, anthropomorphic design may serve as a trust shield, mitigating trust loss following conversational agent failures [51].

However, this strong emotional bond also introduces vulnerabilities. If users discover inconsistencies in the AI's human-like presentation, such as abrupt or contextually inappropriate responses, they may feel misled or deceived [43, 52, 53]. Such breaches of perceived authenticity can erode trust quickly, especially if consumers believe the anthropomorphic features were deliberately employed to manipulate them [35].

This raises ethical concerns about manipulating user perceptions. Anthropomorphism may affect user acceptance indirectly by affecting perceived ease of use and usefulness rather than trust [56]. Based on these findings, designers should carefully consider anthropomorphic features in human-machine interfaces. Therefore, AI designers and marketers must carefully calibrate the degree of human-like traits to keep the technology transparent about its limitations.

4. Conversational marketing

Conversational marketing—broadly defined as the use of real-time, one-to-one interactions between brands and consumers—has gained significant momentum in the digital era [1]. By leveraging tools such as chatbots, messaging apps, and AI-driven voice assistants, organisations aim to replicate the immediacy and personalisation of face-to-face communication in virtual settings. These technologies enable more natural and personalised interactions with customers, potentially increasing satisfaction and loyalty [57].

4.1 Foundations of conversational marketing

In the past, traditional marketing has been the standard, with businesses distributing promotional content to consumers as passive receivers across newspapers, radio, television, and early digital platforms. This model allowed companies to reach large audiences but lacked one-on-one personalisation and engagement. The introduction of the digital age and the explosion of social media platforms changed marketing strategies into digital marketing. Customers today are more knowledgeable than they have ever been [3, 4], and they expect experiences that are both personalised and interactive [5]. They want to engage in two-way interactions in which their questions and feedback are quickly acknowledged and valued.

Conversational marketing uses AI to personalise customer experiences so that moving from traditional marketing to real-time dialogues improves customer satisfaction and brand connections [1, 58]. E-commerce and other sectors can use

24/7 conversational agents for one-on-one interactions [5, 13]. Bidirectional communication between chatbots and digital humans has met users' growing demand for immediate help and advice [59].

Conversational marketing provides customers with a personalised and engaging experience that is different from traditional marketing. Conversational marketing relies on discussion, feedback, and real-time change [60]. Interaction captures attention and offers marketers genuine data on consumer needs and preferences [22, 25]. Conversational marketing has become an effective strategy for businesses to differentiate themselves among crowded digital marketplaces as consumers expect on-demand support and personalised experiences [2].

4.2 Historical context and evolution

Conversational marketing originated in the early days of business, when dealing with people one-on-one was the norm. In traditional markets, customers and sellers talk to each other directly, which creates a personalised experience that affects what people buy. Technology and the way people act as consumers have changed this basic rule of human interaction.

Interestingly, these technological advances took decades. To understand conversational marketing's early stages, Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) must be considered [61]. HCI, a multidisciplinary field of research that has existed since personal computing, studies how people communicate with machines to improve technology and user-device communication.

Regardless of industry (B2B or B2C) [62], the ultimate customer is the individual who interacts with the company's website or marketing through a conversational interface. Conversational interfaces are the third major advancement in user interfaces, following Natural User Interfaces (NUIs) and User-centred Programming (UCP) (see **Figure 1**). According to the influential book 'Brave NUI Environment' [63], Command-Line Interfaces (CLI) were originally used to control early machines, but they were later replaced by Graphical User Interfaces (GUI), which use graphical displays and icons. This transition took place during the age of personal computers [64].

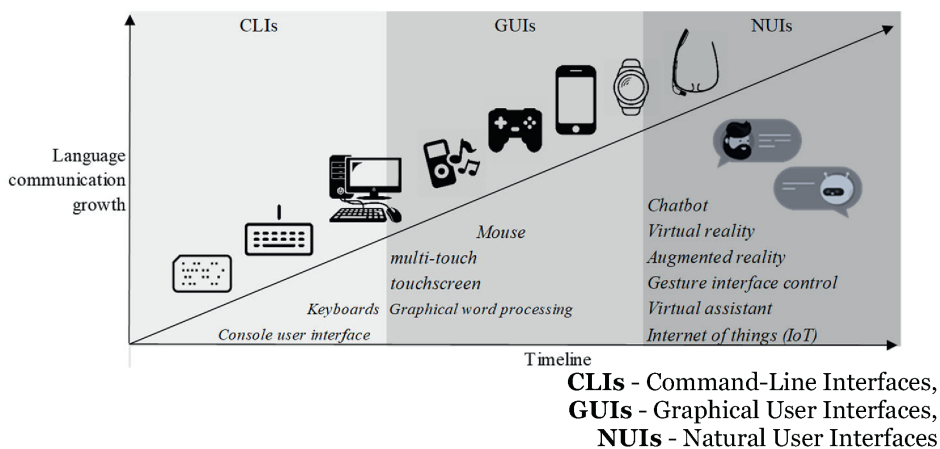


Figure 1.
Evolution of user interfaces.

Early forms of conversational marketing can be traced back to rudimentary interactive programmes like ELIZA, developed in the 1960s, which simulated human conversation through textual input-output exchanges [65]. ELIZA was not originally designed for commercial use, but it showed that computers could have meaningful conversations with users, even if the conversations were scripted. For the next few decades, chat-like systems were mostly used for technical experimentation and customer support hotlines that used simple decision trees [66].

The rapid expansion of the internet and mobile technologies in the late 1990s and early 2000s made it possible to develop more sophisticated conversational tools. Instant messaging and emerging social media platforms introduced new modes of consumer engagement, prompting companies to rethink how they could provide real-time interactions [67].

For the past 50 years, people have been using machines to communicate in their own way by pointing, dragging, swapping, and tapping [5]. Computers are able to adjust and reply to messages by learning our language [68–71]. Businesses that excel in interfaces may also be able to meet their own standards and become more focused on their customers. Businesses want to enhance their relationships with customers and increase their revenue by communicating with customers in the language they prefer, anticipating their needs, and maximising the number of touchpoints throughout their journey.

4.3 Basic principles of conversational marketing

To fully understand conversational marketing, it is crucial to start with a basic comprehension of the term ‘conversation’. The Cambridge English Dictionary [72] defines conversation as a talk between two or more people in which thoughts, feelings, and ideas are expressed; questions are asked and answered; or news and information are exchanged. Academically, conversational marketing is an approach that emphasises real-time, interactive customer engagement through meaningful dialogue [2, 13, 68, 73]. Unlike traditional one-directional marketing communications, it aims to create deeper, personalised relationships with customers by leveraging dialogue to share information, address queries, and gather feedback. In the digital era, where instant messaging platforms dominate online communication [5], most of these interactions now occur on such platforms, which have become the standard for contemporary communication. Because of this, it is possible to figure out the exact parts that make up conversational marketing. This study gives a clear explanation of what conversational marketing is:

‘Conversational marketing is a contemporary marketing approach that utilizes real-time, AI-enhanced, personalized one-to-one interactions across diverse channels to facilitate collaborative brand and product experiences, thereby strengthening customer relationships and enhancing overall customer experience.’

Conversational marketing is a new and progressive strategy that is based on eight fundamental principles (**Table 1**) that were developed specifically for the purpose of this research, according to the author [1, 2, 13].

Conversational marketing entails having meaningful, real-time, personalised conversations with customers who understand their situation. It gives customer needs top priority and shapes interactions to improve relationships. Cross-platform interactions made possible by omnichannel presence improve access. Large-scale customer

Principles of conversational marketing	Description
Customer-centric engagement	This strategy puts the needs, preferences, and feedback of the customer first, making sure that each interaction is unique. To make a deeper, more meaningful connection with the customer, you need to see them as a unique person, not just a part of a large market segment.
Real-time interaction	Real-time communication is one of the most important aspects of conversational marketing. This immediacy imitates the natural flow of a human conversation, making interactions more dynamic and responsive. It is essential to be able to engage customers immediately, whether through chatbots or live agents, in order to build trust and keep their interest.
Personalisation	By means of consumer interactions, preferences, and behaviours, personalising their communication helps companies to make their message relevant and appealing to every person. This degree of personalising goes beyond simply calling a customer by name to include customising material, recommendations, and responses to fit particular needs and interests.
Feedback and adaptability	Conversational marketing is a continual process that relies heavily on client feedback. This means that you must not only listen to what customers have to say but also adapt your plans based on their feedback. This constant feedback and adjustment process ensures that organisations remain relevant and up to date with changing consumer expectations and industry developments.
Omnichannel presence	The concept can be found across a variety of platforms and channels where customers are supposed to interact. Conversational marketing ensures that clients have a consistent and error-free experience across all points of connection, including social media, messaging applications, email and websites. This omnichannel approach improves user experience and accessibility by letting customers interact with brands on any platform.
Scalability and automation	Conversational marketing keeps a personal touch while also using automation to make it easier to grow. Tools like AI-powered chatbots can handle a lot of interactions at once, making things run smoothly without lowering the quality of the interactions. This scalability is important for keeping track of a lot of customers without losing the personal touch.
Contextual understanding	Effective conversational marketing necessitates a thorough awareness of the circumstances around each contact. This includes learning about the consumer's present stage of the purchasing process, previous experiences with the brand, and any possible needs. Contextual knowledge allows for more meaningful and beneficial talks.
Transparency and trust	The core of conversational marketing is building trust. This involves open communication on privacy policies, the use of data, and the nature of interactions driven by AI. Establishing credibility and confidence depends on open communication on the use and protection of consumer data.

Table 1.
Key principles of conversational marketing.

management made possible by AI-powered automation does not compromise personalisation. Considering a customer's path and past interactions guarantees relevance. Privacy, transparency and data consumption help to build trust; thus, conversational marketing is a reliable and interesting modern customer interaction tool.

5. The role of Generative AI in conversational marketing

Generative AI has revolutionised conversational marketing by enabling personalised, scalable, and emotionally engaging interactions. Marketers may improve consumer engagement by leveraging advanced language models, visual engines, and other AI-powered technologies to provide context-aware, adaptable, and human-like communication.

5.1 Personalisation and emotional resonance

Generative AI has many advantages, one of which is its ability to customise communication based on the data of individual users. This data can include browsing history, previous interactions, demographic information, and psychographic profiles [11, 15, 18]. Leveraging large-scale language models, these systems can craft responses that resonate with a user's emotional state or preferences, thereby facilitating deeper engagement [55]. When an AI-driven conversation exhibits warmth, empathy, or humour, customers may perceive the experience as more authentic and thus develop stronger affective bonds with both the technology and the brand.

Emotional resonance is especially significant in marketing contexts where brands strive to differentiate themselves in saturated markets. By mirroring human conversational styles—such as using friendly language or acknowledging user concerns—Generative AI can evoke trust, satisfaction, and loyalty [51, 54]. Nonetheless, striking a balance is crucial.

5.2 Scalability and dynamic interactions

Another key benefit of Generative AI is its capacity to scale personalised conversations across vast consumer bases without sacrificing quality or responsiveness [74]. Traditional customer service models can be resource-intensive, struggling to accommodate spikes in demand or handle diverse enquiries efficiently [66]. In contrast, AI systems can manage concurrent interactions, learning and adapting in real-time as they process feedback loops from user queries.

Iterative learning techniques let AI grow more context-aware over time, producing ever more complex responses reflecting both changing market trends and personal preferences [75, 76]. However, this great dependence on data also emphasises the need for ethical data management and algorithmic openness [77].

5.3 Micro-level implications: Individual consumer decision-making

Generational AI has an impact on how consumers perceive and respond to marketing messages at the micro level. Conversational marketing tools can help users make minor but significant decisions by tailoring responses to their personal preferences, browsing histories, and even real-time emotional states [78]. Consumers are more likely to trust and stick with a chatbot or voice assistant that acknowledges their concerns, uses reassuring language, or recommends relevant alternatives [79, 80].

By 'learning' from continuous interactions, Generative AI also enhances its recommendations and responses, customising every consumer's experience [81]. The more data the AI gathers, the more relevant and accurate its recommendations become, thus raising consumer confidence in the system. Furthermore, Generative AI has the ability to influence the ways in which consumers process information internally.

For instance, a micro-level perspective examines the ways in which chatbots that are driven by AI could affect heuristic or systematic information processing [82]. Consumers may quickly make choices about a product's fit if the AI provides quick, efficient replies (heuristics), whereas if it delivers thorough, context-rich explanations (systematic processing), consumers can devote more cognitive effort to deciding about purchases. In both cases, Generative AI either helps or limits how particular consumers negotiate their path to purchase, posing issues about who finally 'controls' the decision-making process in an AI-mediated market.

5.4 Meso-level implications: Social group influences and network effects

Generative AI interacts, at the meso level, with social and communal dynamics influencing consumer behaviour. Many purchase decisions happen inside a web of social influences—peer opinions, family norms, and community standards—rather than in a vacuum [27, 83]. Conversational marketing solutions can leverage on group dynamics by identifying shared preferences or trends, personalising recommendations to reflect collective interests, and even motivating group participation.

One clear example is the usage of social media group chats or brand communities with AI-powered chatbots. Generative models can thus start or moderate discussions, highlight popular issues, and allow user-generated content—all of which help to foster community belonging [66]. When multiple users share their positive experiences, such as screenshots of compelling AI interactions, this 'social proof' can accelerate the diffusion of brand messages, creating a bandwagon effect that amplifies network adoption [84]. Conversely, if the AI's outputs are perceived as intrusive, irrelevant, or manipulative, the collective backlash on social platforms can rapidly damage a brand's reputation [85].

Furthermore, influencing the structure and expansion of communities built on particular brands or product categories is Generative AI. By segmenting consumers based on shared traits or behaviours, AI can create micro-communities anchored by niche interests, thus strengthening or building brand subcultures. This affects public attitudes on privacy and data ethics as well as those of marketers aiming to build brand loyalty and word-of-mouth advertising [86]. Highly targeted AI content can, on the one hand, improve communal cohesiveness; on the other, it might fuel worries about echo chambers, bias reinforcement, and lack of exposure to many points of view [34].

5.5 Macro-level implications: Market trends, cultural shifts, and global adoption

Generative AI is altering the global market scene, bringing about cultural changes, and hastening technical acceptance. Although conversational marketing driven by AI is becoming more and more popular, companies of all kinds and locations are under more pressure to either adapt or maybe become outdated [2, 12, 57, 75]. For instance, by offering scalable and reasonably priced customer interaction solutions, broad acceptance of AI can help small businesses get beyond entrance challenges. Increased market competitiveness and innovation could follow from this as well. Major multinational companies are also using Generative AI to combine consumer data from several areas, enabling the identification of both general trends and localised consumption behaviour variations [73, 74].

Culturally, the increasing prevalence of AI-mediated interactions is altering consumer expectations regarding immediacy, personalisation, and authenticity [87].

Consumers in various markets now expect seamless, uninterrupted brand interactions at all times, regardless of time zones or language differences. The ability of Generative AI to facilitate multilingual conversations has resulted in a more inclusive and globally connected consumer base [66]. At the same time, different cultural contexts influence the reception of AI; for example, communities with strong privacy standards or collective customs may be more sceptical of AI's extensive personal data collection.

Data protection, algorithmic bias, and consumer communication transparency [47] are among the AI-driven marketing practices that governments all around are discussing how to control. While different regulatory approaches can lead to friction and competitive imbalances in the worldwide marketplace [12], coherent international standards promote cross-border interoperability and trust. At last, even if automation may improve company processes, issues regarding the economic viability of human labour in marketing and job displacement still exist [88]. Consequently, the long-term path of Generative AI and worldwide consumer culture will be influenced by more general societal, economic, and legal forces.

6. Ethical considerations and challenges

Businesses and academics both have a lot of ethical and practical questions as Generative AI takes the front stage in conversational marketing. From controlling user expectations regarding the type of AI interactions to safeguarding personal data, these concerns are vital to building long-term confidence in AI-powered customer engagement.

6.1 Transparency, disclosure, and managing user expectations

Making clear to consumers that they are contacting a machine rather than a human agent is one of the most urgent ethical issues in AI-mediated marketing [89]. Anthropomorphic components can blur the boundaries between human and AI, even while they can boost involvement and user satisfaction. Consumers may feel misled if they discover they have been conversing with an AI system that mimics human-like empathy or emotions [35, 42].

Offering personalised interactions and improved experiences, Generative AI is revolutionising consumer involvement [1, 90]. But this change sets user expectations, which will challenge service designers to regularly surpass them [91]. AI chatbot loyalty is much influenced by user expectations, shaped by human uniqueness and machine capability [92]. Transparency and responsibility are prerequisites for AI-powered customer interaction to foster trust [93]. Many customers worry about algorithm bias and fairness but are not aware of their AI contacts. Overpromising human-like abilities can backfire if the chatbot or voice assistant cannot handle complex questions or shows inconsistent emotions [92, 93]. Reducing these concerns can be achieved by developing easily comprehensible AI models and supporting a transparent culture going beyond legal requirements.

6.2 Data privacy and security concerns

Generative AI lives on data—a lot of it. Data privacy and security issues thus loom big in AI-driven conversational marketing [94]. AI models often feed user enquiries,

profile information, and behavioural metrics into them to improve personalisation and maybe expose consumers to privacy concerns should data handling be less rigorous [22, 25, 77].

Generative AI improves personalisation, efficiency, and consumer insights in marketing [30, 32]. It could change brand-consumer connections with unparalleled content inventiveness and targeted strategies [32]. However, AI marketing presents data privacy problems [95]. Transparent and ethical data acquisition is essential for marketers to prevent legal and reputational issues [95]. For Generative AI systems, differential privacy, federated learning, and homomorphic encryption are being developed to solve these issues [96]. These techniques reduce model inversion and data leakage in big language models. Performance, scalability, and privacy must be balanced; therefore, technical protections and regulatory frameworks must match to comply with data protection rules [96]. Training data biases also have the unintentional ability to induce discrimination. Should generative models rely on skewed or unrepresentative data, the AI could support stereotypes or exclude particular demographic groups [97].

6.3 Responsible use of anthropomorphic design

Anthropomorphic design elements—such as human-like avatars, emotive language, or empathetic tones—can significantly enhance user engagement, but their misuse raises ethical red flags. When AI systems overly simulate human behaviour, consumers may develop attachments or attributions of intent that the technology cannot realistically fulfil [98, 99].

Sidaoui et al. [99] describe managerial guidelines for responsible conversational agent integration using a Corporate Digital Responsibility perspective, with an emphasis on culture, management structure, and digital governance. In their 2023 paper, Kenthapadi et al. [100] discuss the ethical and societal implications of Generative AI, such as bias, privacy, and the truthfulness of content. They stress how important it is to follow responsible AI principles when creating and using big language models in many different areas. These studies show that Generative AI has the potential to make customer engagement better. They also stress how important it is to use AI in an ethical way and think about how it will affect society.

Responsible anthropomorphic design requires combining human traits with obvious signals that the agent is a machine [53, 54, 101]. Not only do overly dishonest or emotionally coercive methods run the danger of user reaction, but they also erode public confidence in AI development. Marketers could consider restrictions, such as banning some sorts of emotional language or identifying the system's non-human status, to ensure that anthropomorphism promotes genuine involvement rather than manipulation [52, 56]. Consequently, AI engineers have to carefully balance being honest about the limits of technology with giving users a good experience. Companies can use anthropomorphic design in a responsible way to make real user experiences by using clear labels, changing scripts that are too emotional, and providing ways for customers to get in touch with real people.

7. Strategies for effective implementation

In conversational marketing, using Generative AI techniques requires both technical know-how and a deep understanding of how customers act on many levels. Aligning AI-driven projects with the psychological, social, and market-wide factors

that affect buying decisions can help businesses get users more involved, build brand loyalty, and deal with ethical issues.

7.1 Alignment with consumer behaviour across levels

7.1.1 Micro level: Individual consumer decision-making

Individual marketing tactics should embrace AI's personalised capabilities—such as context-sensitive recommendations, emotive language, and user preference tracking—to target consumers' specific goals, motivations, and pain areas [98, 102]. Conversational AI can improve trust and emotional resonance by tailoring content and tone based on personal triggers and cognitive biases [103]. However, marketers must maintain clarity regarding data usage and the system's non-human character; crossing personal boundaries or appearing deceitful can weaken customer autonomy and diminish long-term loyalty.

7.1.1.1 Key tactics

- Apply adaptive personalisation that protects consumer privacy and explains data collection and usage.
- Provide clear disclaimers on AI capabilities and limitations.
- Employ machine-learning feedback loops to improve recommendations based on changing tastes.

7.1.2 Meso level: Social group influences and network effects

At the meso level, campaigns must take into account the influence of social networks, communities, and peers on consumption patterns. Generative AI can help with group engagement by managing brand communities, moderating social media conversations, and boosting peer-to-peer product referrals [104]. AI-powered platforms can distribute material that is relevant to shared values and interests by monitoring and analysing group behaviour. Successful applications of AI at this level can boost word-of-mouth marketing and build brand community [105, 106].

7.1.2.1 Key tactics

- Tailor AI interactions to influential social network groupings.
- Utilise AI to identify emerging trends and common pain points in brand communities.
- Follow community guidelines and moderation standards to avoid manipulative speech and maintain collective norms.

7.1.3 Macro level: Market trends, cultural shifts, and global adoption

Organisations should be well aware of shifting market scenarios, cultural attitudes, and regulatory settings on a macro scale when implementing AI-focused

marketing strategies [106, 107]. Generative AI offers powerful analytical capabilities that enable it to track consumer insights around the world, forecast new trends, and tailor messaging to varied cultural contexts [107]. However, the growing usage of AI raises questions about data ethics, potential bias, and societal impact [47, 86]. Using region-specific AI training and cross-cultural collaboration, you can achieve a balance between global brand messaging consistency and local interest.

7.1.3.1 Key tactics

- Monitor international regulations and adjust data governance processes accordingly.
- To stay relevant in different markets, invest in local language models and culturally relevant content.
- Establish AI ethics committees or advisory boards to promote responsible innovation and address concerns about automation's impact on employment and consumer welfare.

Organisations can improve consumer experiences by incorporating micro-, meso-, and macro-level characteristics into conversational marketing. This comprehensive strategy not only maximises Generative AI's potential but also helps to build long-term consumer trust and brand value.

7.2 Integrating AI tools into existing marketing ecosystems

For many companies, the real value of conversational AI shows itself when it is smoothly combined with already-existing marketing systems such as analytics suites [108–110], customer relationship management (CRM), and content management systems. Effective integration gives a whole picture of consumer interactions, maximises productivity, and coordinates communications across media.

1. CRM and data synchronisation

- Streamline data flow by connecting AI-driven chatbots or voice assistants directly to CRM databases. This ensures a single source of truth for customer profiles, purchase histories, and service enquiries.
- Automate data updates in real time, enabling sales or support teams to access the latest conversation transcripts and user preferences.

2. Omnichannel consistency

- Maintain uniform brand guidelines and marketing campaigns across channels, including websites, apps, social platforms, and offline touchpoints.
- Leverage Generative AI to adapt content (e.g. product descriptions or promotional messages) to each platform's format or user base while preserving core brand elements.

3. Analytics and performance tracking

- Integrate AI-driven conversational platforms with analytics tools to monitor key metrics such as user engagement, conversion rates, and sentiment analysis.
- Deploy A/B testing or multivariate experiments to compare conversation flows, message timing, and design elements, refining the user experience over time.

4. Cross-functional collaboration

- Involve stakeholders from marketing, sales, IT, and customer support to plan and execute AI solutions.
- Foster an iterative feedback loop with human agents to identify recurring issues or user pain areas.

5. Scalability and future-proofing

- Choose AI platforms that can evolve with technological advancements, such as improvements in Natural Language Understanding (NLU) or new integration capabilities.
- Update training data on a regular basis to align with market trends, product lines, and consumer behaviour, ensuring accurate conversation flows.

When properly integrated into the marketing ecosystem, AI-powered conversational technologies improve user experiences, lower service costs, guide product development, and reveal new consumer engagement channels, saving companies money. Thus, integrative planning prepares companies for long-term success by adapting to changing consumer expectations and technology.

7.3 The Conversational Marketing Matrix

Managers and researchers in conversational marketing could potentially benefit from the guidance that the research on matrix provides [1, 2]. The matrix thus presents a strategic framework split into four quadrants, each reflecting a unique mix of Generative AI and anthropomorphism, thus providing a complex picture of how various combinations affect conversational marketing strategies.

Generative AI has great promise for conversational marketing, especially when paired with variable degrees of anthropomorphism [1, 2]. To assist academics and managers in navigating these intersections, the *Conversational Marketing Matrix* provides four separate quadrants that demonstrate how varied combinations of technological sophistication and human-like traits can affect consumer experiences. **Figure 2** depicts this strategy framework and the various ways AI-powered technologies might interact with people.

7.3.1 Digital clerk (low Generative AI and low anthropomorphism)

In this fundamental type, AI activities are primarily functional instruments that perform routine, rule-based tasks. Their efficiency relies on providing accurate



Figure 2.
The Conversational Marketing Matrix: intersections of AI and anthropomorphism. Source: Author.

information and timely responses, but a lack of personalisation or human-like features frequently limits engagement to simple, transactional interactions. A simple FAQ chatbot on a retail website, for example, would provide automated responses to frequently asked questions (such as store hours and return policies). It quickly provides factual information without using personalised data or human-like dialogue. Engagement is effective for basic consumer engagements but is limited to deeper personalisation or emotional connection.

7.3.2 Almost human (low Generative AI and high anthropomorphism)

Here, systems project a human-like facade—often through avatars or realistic names—yet rely on relatively simple, pre-scripted dialogue. Users may initially be drawn to the ‘human’ persona, but limited generative capabilities can lead to a disjointed experience if the chatbot’s responses fail to match its highly anthropomorphic appearance. *Example:* A chatbot with a human-sounding name (e.g. ‘Sophie’) and a profile picture that smiles or nods but answers user questions using a predetermined script. It may initially charm users yet risks causing disappointment if the seemingly ‘human’ responses do not match user expectations for depth. *Engagement:* While the high anthropomorphic appeal may draw users in, shallow content development might lead to incongruent or limited interactions over time.

7.3.3 Humanoid echo (high Generative AI and low anthropomorphism)

In this quadrant, AI systems are very good at producing outputs that are dynamic, personalised, and aware of their context without looking like a human. They prioritise functionality over relatability, which leads to efficient, high-level interactions that focus on performance rather than emotional appeal. Think about a voice assistant that does not have a human-like personality (it might just have a simple icon or logo) but is capable of performing complex tasks that require multiple steps, such as scheduling appointments, restocking household items, and providing highly personalised recommendations based on user data and context. This method gives priority to operational quality and rapid problem-solving, making it suitable for users who value speed and capability more than a human-like presence.

7.3.4 Silent genius (high Generative AI and high anthropomorphism)

In the most complicated quadrant, AI systems combine powerful generative capabilities with a human-like presence to provide highly interactive and emotionally intelligent discussions. While this results in immersive user experiences, there is a narrow line between convincing realism and the ‘uncanny valley’ effect, in which extreme human similarity may disturb users. *For example*, an intelligent virtual agent designed for mental health check-ins could use a sophisticated algorithm to learn user emotional patterns and converse in a kind, human-sounding manner. It can offer compassionate follow-up, remember past sessions, and change its tone depending on the user’s mood. Though it can offer quite immersive experiences, engagement has to combine comfort with the ‘uncanny valley’. If not well controlled, consumers may find too human-like traits disturbing.

In practical terms, businesses have to invest in the infrastructure and ethical guidelines that are necessary for the successful implementation of Generative AI. It is equally important to continuously improve user interactions, adjust to consumer preferences, and try out different AI modalities in order to enhance user interactions. Companies can use the four-quadrant architecture of the Conversational Marketing Matrix to intentionally place themselves in a rapidly changing environment. This allows them to create conversational marketing campaigns that are both innovative and based on principles that focus on the consumer.

8. Conclusion

Generative AI is changing conversational marketing by allowing scalable, personalised, and emotionally appealing customer engagements. When combined with varying levels of anthropomorphism, these technologies have the potential to improve customer satisfaction, strengthen brand loyalty, and alter marketing strategies at the micro, meso, and macro levels. However, as the lines between humans and machines become fuzzy, ethical considerations such as transparency, data privacy, and consumer autonomy become more important for maintaining trust and promoting meaningful relationships.

Theoretically, this chapter contributes to the existing academic literature on Generative AI and conversational marketing by researching deeper into how anthropomorphic characteristics influence consumer interactions with AI-driven technologies. It advances theory by describing behavioural mechanisms—such as trust-building, emotional resonance, and perceived authenticity—that mediate consumer reactions to anthropomorphised AI. Furthermore, the proposed Conversational Marketing Matrix adds theoretical value by providing a structured framework for categorising and forecasting the effectiveness of various combinations of Generative AI capabilities and anthropomorphic design features in marketing contexts.

Empirically, this chapter establishes a basis for future research via the Conversational Marketing Matrix, which serves as an analytical instrument in empirical investigations. This matrix enables empirical testing of consumer engagement outcomes across various marketing scenarios by clearly identifying dimensions of AI complexity and anthropomorphism. Additionally, this chapter synthesises current evidence, providing practical examples from contemporary business contexts, thus offering marketers empirically grounded insights for the effective and ethical implementation of Generative AI technologies in real-world applications.

Practically, the Conversational Marketing Matrix, which is introduced in this chapter, provides a strategic framework for balancing AI sophistication with conversation design. It offers practical insights for organisations to navigate this developing field. In order to successfully employ Generative AI for conversational marketing, it is important to find a balance between technological innovation and ethical responsibility. This means that AI-powered products should empower users while respecting their personal limits. Marketers must prioritise interdisciplinary collaboration, careful user testing, and attention to ethical principles as the use of AI expands. This will allow them to better align technological advancements with changing consumer expectations. This careful approach will contribute to a future in which AI improves, rather than diminishes, the human aspect of marketing.

Conversational marketing, which makes use of Generative AI, represents a significant improvement in the way that businesses and customers communicate with each other. As the industry continues to change, it is important to maintain a balance between technological progress and ethical concerns. This will ensure that AI improves the human element of marketing rather than diminishing it. In order to successfully navigate this environment, one must take a thoughtful strategy that combines creativity with accountability and a thorough awareness of the always-changing demands and expectations of the client.

Despite these contributions, this chapter has certain *limitations*. First, while the framework is conceptually robust, empirical validation through qualitative and quantitative studies is required to test its real-world applicability fully. Additionally, the discussion predominantly centres on AI's positive potential and ethical considerations, potentially overlooking unintended consequences or adverse effects on consumer psychology or market dynamics.

Future research should address these limitations by empirically examining consumer reactions to various combinations of AI sophistication and anthropomorphic features, ideally using longitudinal studies to track changing consumer attitudes over time. Furthermore, investigating cross-cultural differences in consumer acceptance and trust of anthropomorphic AI would increase the proposed frameworks' global applicability. Finally, future research could look into how Generative AI influences competitive dynamics in specific industries, identifying the conditions under which AI-driven strategies provide long-term competitive advantages.

In conclusion, while Generative AI has transformative potential for conversational marketing, realising it responsibly necessitates ongoing research, critical reflection on ethical implications, and a balanced consideration of both human and technological dimensions in customer engagement strategies.


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Chapter

Perspective Chapter: The Role of Social Influence on Consumer Behavior

Natavan Namazova

Abstract

The role of social influence in consumer behavior examines how social groups, norms, reference groups, opinion leaders, and peers shape individual purchasing decisions. Social networks and peer interactions, both offline and online, play a significant role in determining consumer preferences and actions. Understanding these influences allows marketers to tailor strategies better to align with group dynamics and social trends, maximizing product appeal and adoption. Social influence is a key factor shaping consumer behavior, impacting decision-making through various social dynamics. Consumers are influenced by social groups (primary and secondary) that create norms, guiding acceptable behaviors and preferences. Reference groups, whether aspirational, associative, or dissociative, compare consumers' attitudes and behaviors. Within these groups, opinion leaders exert significant influence by endorsing or rejecting products, often driving trends. Peer influence is particularly powerful, especially among younger consumers, where identity and social belonging heavily shape consumption choices. With the rise of social networks, peer influence has extended into the digital sphere, amplifying the impact of reviews, recommendations, and social trends shared online. Social influence plays a fundamental role in shaping consumer behavior by determining how individuals make purchasing decisions through interactions with social groups, opinion leaders, and digital networks. This study explores the psychological, sociological, and economic drivers of consumer behavior, particularly within the framework of green consumption. Despite the increasing relevance of sustainability in modern economies, the concept of green consumption remains underexplored in terms of its social influences.

Keywords: social influence, consumer behavior, green consumption, social groups, reference groups, social networks, opinion leaders, sustainability

1. Introduction

Consumer behavior is profoundly shaped by social influence, which encompasses the impact that individuals, groups, and societal norms have on decision-making and consumption patterns. Whether through direct interpersonal interactions, indirect societal pressures, or mediated experiences via digital platforms, social

influence plays a pivotal role in guiding what consumers choose to purchase, use, or recommend. At its core, social influence leverages the human need for connection, belonging, and acceptance. People often look to others for cues on how to behave, particularly in uncertain situations or when making high-stakes decisions. This influence can operate at multiple levels:

1. Interpersonal influence: Friends, family, and colleagues provide trusted advice, set trends, and validate choices. For instance, word-of-mouth recommendations often hold more weight than advertisements due to their perceived authenticity [1].
2. Group dynamics and social norms: Social norms establish expectations for acceptable behavior within a group or society. Consumers tend to conform to these norms to avoid social rejection or to align themselves with a desired identity. Group dynamics can inhibit or enhance consumer decision-making, shaping participation in collective activities [2, 3].
3. Mass influence and social proof: Consumer decisions are influenced by both close social connections and the broader crowd, depending on contextual factors. The behavior of larger crowds or communities often influences individual decisions, creating a ripple effect that amplifies trends and behaviors [4].
4. Digital and media influence: The rise of social media and digital platforms has exponentially increased the reach and immediacy of social influence. Influencers, online reviews, and shared content have become key drivers of consumer behavior, blurring the lines between peer recommendation and marketing [5, 6].

In an era where consumers are inundated with choices, social influence acts as a heuristic—a mental shortcut—that simplifies decision-making. By observing and imitating others, individuals can make quicker, more confident decisions, often in alignment with societal expectations or aspirations. Moreover, the emotions and experiences tied to social connections—such as shared enjoyment or collective participation—enhance the perceived value of products and services [7, 8].

Thus, understanding the mechanisms and contexts of social influence is crucial for marketers, businesses, and policymakers alike. It provides insights into effectively engaging consumers, fostering loyalty, and promoting socially beneficial behaviors, such as sustainable consumption [9]. This chapter delves into these dynamics, examining the various forms of social influence and their implications for consumer behavior across traditional and digital landscapes.

2. Historical perspective on green consumption

The concept of green consumption has evolved over time, shaped by environmental movements, policy changes, and shifts in consumer awareness. The origins of sustainable consumption can be traced back to the 1960s and 1970s, when environmental concerns gained global attention due to rising pollution levels and resource depletion. Landmark events such as the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) and the establishment of Earth Day in 1970 raised awareness about the impact of consumer choices on the environment. During the 1980s and 1990s, governments and organizations began implementing regulations and certifications,

such as the EU Eco-label (1992) and the Energy Star program (1992), to encourage businesses to adopt sustainable practices. The twenty-first century has seen a rapid expansion of green consumerism, driven by digital advocacy, corporate sustainability commitments, and increasing consumer preference for ethically produced goods. Understanding the historical trajectory of green consumption provides context for its current trends and highlights the role of social influence in promoting sustainable purchasing behavior.

Consumer behavior is significantly influenced by social interactions, with individuals often making purchasing decisions based on societal norms, peer recommendations, and expert opinions. In recent years, the shift toward sustainability has added a new dimension to consumer choices, yet the role of social influence in green consumption has not been fully examined. This chapter seeks to bridge this gap by analyzing how reference groups, digital networks, and cultural factors affect the adoption of environmentally friendly products. A key challenge in promoting green consumption is the lack of clear communication regarding its benefits and the persistence of traditional consumption habits. Understanding the factors that drive social influence can help marketers and policymakers develop more effective strategies to encourage sustainable purchasing behavior. This chapter also emphasizes the importance of regulatory frameworks and corporate social responsibility initiatives in shaping consumer trust and long-term behavioral changes.

3. Psychological and sociological drivers of green consumption

Green consumption is influenced by both psychological factors and sociological forces. These drivers shape how people perceive and choose eco-friendly products and practices. Understanding these influences helps explain why some consumers prioritize sustainability while others face barriers.

3.1 Psychological drivers

Environmental awareness—People who understand environmental issues like climate change and pollution are more likely to choose sustainable products. Raising awareness through education and media campaigns plays a big role in encouraging green choices [10].

Values and beliefs—Many consumers are guided by their values and beliefs. They may feel a moral responsibility to protect the environment for future generations or believe in ethical practices like fair trade and sustainability. Health and well-being also drive green consumption. Products like organic foods or non-toxic cleaners are often viewed as safer and healthier options [11].

Perceived benefits—Green products often offer personal benefits, such as saving money on energy bills or enjoying better quality. At the same time, there are societal benefits, like reducing pollution or supporting sustainable industries, which appeal to socially conscious consumers.

Behavioral economics—Small nudges, like placing eco-friendly products at eye level in stores, can influence choices without forcing them. Fear of losing natural resources or worsening environmental problems also motivates people to act sustainably.

Trust and credibility—Certifications and eco-labels build trust in green products. However, skepticism about false claims, known as greenwashing, can make consumers hesitant to buy.

Habits—Once people incorporate sustainable practices into their daily routines, these behaviors become habits, making green consumption easier and more consistent over time.

Consumers’ willingness to adopt green products is often influenced by personal beliefs, environmental awareness, and perceived benefits. Psychological factors such as cognitive biases, trust in green labels, and the desire for social approval play crucial roles in determining whether an individual chooses sustainable options.

3.2 Sociological drivers

Social norms—People are influenced by what others around them are doing. If green behaviors like recycling or using reusable bags are common in a community, individuals are more likely to follow suit [12].

Cultural context—Different cultures place varying levels of importance on sustainability. In some societies, collective responsibility for the environment is deeply ingrained, while in others, individual benefits take priority.

Peer influence—Friends, family, and social circles significantly affect purchasing decisions. If peers adopt green lifestyles, it can encourage others to do the same.

Media and advertising—Emotional stories and relatable campaigns about saving the planet or improving communities can inspire action. Social media also amplifies these messages, making sustainability more visible and aspirational [13].

Demographics—Younger generations, like Millennials and Gen Z, are generally more inclined toward sustainability. Urban residents often have better access to green products than those in rural areas, where availability may be limited [9].

Community engagement—Local initiatives, such as recycling drives or environmental clean-ups, bring people together and create a shared sense of purpose. These collective efforts often lead to stronger commitments to sustainable practices.

Social norms, peer influence, and cultural factors strongly shape consumer decisions. Research indicates that individuals are more likely to engage in green consumption when sustainable behaviors are widely accepted within their communities. Digital networks further amplify these effects, as online reviews and social media campaigns enhance visibility and credibility (**Table 1**).

Psychological and sociological factors are deeply interconnected when it comes to green consumption. To promote sustainable behaviors, it is important to address these drivers through education, supportive communities, and credible marketing strategies. By understanding what motivates people and removing barriers, we can encourage more widespread adoption of sustainable practices.

Category	Key factors	Examples
Psychological drivers	Environmental awareness, values and beliefs, perceived benefits, behavioral economics, trust and credibility, habits	Choosing a hybrid car due to environmental awareness and cost savings, preferring organic food for health.
Sociological drivers	Social norms, cultural context, peer influence, media influence, demographics, community engagement	Participating in a community recycling program influenced by social media campaigns promoting reusable products.

Table 1.
Behavioral drivers: Psychological and sociological perspectives.

4. Economic factors influencing green consumption

Economic factors significantly shape consumer behavior toward green consumption. These factors determine the affordability, availability, and perceived value of sustainable products and services.

Price sensitivity and willingness to pay—Price is a major factor influencing consumer choices. Many eco-friendly products come with a premium price due to higher production costs, sustainable materials, and certifications. While some consumers, particularly those with higher incomes, are willing to pay more for green products, price sensitivity remains a barrier for others. Lower-income consumers often prioritize affordability over sustainability. However, long-term savings from energy-efficient appliances or durable goods can offset the initial cost, making green products more appealing.

Income levels and financial support—Higher income levels generally correlate with greater adoption of green products. Consumers with more disposable income are more likely to invest in sustainable alternatives, especially when motivated by ethical or health concerns. For lower-income groups, financial support mechanisms like subsidies, tax rebates, or grants can reduce the financial burden and encourage green consumption. For example, subsidies for electric vehicles or renewable energy installations have significantly increased adoption rates in various regions.

Government policies and incentives—Policy-driven incentives play a crucial role in making green consumption financially viable. Governments can introduce tax benefits, rebates, or low-interest loans to promote eco-friendly purchases. Carbon pricing mechanisms, such as carbon taxes or cap-and-trade systems, discourage unsustainable practices and shift consumer preferences toward greener options. Regulatory measures, like bans on single-use plastics or energy efficiency standards, also create a supportive environment for sustainable choices.

Availability and market accessibility—The availability of green products and services influences consumer adoption. Businesses that scale up the production of sustainable goods can lower costs through economies of scale, making these products competitive with conventional alternatives. Expanding market access, particularly in rural or underserved areas, ensures that more consumers can make eco-friendly choices. Online platforms and e-commerce sites have further improved accessibility by offering a wide range of green products [14].

Perceived value and cost-benefit analysis—Consumers are more likely to adopt green consumption when they perceive clear benefits. For instance, energy-efficient appliances not only reduce electricity bills but also have a lower environmental impact. Similarly, durable products with longer lifespans provide greater value for money. Businesses can enhance perceived value by clearly communicating the economic and environmental advantages of their products, supported by credible certifications and eco-labels.

Impact on economic growth—Green consumption drives the growth of sustainable industries, creating jobs in renewable energy, recycling, and eco-friendly manufacturing. It fosters innovation, as businesses develop new technologies and products to meet consumer demand. Additionally, supporting local green businesses contributes to community economic development, reinforcing the benefits of sustainable consumption.

Global economic trends—Global economic trends also influence green consumption. During periods of economic growth, consumers are more likely to invest in sustainable products. Conversely, economic downturns may reduce disposable income, shifting priorities toward cost-effective but less sustainable options. International

trade policies and tariffs on green technologies can affect pricing and availability, shaping consumer behavior on a broader scale.

Economic factors are critical to understanding and promoting green consumption. Addressing price sensitivity, improving access, and providing financial incentives can bridge the gap between consumer intentions and actions. Governments, businesses, and consumers must work together to create a sustainable economic environment that supports green choices.

Price sensitivity remains a significant barrier to green consumption. Many eco-friendly products have higher upfront costs, deterring price-conscious consumers. However, financial incentives such as tax rebates, subsidies, and long-term cost savings can counteract this challenge and encourage the wider adoption of green products.

5. Barriers to green consumption

Several challenges prevent the wider adoption of green consumption. Many people find green products too expensive. Others lack information about their benefits or worry about false claims, known as greenwashing. Some think green options are inconvenient or ineffective. Limited availability and weak infrastructure, like a few recycling facilities, also discourage people. Addressing these barriers requires collaboration between governments, businesses, and communities.

Psychological barriers, such as resistance to change or a preference for familiar brands, can also hold consumers back. In some cases, people may feel their individual actions are too small to make a difference, leading to inaction. Systemic issues, like poor urban planning or lack of access to sustainable products in rural areas, further compound these challenges. Overcoming these barriers involves not just awareness campaigns but also tangible efforts to make green consumption easier and more rewarding.

Despite growing awareness and interest in sustainable practices, several barriers hinder the widespread adoption of green consumption. These barriers include economic, informational, psychological, and systemic challenges that need to be addressed to promote sustainable behaviors effectively.

5.1 Economic barriers

1. Higher costs of green products: Green products often carry a premium price due to sustainable materials, ethical production processes, and certifications. This cost disparity makes them less accessible, especially for low-income consumers who prioritize affordability over sustainability.
2. Limited financial incentives: Inadequate subsidies, tax breaks, or financial support for purchasing green products further discourage consumers from adopting sustainable practices. High upfront costs for items like electric vehicles or solar panels often outweigh perceived benefits.

5.2 Lack of awareness and information

1. Low awareness levels: Many consumers remain unaware of the availability and benefits of green products. Limited visibility in advertising and retail outlets contributes to this issue.

2. Complexity of understanding green claims: Misinterpretation or skepticism about eco-labels and certifications often leads to mistrust in green claims. Terms like “organic,” “sustainable,” or “biodegradable” may be confusing or perceived as greenwashing.
3. Limited educational campaigns: Insufficient public awareness initiatives reduce consumer confidence in green products and their environmental impact.

5.3 Psychological barriers

1. Skepticism toward green claims: Greenwashing—false or exaggerated sustainability claims—undermines consumer trust and deters green consumption.
2. Perceived ineffectiveness: Some individuals believe their green choices are insignificant in addressing global environmental challenges, leading to a sense of futility.
3. Inconvenience: Green products or services may require more effort or lifestyle adjustments, such as recycling or switching to reusable items, making them less attractive to consumers.
4. Status quo bias: Consumers often prefer familiar products over newer, sustainable alternatives due to resistance to change.

5.4 Systemic and structural barriers

1. Limited availability of green products: Green products are not always widely available, particularly in rural or underserved areas. High transportation costs and logistical challenges further limit accessibility.
2. Supply chain challenges: High costs and logistical issues in sourcing sustainable materials result in limited availability and higher prices, affecting consumer choices.
3. Weak regulatory frameworks: Inadequate enforcement of environmental policies allows unsustainable practices to persist. The absence of incentives or penalties to encourage green consumption limits consumer motivation.

5.5 Social and cultural barriers

1. Cultural norms and habits: Societies with deeply ingrained consumption habits may resist adopting green alternatives. For example, single-use plastics or fossil-fuel-based energy sources are often entrenched in daily life.
2. Peer influence and social norms: A lack of visible green behavior among peers can reduce motivation to adopt sustainable practices. Consumers may feel isolated or unsupported in their choices [12].

Overcoming these barriers requires collaboration among governments, businesses, and consumers. Strategies include increasing public awareness through educational campaigns, offering financial incentives like subsidies or tax breaks,

and strengthening regulations to enforce corporate accountability. Improving the accessibility and affordability of green products can also encourage broader adoption. Building trust through transparent communication and reliable certifications is essential to combat skepticism and promote long-term behavior change.

6. The role of marketing and communication

Marketing can bridge the gap between awareness and action. Campaigns that educate people about the benefits of green consumption are crucial. Transparent communication builds trust, especially when backed by certifications. Social media and e-commerce platforms help reach a wider audience. Discounts and promotions make green products more appealing. Telling relatable stories about the impact of green choices can inspire consumers to act.

Marketing strategies must address different consumer segments. For example, eco-enthusiasts respond well to detailed information about a product's sustainability, while occasional green consumers might need incentives like discounts or rewards. Companies can also use emotional appeals, such as highlighting how green products benefit future generations. By leveraging technology and data analytics, marketers can create personalized campaigns that resonate with diverse audiences. Marketing and communication play a pivotal role in promoting green consumption by influencing consumer awareness, attitudes, and behaviors. Effective strategies can bridge the gap between intention and action, making green products and practices more appealing to a wider audience.

Building awareness—Educational campaigns are critical in raising awareness about the benefits of green consumption. Highlighting the environmental, economic, and social advantages of sustainable choices helps consumers understand their importance. Clear and concise messaging, combined with relatable examples, ensures the information resonates with diverse audiences [9].

Establishing trust—Building trust is essential to encourage green consumption. Consumers often doubt the authenticity of green claims due to past instances of greenwashing. Transparent communication about product sustainability, supported by credible certifications and eco-labels, helps establish confidence. Sharing stories about the brand's commitment to sustainability and its measurable impact further reinforces trust.

Leveraging digital platforms—Digital marketing provides opportunities to engage with consumers on a personal level. Social media platforms, websites, and mobile apps allow brands to showcase their green initiatives and products to a global audience. Influencer collaborations and user-generated content campaigns can amplify the message, making green lifestyles more aspirational and relatable. For example, social media challenges that promote eco-friendly habits can quickly gain traction and inspire action.

Personalized marketing strategies—Understanding consumer behavior enables businesses to tailor their marketing efforts. Data analytics tools can segment audiences based on their preferences, demographics, or purchasing habits. Personalized advertisements, recommendations, and targeted email campaigns ensure that green messages reach the right consumers effectively.

Promoting cost-effectiveness—Many consumers perceive green products as expensive. Marketing campaigns should emphasize the long-term savings associated with sustainable choices, such as reduced energy bills or product durability. Offering

discounts, loyalty rewards, or subsidies for eco-friendly purchases can also attract cost-conscious consumers.

Using storytelling to connect—Emotional storytelling is a powerful way to engage consumers. Narratives that highlight the positive impact of green consumption on future generations, local communities, or endangered ecosystems create a sense of purpose and connection. These stories can be shared through videos, blogs, or testimonials, making the benefits of sustainability tangible and relatable.

Incorporating nudges—Behavioral economics techniques, like nudging, can subtly influence consumer behavior. For example, placing eco-friendly products at eye level in stores or offering reusable bag discounts encourages sustainable choices without overt pressure. Highlighting the popularity of green products, such as “most purchased” or “customer favorite,” can leverage social proof to drive adoption [15].

Fostering community engagement—Creating a sense of community around green consumption strengthens its appeal. Brands can organize events, workshops, or online forums to encourage collective action. For example, hosting recycling drives or eco-education programs fosters collaboration and reinforces the importance of sustainability.

Aligning with global goals—Linking marketing and business strategies to global sustainability goals, like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is an effective way to show responsibility and connect with environmentally conscious consumers. Highlighting specific goals, such as SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) or SDG 13 (Climate Action), can showcase a company’s commitment. For example, businesses can emphasize using sustainable materials or reducing emissions in their supply chains, making it clear how their efforts contribute to global priorities. Promoting climate action through campaigns that actively support environmental solutions, such as funding renewable energy projects or organizing tree-planting drives, demonstrates meaningful action. Businesses can involve customers by linking sales to donations for climate initiatives, creating a sense of shared purpose. Encouraging responsible consumption involves educating consumers about sustainable practices, like recycling or choosing eco-friendly products. Brands can take steps, like launching programs to collect and recycle used products, fostering a circular economy that aligns with global goals. Consumers value measurable results and progress updates. Sharing data on reduced carbon footprints, energy savings, or waste diversion builds trust. Publishing sustainability reports tied to SDGs demonstrates accountability and enhances consumer loyalty. Timing campaigns around major sustainability events, like Earth Day or the UN Climate Action Summit, can add relevance. Highlighting participation in international efforts, such as the Paris Agreement, shows that a business is committed to broader global initiatives [9].

Collaborating with organizations, governments, or other businesses working toward similar goals can amplify the impact. Collaboration also shows consumers that the brand is part of a larger movement, rather than acting in isolation. By aligning with global goals, businesses can demonstrate their commitment to meaningful action and connect with consumers who support positive change. This approach strengthens reputations, fosters loyalty, and contributes to a sustainable future [9, 13].

Measuring impact—Tracking the effectiveness of marketing campaigns is crucial for continuous improvement. Metrics such as increased sales of green products, social media engagement, or changes in consumer attitudes provide insights into what works and where adjustments are needed. Businesses can use these findings to refine their strategies and expand their reach.

Marketing and communication are indispensable tools for driving green consumption. By building awareness, fostering trust, and leveraging digital platforms, businesses can inspire consumers to adopt sustainable practices. Tailored strategies, coupled with transparency and emotional connection, ensure that green products and lifestyles become the preferred choice for a growing audience.

7. Technological and digital influence

Technology makes green consumption easier and more efficient. Online platforms give people access to a variety of eco-friendly products. Artificial intelligence personalizes recommendations based on preferences. Blockchain technology tracks supply chains, ensuring transparency. Smart devices like energy-efficient appliances help people save resources. These tools simplify sustainable living and encourage more people to adopt green habits.

Digital platforms, like e-commerce websites, enable consumers to compare products based on their environmental impact. Apps and tools that calculate carbon footprints or suggest sustainable alternatives empower users to make informed decisions. Additionally, social media campaigns and influencer collaborations can amplify the reach of green messaging, creating a culture of sustainability among online communities [10, 16].

Technology and digital platforms have revolutionized the way consumers interact with green products and services, making sustainable consumption more accessible, efficient, and engaging. These tools play a pivotal role in promoting green lifestyles by enhancing awareness, simplifying decision-making, and fostering accountability.

E-commerce platforms—Online marketplaces have transformed access to eco-friendly products. Platforms like Amazon's Climate Pledge Friendly section or dedicated green e-commerce sites make it easier for consumers to discover and purchase sustainable goods. Features such as filters for eco-certified products or detailed product descriptions improve transparency and support informed decision-making. The convenience of online shopping further encourages adoption [17].

Artificial intelligence (AI)—AI-powered tools personalize the green consumption experience. By analyzing consumer preferences and behaviors, AI can recommend eco-friendly alternatives tailored to individual needs. For instance, an AI-enabled shopping assistant might suggest energy-efficient appliances or sustainable fashion options based on prior purchases. AI also plays a role in optimizing supply chains, reducing waste, and minimizing the carbon footprint of product delivery.

Blockchain technology—Blockchain ensures transparency and trust in green claims. By providing an immutable record of a product's journey from production to purchase, blockchain technology verifies the authenticity of eco-certifications and sustainability practices. For example, consumers can scan a QR code on product packaging to access information about sourcing, manufacturing, and environmental impact, reducing concerns about greenwashing.

Internet of Things (IoT)—IoT-enabled devices promote sustainable living by optimizing resource use. Smart home technologies, such as thermostats, lighting systems, and appliances, help consumers reduce energy and water consumption. Real-time feedback from these devices enables users to track and adjust their habits, fostering more conscious resource management. For example, smart irrigation systems ensure efficient water use in gardens [18].

Mobile applications—Apps designed for sustainability empower consumers to make greener choices. Carbon footprint calculators, for instance, allow users to assess and reduce their environmental impact. Apps like Good On You, which rates brands based on ethical and environmental performance, or JouleBug, which gamifies eco-friendly actions, engage users and encourage behavior change. Gamification features, such as earning points or rewards for sustainable actions, make the process enjoyable and motivating [19].

Social media and digital marketing—Social media platforms amplify green messages and create communities around sustainability. Influencers and brands use platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook to showcase eco-friendly products and share tips for sustainable living. Hashtags and challenges, such as #PlasticFreeJuly or #SustainableStyle, foster participation and raise awareness. Social media also facilitates conversations and peer influence, encouraging users to adopt green practices [20–22].

Big data analytics—Data-driven insights into consumer behavior help businesses understand trends and preferences in green consumption. Big data enables companies to track demand for sustainable products, identify barriers to adoption, and tailor their offerings accordingly. For example, analyzing search trends on e-commerce platforms can reveal growing interest in specific categories like plant-based foods or zero-waste products.

Virtual and Augmented Reality (VR/AR)—Immersive technologies like VR and AR bring sustainability to life. Virtual tours of eco-friendly factories or AR experiences that demonstrate a product's lifecycle can educate consumers about sustainability. Interactive features, such as visualizing how a solar panel installation would look on a home, make green products more tangible and appealing.

Blockchain-powered certifications—Certifications stored on blockchain provide a reliable way to verify the sustainability of products. This technology eliminates the risk of counterfeit labels and offers consumers an added layer of assurance. Eco-conscious buyers increasingly value transparency in sourcing, production, and supply chains.

Crowdfunding and peer-to-peer platforms—Crowdfunding sites like Kickstarter and Indiegogo support the development of innovative green products. Peer-to-peer platforms encourage resource sharing, such as carpooling apps or community-based lending of tools and equipment. These initiatives reduce consumption and promote collaborative sustainability.

Digital campaigns and behavior change—Online campaigns that nudge consumers toward green behavior are highly effective. Limited-time offers on eco-friendly products, default green options during online checkouts, and personalized messages highlighting a consumer's environmental impact are examples of digital strategies that drive adoption. Behavioral economics principles, such as social proof or framing messages around community benefits, further enhance the impact of digital campaigns.

Technological and digital innovations are key enablers of green consumption. By increasing accessibility, providing transparency, and offering personalized experiences, these tools make sustainable choices easier and more attractive for consumers. As technology continues to evolve, its role in fostering green lifestyles and reducing environmental impact will only grow. Businesses and policymakers must leverage these advancements to accelerate the transition toward a more sustainable future.

8. Policy and regulatory influence

Government policies play a big role in promoting green consumption. Subsidies and tax rebates reduce consumer costs. Strict standards ensure companies meet sustainability goals. Public awareness campaigns educate people about green options. International agreements like the Paris Accord push countries to align their policies with global goals. Governments can encourage businesses and individuals to make sustainable choices by setting clear guidelines and offering incentives.

Policy measures like bans on single-use plastics or mandatory recycling programs create systemic changes that make green behavior the norm. Governments can also support research and development in green technologies, fostering innovation and lowering costs. Collaboration between the public and private sectors is essential for creating lasting change, ensuring that green consumption is both accessible and impactful.

To understand green consumption, it is important to measure behavior. Surveys and focus groups provide insights into motivations and barriers. Sales data show trends in demand for sustainable products. Digital tools track online engagement with green campaigns. Behavioral metrics like repeat purchases highlight what works and what does not. These methods help businesses and policymakers create strategies to promote sustainable choices. Advanced tools, like big data analytics and AI, can identify patterns in consumer behavior, revealing opportunities for targeted interventions. For instance, analyzing search trends on e-commerce platforms can help businesses stock more popular green products. Metrics such as reductions in plastic use or increases in sales of eco-labeled items provide tangible indicators of progress.

9. Conclusion

Green consumption is essential for a sustainable future. By understanding what drives people to go green and addressing the barriers they face, businesses and governments can create solutions that work. Combining marketing, technology, and policy can make green options more appealing and accessible. As more people adopt sustainable habits, the collective impact will help achieve global goals and protect the planet for future generations. Encouraging green consumption requires a holistic approach, addressing economic, psychological, and structural factors. It is not just about individual actions but also about creating systems that make sustainability the easiest and most rewarding choice for everyone. Through collaboration and innovation, green consumption can become a cornerstone of a more sustainable world.

This chapter highlights the importance of social influence in shaping consumer behavior, particularly in the context of green consumption. Findings suggest that strategies leveraging peer influence, digital engagement, and credible endorsements can significantly improve the adoption of sustainable products. Policymakers and businesses should focus on transparent communication, financial incentives, and community-driven campaigns to enhance consumer trust and participation in sustainable consumption.

Furthermore, fostering long-term consumer engagement requires an integrated approach that combines regulatory frameworks, corporate social responsibility, and digital marketing strategies to reinforce positive behavioral changes.

10. Future research directions

Future studies should explore the long-term effectiveness of social influence strategies on green consumption, particularly in different cultural and economic contexts. Investigating the intersection of behavioral economics and digital marketing in promoting sustainability could provide deeper insights into effective policy and business strategies. Additionally, empirical research on the role of artificial intelligence and big data analytics in shaping consumer decisions regarding sustainable products remains an important area for future exploration.

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Section 3

Consumption and Macro Systems

Chapter 6

Sustainable Business Models and their Impact on Consumer Behaviour and Motivation

Ana Todorova, Irina Kostadinova and Svilena Ruskova

Abstract

This study aims to analyse the relationships between sustainable business models, the sustainable products and services they generate, and consumer behaviour. Building on in-depth analysis and pilot study, a profile of the sustainable consumer has been suggested, including demographic characteristics, motivations, and attitudes that distinguish him. In addition, the study seeks to answer the questions of whether and how sustainable business models influence consumer preferences, attitudes, and decisions. In order to answer the research questions thus posed, the authors initiated a survey among various consumer groups in Bulgaria. Four hundred and twenty-four respondents (N = 424) replied, and based on the data obtained, an analysis of consumer perceptions and behaviour in terms of making a purchase decision was conducted. This makes it possible to identify key factors that motivate consumers to choose sustainable products and services. The results of the study will contribute to a better understanding of the motivation of sustainable consumers and will provide valuable information for companies wishing to develop sustainable business models. Additionally, the study complements the theory in the field of business models, marketing, communications, corporate social responsibility, *etc.*

Keywords: sustainable business models, consumer behaviour, marketing, sustainability, purchase decision

1. Introduction

Human activity is having an increasingly adverse impact on the environment at all scales, and this imposes an urgent need to transform business processes and consumer behaviour. Through innovations in technologies, products, services and processes, as well as the implementation of innovative business models (BMs), business is pointed out as a key element in the desired transition to sustainability. It is precisely effective BMs that have the potential to create new technologies and processes and are, therefore, crucial in the transition to sustainability [1].

The concept of sustainable business models (SBMs) owes its roots to the literature on BMs in general. BMs describe the design or logic for creating, delivering and capturing value in an organisation, and SBMs are an extension or modification of

conventional BMs and address issues that the traditional concept has not paid enough attention to—the social and environmental effects of business management [2].

In a broad sense, a business model is a framework for how a company creates, delivers, and captures value. Unlike traditional BMs that focus on profit, SBMs are based on the principle of sustainable development. The latter aims to help solve environmental and social challenges without neglecting to deliver value for all stakeholders. At the same time, increasing sustainability regulations and changes in customer purchasing behaviour have led to SBMs becoming a tool for competitive advantage [3].

Knudson [4] notes that the concept of SBMs has attracted the attention of researchers in the fields of both corporate sustainability and entrepreneurship and management. According to him, SBMs are a way to connect sustainable innovation with the organisation's business model and as a means to implement sustainable activities and strategies throughout the organisation's value chain. The author presents SBMs both as a tool and a conceptual logic that divides activities into three components—offering value, creating and delivering value, and capturing value.

Moreover, putting the fate of future generations at the forefront, it turns out that more and more people are inclined to buy environmentally friendly products from sustainable brands [5]—66% of shoppers are now looking for eco-friendly brands [6]. This can be presented as a result of the interaction between social responsibility and ethical considerations. This is so since a sustainable lifestyle requires, first of all, concern for the environment, but also change in the impact of man on the world around him. As a result, the urgency to address climate change, conserve natural resources, and reduce pollution is fundamentally changing the way businesses approach customer engagement and their marketing strategies and decisions [5].

The SBMs concept has spread more comprehensively to the industrial sector as a consequence of increased public pressure on businesses and their social and environmental responsibilities. From an industrial perspective, the idea of sustainability emphasises industrial activities and communications with stakeholders, focusing on sustainability goals at the organisational, environmental, and societal levels. Industrial sectors must create environmental, economic, and social values through long-term strategies, and BMs must be oriented towards sustainability to ensure corporate sustainability, that is industrial sustainability [7].

The promotion of SBMs is also helped by the fact that modern consumers are more educated and demand that environmental initiatives be more transparent. A number of analysts suggest that the time of sticking eco-stickers and claims that a given product is better for the environment than others is irrevocably gone. Environmentally conscious consumers demand more responsibility and actions from businesses in terms of sustainability. Therefore, to thrive in the modern market, companies must adopt not just an ecological but a conscious, sustainable mindset [5, 8].

Vehmas *et al.* [9] point out that SBMs are presented in the literature as a way to gradually improve environmental impact compared to simply selling a product. This motivates more and more companies to start experimenting with them more actively. However, these models have not yet been scaled across sectors. As the authors state, a serious obstacle is the lack of a clear understanding of how consumers value sustainable business offerings and their willingness to pay a higher price.

The identified trends are a catalyst for the emergence of diverse BMs aimed at overcoming sustainability challenges. While some of these models represent slight modifications of existing ones—or, as Bączyk *et al.* [8] call them, *modest facelifts of mainstream ones*, others offer radically new approaches. It is interesting to note that some of the innovative BMs are already gaining popularity among the general public,

while others are still in the niche. Despite the numerous classifications proposed by researchers, the factors that influence consumers' acceptance of these models remain a subject of debate.

This study aims to understand Bulgarian consumers' attitudes and behaviours towards sustainable consumption. By identifying key factors influencing their purchasing decisions, the study contributes to the academic literature by outlining the demographic and behavioural profiles of the sustainable consumer in Bulgaria. It provides valuable empirical data that can be used for comparative research and for developing new theoretical models. The study provides information on how consumers perceive sustainable products and services and what factors influence their purchasing decisions. This information can be used to improve communication between businesses and consumers and to build greater trust.

To achieve the formulated goal, a pilot study was conducted among 424 respondents from Bulgaria, looking for correlations between consumers' age, education, and income and their purchasing decisions. The structure of the manuscript follows the following logic: first, a literature review of the conceptualisation of SBMs, consumer attitudes, and the role of sustainable communication in marketing is presented. Then, the research methodology is described, and the results are analysed and discussed. Finally, the main conclusions of the study are defined, the explanations for the formulated research questions are answered, and a basic profile of the *ideal sustainable consumer* is formed, which is analogous to the *ideal customer* in traditional marketing. The limitations of the study, as well as implications and suggestions for future research, are provided.

2. Literary background

The sustainability of society as a whole depends on the sustainable development of organisations in particular. The mission of the United Nations (UN) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) formulated by it emphasise the importance of industry participation in the necessary change in the current economic system, as well as that traditional BMs that are unsuitable for meeting the challenges of global sustainable development (SD). That has brought SBMs to the forefront—a concept that is expected to help bridge the gap between the necessary sustainable innovations and the strategies used by organisations to achieve sustainable development [4].

Referring to Csutora *et al.* [8], SBMs are tools that allow companies to define, analyse, and communicate their contribution to sustainable development, create value for all stakeholders, and protect the environment. Ferlito and Faraci [10] define SBMs as a complex process that changes the fundamental elements of a firm's logic to create new value for all stakeholders. They argue that the radical nature of organisational change makes adopting a sustainable orientation easier for new entrants (start-ups) and riskier for incumbents—existing companies that have been running their businesses for a long time.

Karuppiah *et al.* [7] argue that conventional BMs focus mainly on economic aspects and encompass nine core elements—key customers, customer relationships, value propositions, business channels, industrial activities, resources, stakeholders, capital investments, and revenue streams. On the other hand, SBMs also adopt a holistic view of how a business is managed in relation to its stakeholders, including society and the natural environment. This type of business model encompasses economic, environmental, and social aspects not only in the organisation's core mission and

objectives but also in the measures implemented to achieve them. At the same time, they strive to take into account the needs of all stakeholders rather than prioritising the expectations of the owner and shareholder and treat “nature” itself as a key stakeholder. This shows that SBMs share common characteristics with familiar green and social BMs and concepts such as the sharing and circular economy [1].

Ferlito and Faraci define innovation in the scope of SBMs as a change in the way a firm operates to create a positive impact or reduce negative consequences for the environment and society. Although there is a broad consensus on the importance of sustainability for firms [11], academic research on how to transform a firm into a sustainable organisation remains unclear. The process of implementing a sustainable business model as a whole also remains unclear [10].

In parallel, industries are witnessing benefits such as brand extension, process and product innovation, and budget savings through the implementation of corporate sustainability practices. Thus, conceptualising a business model that incorporates sustainability is not only of primary interest but also of paramount importance to the business community. Therefore, to thrive in the era of globalisation and adhere to the SDGs, businesses should develop SBMs and abandon the conventional type of business model. This is possible only when businesses adopt SBMs as a competitive advantage through multi-stakeholder management, product or process innovation, and effective inventory management [7].

Based on North [12] findings, SBMs encompass a company’s plan to generate profit sustainably; that is, they necessarily include the protection of people and the environment. This type of business model identifies the products or services that the business sells, its target customers, the associated costs, the supply chain, and the distribution. The author argues that the goal of innovation in building SBMs is to have a positive impact on people and the environment, and this is precisely what SBMs imply, taking into account a wide range of environmental, economic, and social factors when making management decisions and adapting different types of operations and strategies. The aim is to ensure that short-term decisions are consistent with and beneficial to long-term sustainability and sustainability goals.

Nowadays, most industry sectors adopt circular economy (CE) practices, considering them as SBMs. However, Karuppiah *et al.* [7] state that there is a fundamental difference between CE practices and the circular economy business model (CEBM). The main goal of CE practices is to extend the useful life of products through a series of activities. At the same time, CEBMs are defined as a business approach through which an organisation can create value by implementing CE practices. The convergence, in this case, is due to the fact that the adoption of CEBMs is likely to assist industrial organisations in their transition to SBMs. However, introducing any change to the existing business model requires cooperation from the stakeholders involved. Achieving consensus among stakeholders regarding SBMs remains challenging, as there needs to be more clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders involved. All this hinders the transition of industrial organisations to SBMs.

Vehmas *et al.* [9] define SBMs as those that not only create value for the business but also society and the environment. They identify three key elements of these models: what sustainable value is, how it is created, and how it is captured. As maintained by the research team, business model innovation often begins with testing the value proposition in real life with customers before moving on to the practical aspects of value creation and delivery aspects, as well as the financial aspects of value capture mechanisms.

Concurrently, North [12] adds that innovation in SBMs is more relevant than ever—the world is constantly changing, and with these changes come new challenges

and consumer perspectives that require renewed BMs. Even though the internal mechanisms of BMs are invisible to consumers, different SBMs offer customers radically different value propositions. This shows that sustainability is not just a matter of communication but directly affects the consumer experience [8].

In line with the various definitions, the core of SBMs could be defined as the sustainable value proposition—a promise of those mentioned above economic, environmental, and social benefits that a company provides to its customers, in particular, and to society as a whole, through its offerings. Therefore, the customer's attitude towards SBMs is an important starting point for starting a business venture [9]. Nielsen's research shows that 66% of consumers would spend more on a product if it came from a sustainable brand, and 81% of global consumers believe that companies should help improve the environment. Consumers are increasingly expecting sustainability from the products and services they purchase, especially with the rise of Millennials and Generation Z [12].

Simultaneously, Viciunaite and Alfnes [2] argue that consumer motivation has received scant attention to date, with the exception of a few recent studies focusing on sustainable consumption in the circular economy or business-led sustainable consumption initiatives. Companies that strive for sustainability must adapt their offerings to consumer preferences to create value that attracts customers. That means focusing not only on the social and environmental aspects of the products and services produced and provided but also on consumers' perceptions and attitudes.

A study supports this claim, maintaining that in recent years, 85% of consumers have become “greener” in their shopping habits, and another 72% claim to buy more environmentally friendly products compared to 5 years ago. The reasons behind consumer behaviour are an essential starting point since, as Karuppiyah *et al.* point out, it is precisely the increased environmental awareness that has led the industrial community to develop SBMs, thus making them a *buzzword* for the research community as well. A large-scale bibliometric analysis conducted by the authors shows that SBMs not only evolved from sustainable development and innovation but also reveals five emerging areas: SBM strategies, SBM development challenges, SBM drivers, the role of innovation in SBMs, and digital technologies in SBMs [7].

Baláková *et al.* [13] expand the traditional factors influencing purchases by adding new criteria such as sustainability, composition, health and origin. These additional factors are equally important for consumers in making purchasing decisions and are specified by four main determinants: product characteristics, environmental responsibility, convenience, and price.

Results of the study conducted by Vehmas *et al.* [9] show that consumers are willing to use available information and evaluate it to make sustainable purchasing decisions. Therefore, they pay significant attention to the sustainability of the products and services they consume. In this sense, when making purchasing decisions, consumers perceive specific positive environmental and social impacts. The authors point out that over half of the participants in their study are willing to pay more for responsibly produced products. A problem is observed in the lack of reliable information on the basis of which an adequate decision is expected to be made, and finding relevant data takes too much time.

According to Fernandes [14], affordability and price are almost always the primary factors driving consumer decision-making, but there are also signs of demand and demand for sustainability. Consumers are looking at the classic definition of a discount in a whole new light, creating new opportunities for companies that recognise this shift. Today, consumers are not only intrigued by but also expect a hybrid

approach to delivering value for money. The question is what happens when consumers are confronted with multiple promotional options, each offering a different value proposition. Companies need to observe and analyse these nuances to learn how to align their promotional offers to the specific types of deals, package sizes, formats, and channels that consumers would most like to encounter.

Moreover, Vehmas *et al.* [9] identify the lack of customer acceptance as one of the main obstacles to SBMs. This requires radical changes not only in BMs but also in consumption models. The latter would be possible after a long and in-depth study of customers in order to understand which BMs have an impact on specific customer groups since, analogous to conventional marketing approaches, customers need to be segmented and targeted in different ways. The implementation of such an approach is associated with the identification of many new insights on financial aspects, complemented by the perspective of how consumers perceive the new, more sustainable business model, how they characterise it, and above all, what they expect from it.

On the other hand, the purchase intention of customers plays a key role in the design of SBMs. Different product categories, such as fashion vs. electronics and shopping channels—offline *vs.* online shopping, influence customers' perceptions of value in addition to cultural background. There are undoubtedly many alternative interpretations of customer value, and it follows that each company must choose the value that best serves its strategic objectives when developing customer value propositions and assessing its success. Vehmas *et al.* support those findings with recent studies examining willingness to buy and pay, which found that consumers are more likely to buy more sustainable products when they believe they are getting the same quality and functionality as when buying a product produced through more traditional processes. That new data contrasts with older studies that have shown that the price of a product is more important to consumers than its environmental impact. Price, availability, performance, and product quality continue to be the most critical factors determining consumers' intention to pay for sustainable products [9].

Hein [15] emphasises the importance of individual factors in consumer decision-making, especially regarding the purchase of recycled products. Using the *value-belief-norm* (VBN) theory, the author analyses how values such as concern for the environment and the well-being of others influence purchase intentions. In line with the study, biospheric values (concern for nature) play a more substantial role in promoting environmentally conscious behaviour compared to altruistic values (concern for others).

Martin-Rios [16] points out that when using certificates or reporting on SDGs, companies often misuse them and thus further confuse consumers. This leads not only to inconsistency but also to extremes in consumer behaviour. These data give the author reason to conclude that awareness is key to rethinking the topic of sustainability in a transdisciplinary way. A higher level of awareness can be achieved by involving customers in actual sustainability initiatives and projects initiated by different organisations. Nevertheless, Martin-Rios points out as a significant problem the fact that despite all the information available to customers, their behaviour still does not change in reality. This does not deviate the author from his position that, despite everything, change is precisely in the hands of consumers, and that is why it is essential to study and understand their behaviour in depth.

Bącznyk *et al.* [17] emphasise that although consumption occurs at the level of individuals, consumers are social figures and are therefore influenced by social factors and context. This means that consumer behaviour is not solely driven by individual decision-making, including price, quality, benefits, *etc.*, but is also shaped by social

and cultural norms, economic and political systems, and the physical environment. The authors cite the Ribeiro et al.'s framework for factors specifically influencing circular consumption at three different levels: consumption goals, personal characteristics of consumers, and attributes of products and services at the micro level; the context of direct consumption at the meso level; and societal contexts and societal agents at the macro level.

Levytskyi [18] argues, for his part, that modern consumers are increasingly aware of the environmental and social impacts of their purchasing decisions. By effectively communicating a company's sustainability efforts and promoting environmentally and socially responsible products, it is possible to attract the attention and loyalty of this growing consumer segment. As a suitable tool for raising awareness, the author points to sustainable marketing, describing it as a powerful strategy for companies aiming to align their values with consumer expectations. Sustainable marketing, also known as green marketing, goes beyond promotional efforts and encompasses the entire marketing mix—product development, pricing, distribution, and promotion, but through the lens of sustainable practices.

As Wright [19] claims, the goal of sustainable marketing is not only to position a particular brand as an active player in solving an environmental or social problem but also to humanise the brand's messages and highlight authentically and transparently the reason why the desired customer segment should choose a company over its competitors. By educating the audience about the “why” behind a company's sustainable choices, marketers can foster understanding, build trust, and cultivate credibility. Sustainability is not just about making good choices—it is about empowering consumers with knowledge and inspiring them to be agents of change. In addition to education, marketers encourage consumers to make more environmentally friendly choices by emphasising the positive impact of their choices.

Marketers can help consumers make sustainable choices that align with their values and benefit the planet by highlighting key benefits. In an era of heightened consumer scepticism about *greenwashing*, the act of making false or misleading claims about the environmental benefits of a product or service, as well as authenticity and transparency, are non-negotiable qualities for sustainable marketing strategies. Marketers must back up sustainability claims with real-life evidence to maintain consumer trust and avoid empty promises. By embracing transparency and openly acknowledging areas for improvement, brands can demonstrate a genuine commitment to progress and create a culture of accountability, thereby earning the loyalty of their consumers [20].

Sebastian and Kunjumon [21] also believe that in order to influence consumers in all categories through better information, marketing communication is crucial. It is precisely the reduction of uncertainty in making a choice and purchase decision that is one of the advantages of marketing communication, and the latter refers to communications that spread awareness and have an immediate impact. As an effective strategy for engaging not only investors but also customers in the efforts and their inclusion in sustainability, the so-called sustainability communication is also applied. Demonstrating how a business generates value and achieves sustainability has a positive impact on value for two key stakeholders—shareholders and consumers. This can be achieved through engaging in sustainability communication that is appropriately aligned with the overall strategic objectives of the business and the sustainability action plan. Therefore, a comprehensive sustainability communication plan is vital to achieve the necessary intangible and tangible benefits, and each action plan must outline the role of communication in sustainable development.

Similar to Martin-Rios [16], Sebastian and Kunjumon [21] also emphasise that a sustainability communication plan should start with a thorough analysis of stakeholders and target audiences, that is an excellent knowledge of consumers and their expectations and perceptions. In addition, the authors summarise that the key to fostering a widespread sustainability movement lies in effective communication or awareness. In this sense, marketers have a unique opportunity to redefine complex sustainability initiatives into compelling narratives that resonate with consumers positively and engagingly. The question is whether they are up to this task and to what extent they manage to gain the trust of consumer cohorts.

Based on the literature review and the findings identified as a result of existing knowledge, it is clear that consumer motivation and attitudes towards products produced sustainably are still a paradigm. The present study seeks to fill this gap by putting sustainable business models, sustainable marketing, and sustainable consumption into a common framework. From the perspective of the spread of SBMs and their increasingly urgent implementation in the economy, as well as taking into account various factors (including price, quality, responsibility, awareness, *etc.*) influencing the formation of a purchasing decision among consumers, the authors of this study seek answers to the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1: What are the primary perceptions of consumers regarding the responsibility of business, on the one hand, and of the individual consumer, on the other?

RQ2: What are the motivations and attitudes of consumers regarding sustainable products?

RQ3: What are the main characteristics of consumers regarding sustainable consumption?

RQ4: What is the demographic and behavioural profile of the sustainable consumer?

3. Research methodology

The presented analysis is based on a pilot study conducted among Bulgarian citizens. In accordance with the formulated research questions, the developed research methodology includes two stages:

1. *Systematic review*: outlined in the Literature Background and aiming to build a theoretical understanding and a clear foundation for the subject of study SBMs, by tracing the correlations between conventional and SBMs, consumer behaviour and attitudes, factors shaping the purchase decision of consumers, and the role of marketing in increasing awareness to the sustainable brands. The method applied is a systematic review of scientific articles, books, reports, and other relevant sources found in databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar.
2. *Pilot survey*: needed to obtain primary data on the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of consumers. The timeframe is 1 November–30 November 2024. The developed questionnaire includes the following:
 - *Section I*: five questions providing demographic information about the respondents: age group (in accordance with the most common generational classification), gender, education, employment, monthly income;
 - *Section II*: three groups of eight questions with a multiple-choice answer on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, according to which: 1 = *No*; 2 = *Rather not*; 3 = *Not sure* /

Haven't thought about it/Rarely/Not enough; 4 = Rather yes; 5 = Yes. The questions explore consumer willingness to act sustainably by purchasing sustainable products, and analyse consumer responsibility for achieving sustainability, as well as the success of marketing communications and certification activities;

- *Section III:* three multiple-choice questions that analyse the ways in which consumers obtain the information they need to make an informed purchasing decision, as well as consumers' perceptions of sustainability as a concept.

The sample was formed based on Bulgaria's population, assuming that every citizen is a potential user because every citizen (regardless of age) has the potential to directly or indirectly influence the consumer market for goods and services. Based on NSI data, the population of Bulgaria as of 31.12.2023 is 6,445,481 people [22]. Therefore, the recommended sample size is 385 (at a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%).

The distribution of the questionnaire among Bulgarian citizens is limited to the social network Facebook, with the aim being to gradually test other distribution channels after the pilot study is approved and completed—other social networks, email communication, personal communication, official newsletters, *etc.* In this way, the authors try to identify and determine the dependence between the different channels to obtain information regarding the sustainability, presence, and activity of the respondents in the respective social channels and their formed attitudes and behaviours. This is set out in *Section III* of the questionnaire, *which is not the subject of the current analysis.*

Through descriptive analysis, the current study analyses the responses of the respondents in terms of their perceptions, attitudes, and motivation—*Section II* of the questionnaire. In addition, the authors apply the demographic data (*Section I* of the questionnaire) in the pilot study only to the purchase of sustainable products, identifying them through the answers to the statement “*I buy products that are certified as environmentally friendly or produced under fair conditions.*” (Q3.2), which reflects the categorical behaviour of consumers.

4. Results and discussion

The pilot study involved 424 people ($N = 424$). The questions in *Section II* are divided into three groups, with the first group related to consumers' perceptions of the responsibility of both businesses and the individual in terms of the leading role each plays in achieving sustainability (**Table 1; Figure 1**).

When asked if they think companies have a responsibility to act sustainably (Q 1.1), respondents had a categorical attitude, with 78% agreeing and tending to agree. The current results, which agree with the data cited in the theoretical framework, confirm the global trend that consumers expect companies to engage more actively with environmental issues. A significant proportion of respondents—58% believe that they have enough information to make informed purchasing decisions for sustainable products (Q 1.2). This confirms the role of awareness and effective communication in companies' efforts to promote environmentally and socially responsible products as vital to attracting and retaining more conscious consumers.

The following two questions analyse the personal responsibility of consumers towards achieving a more sustainable future. To varying degrees, 75% of respondents gave a positive answer regarding whether individual habits impact the environment

Question (Q)	1	2	3	4	5
1.1 Do you think companies have a responsibility to act sustainably?	0 (0%)	16 (4%)	80 (19%)	176 (42%)	152 (36%)
1.2 Do you think you have enough information to make informed purchasing decisions related to sustainability?	16 (4%)	40 (9%)	120 (28%)	184 (43%)	64 (15%)
1.3 Do you think your consumption habits have an impact on the environment?	0 (0%)	40 (9%)	64 (15%)	208 (49%)	112 (26%)
1.4 Do you think that every individual has a responsibility to contribute to a more sustainable future?	0 (0%)	32 (8%)	80 (19%)	200 (47%)	112 (26%)
1.5 Do you think companies overexposed the importance of sustainability in their marketing campaigns?	0 (0%)	24 (6%)	48 (11%)	248 (58%)	104 (25%)
1.6 Do you think companies exaggerate their sustainability achievements?	0 (0%)	8 (2%)	48 (11%)	272 (64%)	96 (23%)
1.7 Do you think sustainable products are sufficiently available on the market?	16 (4%)	96 (23%)	152 (36%)	128 (30%)	32 (8%)
1.8 Do you think that the prices of sustainable products are higher compared to conventional products?	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	40 (9%)	240 (57%)	144 (34%)

Source: Own development.

Table 1. Consumer perceptions regarding the responsibility and sustainability of businesses and consumers (Questions Group 1 with Likert scale: 1 = No; 2 = Rather not; 3 = Not sure; 4 = Rather yes; 5 = Yes.)—N = 424.

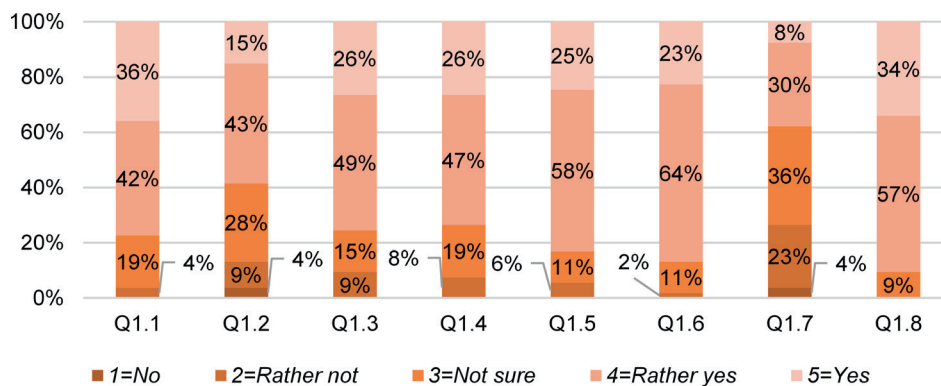


Figure 1. Consumer perceptions regarding the responsibility and sustainability of businesses and consumers (Questions Group 1 with Likert scale: 1 = No; 2 = Rather not; 3 = Not sure; 4 = Rather yes; 5 = Yes.)—N = 424; Source: Own development.

(Q 1.3), compared to 9% who tend to disagree and none who strongly disagree. Similar data are also available regarding whether each individual has a responsibility to contribute to a more sustainable future (Q 1.4), where 73% of respondents strongly agree or tend to agree. The results support Levytskyi’s thesis [18] that modern consumers are increasingly aware of the environmental and social consequences of their consumer decisions.

Regarding sustainable communication and the role of marketing (Q 1.5), a significant proportion of respondents—83% are of the opinion that companies exaggerate the importance of sustainability in their marketing campaigns. This shows a massive distrust in the marketing messages of brands and the sustainability they communicate. This finding is confirmed by the data regarding whether, according to consumers, companies exaggerate the importance of sustainability in their marketing campaigns (Q 1.6)—87% of the respondents agree to varying degrees. As Kotsev [23] points out, distrust often turns out to be the better alternative. When reasonable doubts about a person or organisation’s unreliability exist, distrust becomes more than a logical and justified response. Therefore, the purchasing decisions made by the respondent will not only be less emotional but probably also more informed since the consumer will need and seek additional information about a specific product.

The data from the last two questions enrich the information about sustainable products, specifically in the Bulgarian context. The seventh question (Q 1.7) seeks an answer as to whether, according to consumers, sustainable products are sufficiently accessible on the market, leaving it to the personal judgement of the respondents how they perceive the term “sufficiently” (sufficiently in terms of quantity, price, offers, etc.). Slightly more than a third of the respondents do not see a problem with the accessibility of sustainable products on the market, and slightly less than a third—find it challenging to find such products, regardless of the reason. Regarding the correlation between high prices and product sustainability (Q 1.8), 91% of the respondents gave a positive answer and, to varying degrees, believed that the prices of sustainable products are higher compared to conventional products.

Question (Q)	1	2	3	4	5
2.1 Are you willing to pay a higher price for a product that is produced in a sustainable way?	32 (8%)	112 (26%)	32 (8%)	208 (49%)	40 (9%)
2.2 Are you willing to pay more for a product that is produced in a sustainable way, even if it means buying fewer products?	32 (8%)	112 (26%)	24 (6%)	216 (51%)	40 (9%)
2.3 Are you willing to compromise on the design or functionality of a product to choose a more sustainable option?	32 (8%)	128 (30%)	40 (9%)	184 (43%)	40 (9%)
2.4 Do you feel guilty when you buy products that are not sustainable?	32 (8%)	80 (19%)	136 (32%)	144 (34%)	32 (8%)
2.5 Do you trust companies when they claim that their products are sustainable?	64 (15%)	184 (43%)	24 (6%)	128 (30%)	24 (6%)
2.6 Do you trust certificates and labels that indicate that a product is sustainable?	64 (15%)	160 (38%)	16 (4%)	160 (38%)	24 (6%)
2.7 Do you find it difficult to find information about the sustainability of the products you want to buy?	32 (8%)	48 (11%)	112 (26%)	208 (49%)	24 (6%)
2.8 Do you accept it as normal for sustainable products to be priced higher than those of mass-produced goods?	64 (15%)	88 (21%)	16 (4%)	208 (49%)	48 (11%)

Source: Own development.

Table 2. Consumer motivation and attitudes regarding the characteristics of sustainable products—price, quality, information, etc. (Questions Group 2 with Likert scale: 1 = No; 2 = Rather not; 3 = I have not thought about it; 4 = Rather yes; 5 = Yes.)—N = 424.

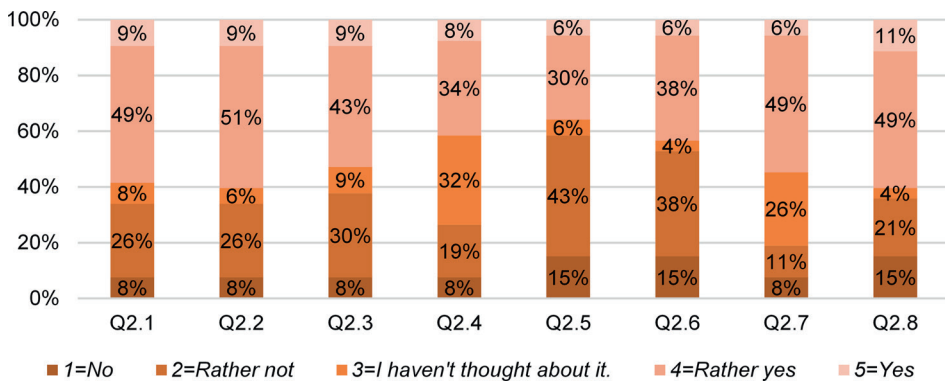


Figure 2. Consumer motivation and attitudes regarding the characteristics of sustainable products—price, quality, information, etc. (Questions Group 2 with Likert scale: 1 = No; 2 = Rather not; 3 = I have not thought about it; 4 = Rather yes; 5 = Yes.)—N = 424; Source: Own development.

Questions from Group 2 (**Table 2; Figure 2**) analyse the motivation and attitudes of consumers towards sustainable products. Regarding the willingness of consumers to pay a higher price for a product that is produced sustainably (Q 2.1), 58% of the respondents agree to varying degrees. The next question in the group examines the willingness of respondents to pay more for a product that is produced sustainably, even if it means compromising on quantity (Q 2.2). That is, this question examines the tendency to buy less but sustainably—a trend that is supported by 60% of the respondents. Just over half of the respondents—52% are willing to compromise on the design or functionality of a product in order to choose a more sustainable alternative (Q 2.3). The results confirm Vehmas *et al.*'s findings [9] that price, availability, productivity, and quality are among the influencing factors in the choice of sustainable products.

The question of whether consumers feel guilty when buying products that are not sustainable stands out from the rest of the group (Q 2.4). The aim is for respondents to be provoked and to think about their inner feelings when choosing a sustainable product or not. Results show that 36% of the respondents feel guilty to varying degrees, and 27% do not suffer from such a negative emotion. Over a third ignore how they feel in such a situation, which perhaps indicates that when buying sustainable products, consumers are influenced by external and logical factors and not so much by their inner and emotional feelings. Undoubtedly, the answer to only one question cannot serve to generalise the results, but it is a starting point for future studies in this area.

As indicated in the literature background, trust in companies and the sustainable information they communicate is crucial for making a purchase decision. In this study, 36% of the respondents trust, to varying degrees, companies claiming that their products are sustainable (Q 2.5). The data are similar regarding whether consumers trust certificates and labels that indicate that a product is sustainable (Q 2.6)—44% agree or somewhat agree. These data somewhat confirm Martin-Rios's [16] conclusion, drawn from the theoretical background, about inconsistency and extremes in consumer behaviour. Certifications, relevant information on labels and packaging, and companies' sustainability reports are a double-edged sword when used by unscrupulous entrepreneurs. Their actions influence not only consumer behaviour but also the overall implementation of sustainable production and consumption.

When asked, “Do you find it challenging to find information about the sustainability of the products you want to buy?” (Q 2.7), 55% of the respondents indicated that they have difficulty, and 26% have not considered the issue, which probably means that they have not looked for such information. These findings are important from the perspective of the theoretical background statements of a number of authors [7, 9, 16], according to which consumer awareness is key to rethinking the topic of sustainability.

The last question in the group explores the respondents’ attitudes towards the prices of sustainable products (Q 2.8). For 36%, it is unacceptable in varying degrees, and for 60%, it is normal for the prices of sustainable products to be higher than those of mass goods. That correlated positively with the literature’s claim that 66% of consumers would spend more for a sustainable product [12].

The questions in Group 3 (Table 3; Figure 3) aim to characterise the behaviour of sustainable consumers by analysing their responses to specific statements. Thus, it becomes clear that 66% of the respondents are interested in environmental issues in general (Q 3.1). This growing awareness of consumers about ecological issues leads Csutora *et al.* [8] to conclude that companies need to upgrade their business strategies. Consumers increasingly expect sustainability from the products and services they purchase, which is confirmed by North [12].

The following statement—I buy products that are certified as environmentally friendly or produced under fair conditions (Q 3.2)—serves to the greatest extent to form the profile of the sustainable consumer. The results demonstrate an ideal balance in the positions—38% buy and 37% do not buy sustainable products. The rest indicate that, according to their judgement, they buy insufficiently or rarely. Data shows that

Question (Q)	1	2	3	4	5
3.1 I am interested in environmental issues.	16 (4%)	80 (19%)	48 (11%)	208 (49%)	72 (17%)
3.2 I buy products that are certified as environmentally friendly or produced under fair conditions.	40 (9%)	120 (28%)	104 (25%)	128 (30%)	32 (8%)
3.3 I look for information about the sustainability of companies before making a purchase.	48 (11%)	128 (30%)	80 (19%)	136 (32%)	32 (8%)
3.4 I consider the environmental and social consequences of my purchases.	48 (11%)	112 (26%)	64 (15%)	168 (40%)	32 (8%)
3.5 Marketing campaigns that emphasise product sustainability are persuasive.	144 (34%)	160 (38%)	24 (6%)	72 (17%)	24 (6%)
3.6 I have been informed about issues related to sustainable development.	40 (9%)	88 (21%)	96 (23%)	160 (38%)	40 (9%)
3.7 It is important to me to buy products and services from companies that are socially responsible.	56 (13%)	96 (23%)	40 (9%)	208 (49%)	24 (6%)
3.8 Marketing campaigns that emphasise product sustainability influence my purchasing decision.	168 (40%)	160 (38%)	8 (2%)	72 (17%)	16 (4%)

Source: Own development.

Table 3. Statements that aim to characterise the behaviour of sustainable consumers (Questions Group 3 with Likert scale: 1 = No; 2 = Rather not; 3 = Rare/Insufficient; 4 = Rather yes; 5 = Yes.)—*N* = 424.

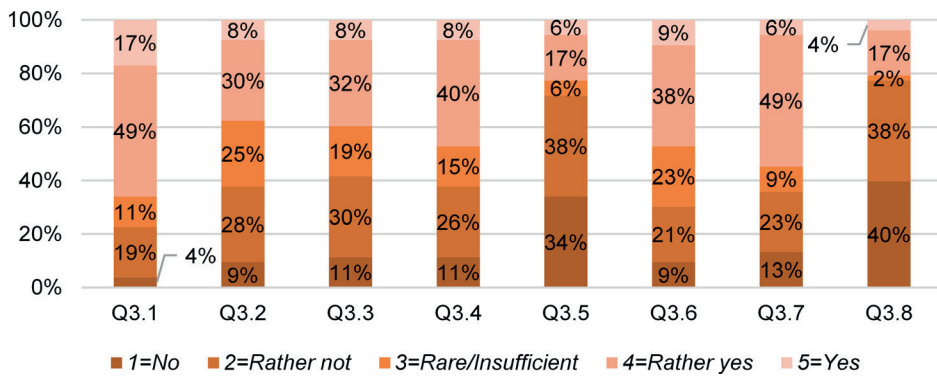


Figure 3. Statements that aim to characterise the behaviour of sustainable consumers (Questions Group 3 with Likert scale: 1 = No; 2 = Rather not; 3 = Rare/Insufficient; 4 = Rather yes; 5 = Yes.)—N = 424; Source: Own development.

a significant share of consumers (63%) prefer sustainable products, which supports the claim [7] that in recent years, there has been a substantial increase in consumers’ environmental awareness. Most of them have changed their shopping habits towards sustainability, and 72% buy more environmentally friendly products than 5 years ago.

The statement “*I look for information about companies’ sustainability before making a purchase*” (Q.3.3) aims to assess the importance of sustainable details in making a purchase decision—40% deliberately seek information before making a purchase. Regarding the personal assessment of the environmental and social consequences of the purchases made (Q.3.4), 48% indicate that they take this fact into account to varying degrees. Both results highlight environmental responsibility as significant for consumer behaviour. This responsibility is also present in the four determinants of purchasing decisions derived by Baláková *et al.* [13].

The statement “*Marketing campaigns that emphasise the sustainability of products are convincing*” (Q.3.5) reflects the respondents’ trust in sustainable communication. Only 26% demonstrated trust in marketing campaigns. In parallel, 47% of the respondents defined themselves as well-informed regarding issues related to sustainable development (Q.3.6). Despite the significant share who self-identify as informed, the data show that companies are not coping with the communication policies they are implementing—a problem that the literature has identified as possible.

The next statement explores how important a company’s social responsibility is for the success of the products and services it sells (Q.3.7). The results show that 55% of the respondents consider it essential to buy from socially responsible companies. For the rest, it is an unimportant or insufficiently significant factor in their purchase decision. Although lower, this result confirms the data reported in the literature [12]. The answers to the last statement—*Marketing campaigns that emphasise the sustainability of products influence my purchase decision* (Q.3.8)—even more categorically indicate the existing gap between the company’s marketing communications and consumer behaviour. Only 21% of those asked gave a positive answer, while for another 78%, the implemented marketing campaigns had no or almost no influence on their purchase decision. For comparison, the data for statement Q.3.5 are similar, where 72% of people define marketing campaigns as unconvincing.

In accordance with the research methodology, the next part of the analysis focuses on a specific statement (*I buy products that are certified as environmentally friendly or produced under fair conditions*) in which the respondent defines himself as a

sustainable consumer by an objective indicator—the choice of a sustainable product. In this part of the chapter, an attempt is made to form a demographic profile of the sustainable consumer.

The study shows that buyers of certified sustainable products (N = 160) are divided by gender into 48 (30%) men and 112 (70%) women. In terms of age (**Figure 4**), the respondents' answers to the question *You were born in the period...* are as follows: *before 1964*—0%; *between 1964 and 1980*—20.40%; *between 1981 and 1996*—20.55%; *between 1997 and 2012*—5%; *after 2012*—0%; *I do not want to answer*—0%.

The educational profile of the respondents (**Figure 5**) shows that 35% have a *secondary education diploma*, and 65% have a *higher education diploma*. In terms of employment (**Figure 6**)—with the possibility of marking more than one answer, the profile of the sustainable consumer shows: *Student*—14%; *Unemployed (looking for work)*—5%; *Full-time employment*—50%; *Part-time employment*—14%; *Self-employed*—18%.

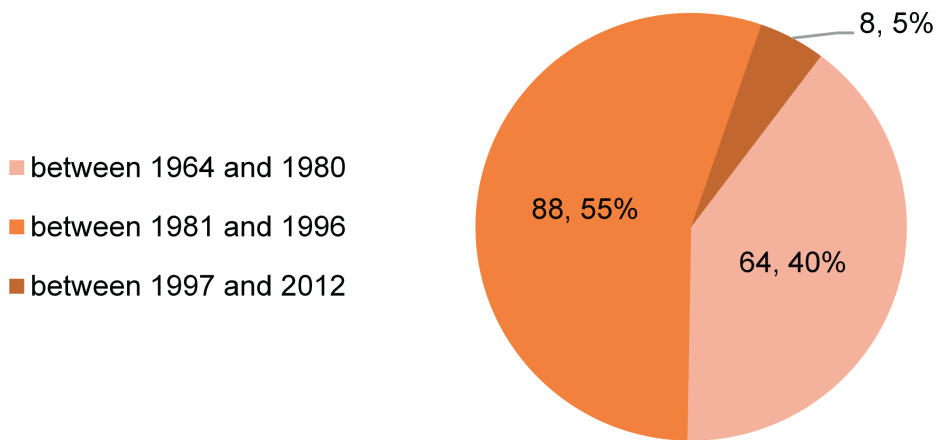


Figure 4. Distribution of respondents (number; percentage) by age and their answers to the question: *You were born in the period...* (N = 160); Source: Own development.

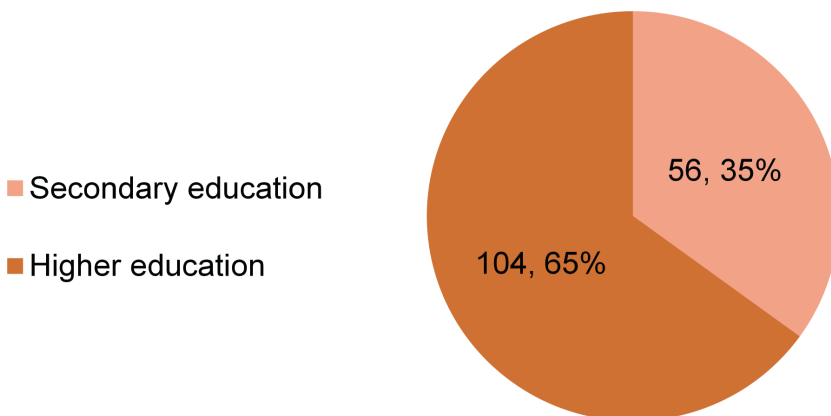


Figure 5. Distribution of respondents (number; percentage) by education degree (N = 160); Source: Own development.

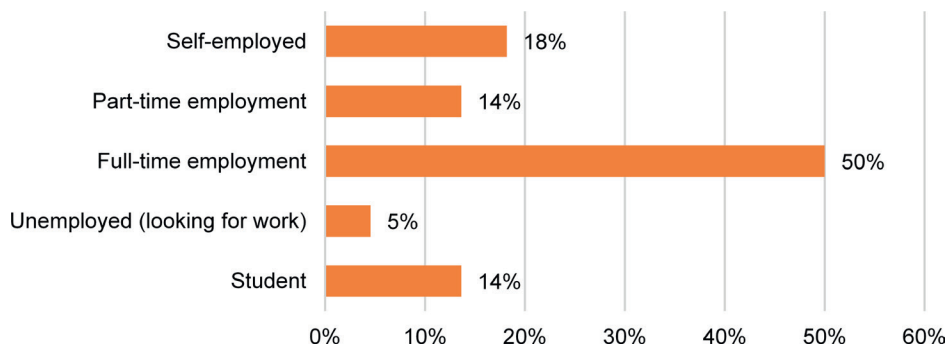


Figure 6. Distribution of respondents (percentage) by employment profile ($N = 160$)—with the possibility of marking more than one answer; Source: Own development.

The distribution of income by groups (**Figure 7**) is made according to Bulgaria’s minimum wage, average wage, and maximum social security income. Based on these metrics, the financial profile of the respondents shows that with monthly income below 933.00 BGN are 5% of the people, between 933.00 BGN and 2296.00 BGN—55%, between 2296.00 BGN and 3750.00 BGN—30%, and above 3750.00 BGN—10%.

The conducted research managed to provide satisfactory answers to the formulated research questions. Regarding the RQ1—*What are the primary perceptions of consumers regarding the responsibility of business, on the one hand, and of the individual consumer, on the other?*, the fact stands out that 78% of respondents categorically indicate business as responsible for achieving a more sustainable economy. Besides, personal responsibility is not ignored—75% agree that personal consumption habits have an impact on nature, and 83% accept that each person is responsible for achieving a more sustainable future. These results confirm the identified characteristics of the sustainable consumer, including self-awareness and responsibility, derived from the theoretical background.

A significant share of consumers—91%, are of the opinion that compared to conventional products, sustainable products are characterised by higher prices. Consumers are a little more categorical in assessing companies’ activities regarding sustainability—87% of them believe that organisations exaggerate their achievements, and 83% define the importance of sustainability as overexposed in marketing

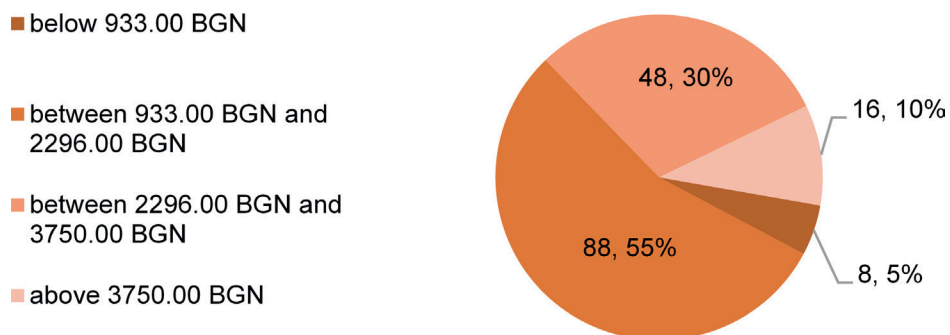


Figure 7. Distribution of respondents (number; percentage) by monthly income ($N = 160$)—with the possibility of marking more than one answer; Source: Own development.

campaigns. This data correlates positively with recent research indicating that 81% of people worldwide expect companies to be environmentally conscious in all their advertising and marketing activities [6].

RQ2—*What are the motivations and attitudes of consumers towards sustainable products?* gets its answer from the questions in group 2 (Table 2). They show that 49% of respondents are willing to pay a higher price for sustainable products, 51% are willing to compromise on the design and functionality of a product for its sustainability, and 60% are willing to pay more for sustainable products, even if it means consuming less. On the other hand, 58% do not trust companies when they claim that their products are sustainable, and a slightly smaller share—53%, do not trust labels and certificates that indicate that a product is sustainable. Such findings cast doubt on traditional methods of communicating sustainable value to consumers—if certificates arouse distrust, what is the benefit (and for whom) of their application?

In addition, it appears that despite sustainable communication campaigns, mandatory certifications, and deliberate marketing strategies, consumers still do not have the information they need to make an informed decision to purchase a sustainable product—55% of respondents face difficulties in finding information regarding the sustainability of a product they would like to purchase. In addition to the first research question and the consumers' opinion that sustainable products have a higher price, it also appears that this is relatively highly acceptable to consumers—60% of respondents agree that it is normal for sustainable products to be offered at higher prices. The data analysis reveals significant similarities with the findings presented in the theoretical background.

Regarding the RQ3, *“What are the main characteristics of consumers regarding sustainable consumption?”* the results support and develop the concepts presented in the literature review. Most consumers (57%) are interested in buying sustainable products, and 38% buy products that are certified as ecological or produced under fair conditions—factors that, to varying degrees, define sustainable products. Another 48% of respondents claim that they take into account the environmental and social consequences of their purchases. For 55%, it turns out to be essential to buy products and services from socially responsible companies.

In dissonance with the willingness of consumers to actively participate in building a sustainable future through their purchasing decisions is the distrust of respondents towards marketing activities in an organisation—72% define marketing campaigns that emphasise the sustainability of the product as unconvincing, and a slightly higher share—78%, that these same campaigns do not influence their purchase decision. And if such a significant share of respondents defines marketing as unconvincing, can it be effective? Apparently, from the respondents' answers, rather not.

RQ4—*What is the demographic and behavioural profile of the sustainable consumer?* aims to build a profile of the sustainable consumer. It is evident from the data that in the overwhelming majority of cases, this is a woman born between 1981 and 1996 (Generation Y/Millennials). This is also confirmed by an analysis [6], which shows that 73% of millennials are willing to pay more for sustainable offers.

In addition, the perfect sustainable customer, who also has a higher education degree, is employed full time and has an income between 933.00 BGN and 2296.00 BGN or higher. For a country like Bulgaria, this financial range is considered relatively low, but it all depends on the region from which the respondents are from. However, it is commendable that even within the limits between the minimum and average wages for Bulgaria, the majority of respondents manage to shop for sustainable products, especially since it has become abundantly clear that in the minds of consumers, sustainable products are characterised as products of a higher price class.

From the point of view of the behavioural profile, it is clear that the sustainable consumer seeks specific information before making a purchase decision—40% of respondents confirm the logic of consumer choice. This is also confirmed by the literature analysis, which emphasises the importance of information for achieving overall sustainability in production, supply, and consumption. Another characteristic of the sustainable consumer, also identified in the literature background—distrust of certification and various other means of reporting the impact on nature and society, is confirmed by 42% of the participants in this study. Regarding the factors that influence the choice and purchase of a sustainable product, 73% highlight the personal responsibility of the individual to achieve a more sustainable future.

In summary, it can be concluded that the sustainable consumer belongs to (1) the Millennial generation, (2) has a higher education degree, (3) prefers to buy sustainable products and is willing to compromise on design, functionality, and quantity, (4) is aware of their socially responsible role, and (5) seeks additional information before each purchase instead of trusting marketing campaigns and messages, certificates, and descriptions on packaging and labels.

4.1 Study limitations

A significant limitation of the study is the limitation applied in the methodology—the study was carried out in stages in different social networks and other channels. It is known that each social network has different preferences among various age groups; for example, Facebook is preferred by those born between 1964 and 1980 (Generation X) and, between 1981 and 1996 (Generation Y, Millennials) and to a lesser extent by other generations. This minimises their opportunity for full participation in the survey—a problem that the authors of this study aim to eliminate by the full completion of the study.

Accordingly, the under-representation of respondents from all generational groups casts doubt on the currently formed profile of the sustainable consumer. The authors plan additional, expanded studies on the topic to validate the descriptive characteristics of the sustainable consumer to the maximum extent possible.

Despite the young age of respondents in the age group “*after 2012*”, this option was added because it is not possible to predict who will complete the anonymous survey across different channels (e.g. social media as a communication channel). The goal is that if the survey is completed correctly (as the researchers expect), this option will minimise the likelihood of error and inaccuracy in the remaining age groups.

4.2 Theoretical and empirical contributions

This study contributes to the theoretical framework of sustainable consumption by examining the specific attitudes and behavioural patterns of consumers in the Bulgarian context. It extends existing theories by providing a critical analysis of the effectiveness of marketing communications related to sustainability. In addition, the study contributes to understanding the demographic and behavioural profile of the sustainable consumer in conditions of economic constraints, emphasising the role of the millennial generation, education, and personal responsibility.

At the same time, the study provides new empirical data on consumer attitudes and behaviour in Bulgaria regarding sustainable consumption. It identifies key factors influencing consumer decisions, such as price sensitivity, distrust of marketing communications, and information search. These empirical data contribute to a better

understanding of the target group for sustainable products and services. Our data refute the assumption that certification and marketing campaigns are sufficient to convince consumers. The results show that consumers are sceptical of these methods and seek more reliable information. It is empirically confirmed that a large percentage of consumers do not trust marketing campaigns that emphasise the sustainability of products. This is an important finding that questions the effectiveness of current marketing strategies.

5. Conclusions

The research reveals a complex and multi-layered picture of consumer attitudes towards sustainability. On the one hand, the results show a significant interest in sustainable products and services, supported by consumers' willingness to pay a higher price and make compromises. On the other hand, the data indicate a significant distrust of companies' marketing communications and a lack of sufficient information about the characteristics and benefits of sustainable products.

The analysis of demographic data outlines the profile of the typical sustainable consumer as a representative of Generation Y with higher education and middle income. However, despite the positive attitude towards sustainability, a number of barriers hinder the broader spread of sustainable consumption. Among the main challenges are the high prices of sustainable products, the lack of clear and reliable information, and distrust of companies' marketing messages.

The results obtained highlight the need for greater transparency and accountability on the part of businesses. Companies need to develop effective communication strategies that build trust and provide consumers with precise and reliable information about their sustainable practices. On the other hand, consumers need to be more proactive and seek information about the sustainability of products before making a purchase.

The study enriches the theory of marketing, business models, and sustainability by contributing to a better understanding of consumer attitudes towards sustainability and identifying the key factors that influence purchasing decisions. The results obtained can be helpful for businesses, governments, and non-governmental organisations in developing policies and strategies to promote sustainable consumption.

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The Role and Motivations of Consumers to Join the Circular Economy

Izabela Ostrowska

Abstract

As population growth accelerates, natural resources dwindle, and waste management becomes increasingly problematic, the concept of a circular economy has emerged as a critical focus of research. Unlike the traditional linear economy, where products are made, utilised, and then discarded, the circular economy promotes a closed-loop system, offering a sustainable alternative. A circular economy is an economic model where raw materials, products, and waste are managed efficiently to reduce waste and safeguard the environment. The shift from a linear to a circular economy model promotes the idea of producing resilient products that can be repaired, renewed and recycled. The aim of the chapter is to present consumers' attitudes towards the circular economy and to identify their motivations and possible concerns regarding this topic. The chapter's considerations are based on the results of the self-study. The research method that was used in the self-study was focus group interviews (FGI). Three different market segments were surveyed—young people under 30, adults aged 31–59 and older people over 60. The interviews allow for more issues to be discussed and considerable depth compared to quantitative research. Consumers express support for the concept of a circular economy and show a willingness to adapt their habits. However, it is evident that they are unlikely to make these changes independently unless appropriate systemic frameworks and legal regulations are established.

Keywords: consumer behaviour, circular economy, resource conservation, motivations, recycling, replace

1. Introduction

Between 1970 and 2017, the world's population doubled, from 3.7 billion to 7.6 billion people. Demographic projections show that this upward trend will continue, and the population could reach around 11.2 billion by 2100 [1]. The latest demographic projections indicate that the world population will grow to 9.6 billion people by 2050. The past five decades have seen significant growth in economies around the world, resulting in an improved quality of life for the population. This rapid population growth and rising individual incomes have resulted in an expanding global consumer group, particularly the middle class, which has a significant impact on

the global economy. Forecasts show a further increase in middle-class consumption, estimated at one-third of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2030, a phenomenon driven by progressive economic and social development, leading to increased consumption, investment and the creation of new markets worldwide. A key role is played by the growing number of middle-income earners who are becoming increasingly active participants in the global economy, which is shaping consumption trends on a global scale [2].

Consumption behaviour and patterns in developed economies can hardly be considered sustainable. The experience of Western European countries shows that an increase in the wealth of societies leads to a significant increase in consumption levels. L. Sklair [3] drew attention to the emerging phenomenon of consumerism, i.e., an unreflective need to consume new products. Technological innovation, increasingly easy access to inexpensive goods from Asia, the ubiquity of credit and the ability to shop online have created a philosophy of life in society known as consumerism [4]. Consumerism is further increased by manufacturers offering newer and newer versions of their products, who thus earn money from the constant increase in demand (e.g. Apple and the ever newer versions of iPhones). Consumerism also benefits the state, which benefits from increasing turnover or income taxes. There are widespread marketing activities encouraging consumers to buy more, such as sales promotions (buy three for the price of 2, get the second pack free, get the second pack 50% off) or advertisements for new and better products. Also, instalment sales make these products accessible to the less affluent part of society. Consumerism means overconsumption on the part of the individual, with no regard for individual, social or ecological costs. Consumption is also increasingly becoming a means of establishing social standing and expressing individual identity [5]. The countries leading the way in this excessive consumption are the developed countries. If the entire world population used resources at a level similar to high-income countries, four times more natural resources would be consumed than are available on Earth [6].

Research in recent decades shows that economic growth is linked to an increase in material use. Reductions in resource use are still rare, meaning that few countries have managed to decouple economic growth from negative environmental impacts [7, 8]. Currently, the vast majority of raw materials supplied to the economy are primary raw materials, while the share of secondary raw materials is even declining: from 9.1% in 2018 to 7.2% in 2023. At the same time, the total amount of materials used by the global economy is steadily increasing: more than half a trillion tonnes of materials were used in the last 6 years alone, almost as much as in the entire twentieth century [9]. Copper is used as an example; its resources, if the current rate of consumption is maintained, will be exhausted in about 40 years [10].

In order to carry on with our current lifestyle, humanity will need natural resources in much greater quantities than at present. Additionally, increasing production and consumption inevitably means more pollution, which worsens the environment and can therefore pose a threat to humans and nature [11]. Overpopulation and urbanisation create further problems such as increased waste and noise. The impact of human activities on the environment is steadily increasing, which is already leading to an ecological crisis and irreversible changes in ecosystems. Such changes can significantly limit further economic development, especially due to the lack of access to scarce natural resources [12]. The UN estimates that half of all greenhouse gas emissions and more than 90 percent of the Earth's biodiversity loss and water deficit are caused by the extraction and processing of natural resources [13].

According to scientists' calculations, global consumption of natural resources exceeds the Earth's regeneration capacity by about 1.6 times. The need for a change in the approach to natural resources is inevitable and requires policy and legal instruments. Past experience shows that the amount of income earned plays a greater role in the exploitation of the environment than the state of environmental awareness [14]. The current linear economic model, based on overconsumption, requires changes in the approach to resource use in order to achieve more sustainable and ecologically neutral development.

The circular economy, also referred to as a closed-loop economy, cradle-to-cradle economy or regenerative economy, is an economic development strategy that allows for increased prosperity while reducing resource consumption. This goal is achieved through changes in production and consumption processes and the implementation of innovative business models. There are various ways in which the objectives of a circular economy can be realised, including reusing materials, extending the life of products and managing waste appropriately. The circular economy, through appropriate supply chain management, seeks to eliminate the notion of the 'end of product life', transforming a redundant product into still useful raw materials and materials [1]. One of the tenets of the circular economy is that household consumption should be sustainable. This includes buying the right amount of products and paying attention to their sustainability and how they were produced, but also how consumers dispose of them. The aim of this chapter is to show the willingness of consumers to join the new circular economy model and to identify the kind of consumer motivations favouring CE and the barriers preventing its implementation.

The following chapter focuses on answering the research questions:

1. Are different age groups familiar with and accepting of the concept of a circular economy?
2. Do consumers feel motivated to join the circular economy?
3. Do the different age groups have the same kind of motivation with regard to joining a circular economy?
4. What barriers can be seen that hinder the integration of different groups into a circular economy?

The author's own study is important both on a theoretical and practical level. It contributes to a deeper knowledge of consumers' willingness to participate in the model of a closed-loop economy and the factors that determine their commitment and level of motivation. Identifying differences in the level of acceptance and motivation among different age groups allows for a better understanding of the determinants of pro-environmental behaviour and the mechanisms that shape it.

2. The concept of a circular economy

With the growing problems caused by continued population growth, dwindling natural resources and the problem of exponentially increasing waste, the introduction of a circular economy is an important area of research for scientists. The concept of a closed-loop (circular) economy is an alternative to the linear economy that

characterises the production model commonly used today. It is based on a scheme: obtain raw materials, process them and then dispose of the product freely (take, make, dispose). The concept of the linear economy, which is still dominant worldwide, is based on the erroneous assumption that the planet's resources are unlimited [15].

The modern tenets of the concept of a circular economy were formulated in the late 1990s by Lyle [16], who emphasised the need to reconstruct the environment. The concept of the CE was primarily developed by practitioners, i.e. politicians, business people, consultancies, associations and foundations. In contrast, large-scale implementation and refinement of the CE concept only began in the early 2000s, initially in Asia (i.e., China and Japan), and only later appeared in EU legislation [17, 18], and consequently, many EU Member States started to implement it [19, 20].

In European Union documents, the circular economy (CE) is defined as 'a development strategy that enables economic growth with optimised resource use, deep transformation of production chains and consumption patterns'. A key element in the realisation of a circular economy is to maintain the value of products, materials and resources in the economy for as long as possible and to minimise the production of waste. The European Commission has also indicated that the transition to a circular economy contributes significantly to building an economy that can be described as sustainable, low-carbon, resource-efficient and competitive [18]. Transforming the economy into a circular economy is one of the key objectives of the European Green Deal 6, which aims to bring about the ecological transformation of Europe [21].

The closed-loop economy is now seen as an economic development strategy [22]. It aims to maximise the efficient use of resources while minimising waste, which fits with the idea of sustainable socio-economic development. The idea of a circular economy is derived from observations of natural ecosystems, which are not linear but resources in nature circulate (energy flows) [23, 24]. The concept of a circular economy assigns a fundamental role to the environment, its functions and the relationships within it. This idea illustrates how production and consumption can be part of a closed loop, thereby contributing to improving the ability of current and future generations to meet their needs [25].

Kirchherr et al. [26] defined the concept of a circular economy as an economic system based on business models that replace the concept of 'end of life' through the reuse, recycling and recovery of materials within production/production/distribution and consumption processes, thus acting at the micro (products, companies, consumers), meso (eco-industrial parks) and macro (city, region, nation and beyond) levels to achieve sustainability, enabling improved environmental quality and the achievement of economic prosperity and social justice, which is done for the benefit of present and future generations.

A closed-loop economy is an economic system in which raw materials, products and waste are managed in a rational way to minimise waste and protect the environment. The closed-loop economy is designed to replace the traditional linear economy model, based on fast and cheap production and cheap storage, with the production of durable goods that can be repaired or easily dismantled and recycled again. This closed-loop model promotes the repair, renewal and reuse of products, i.e., extending their life cycle [27]. **Figure 1** provides a summary of the objectives for implementing a closed-loop economy.

Kirchherr et al. [26] note the need for a closed-loop economy at the micro, meso and macro levels, which applies to producers, retailers and consumers, but also to cities, regions or countries. The transition to a circular economy model is expected to provide countries' economies with significant savings, increased investment, innovation and, consequently, economic growth and development.

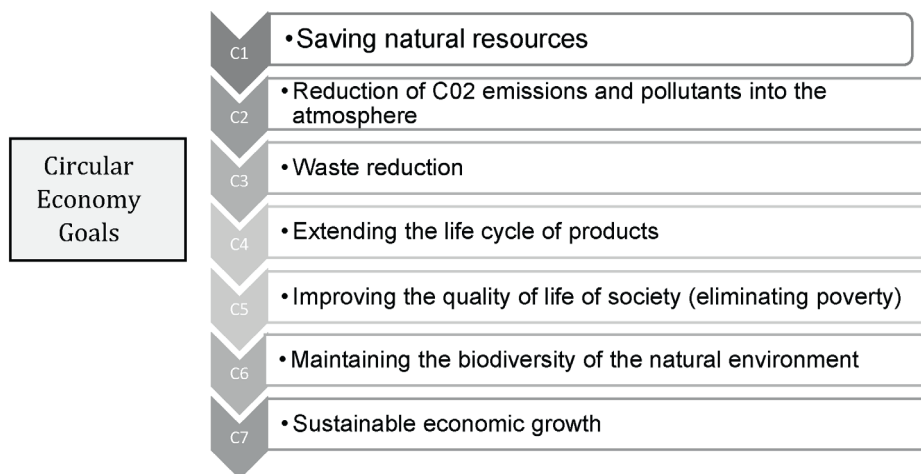


Figure 1.
 Goals of a circular economy. Source: Own study.

As a summary of the circular economy considerations, a table showing a comparison of the two economy models—linear and circular—is included (**Table 1**).

The circular economy should be seen as a concept, characterised by high dynamics of change and affecting many areas of economic life, but it also applies to the daily functioning of households.

Linear economy	Circular economy
Approach: take, use up, throw away.	Approach: reuse, repair, refurbish and recover raw materials.
Single use of product, materials and energy.	Reusing a product through proper design, sharing, donating to those in need, and taking care to recover raw materials from unnecessary products.
Moral obsolescence of products—they go out of fashion, and users dispose of them even though they are functional.	Extending the life cycle of a product by rebuilding, extending or refurbishing it.
Lack of attention to the recovery of raw materials.	Emphasis on recycling—using secondary raw materials in production and designing for ease of recycling.
Traditional energy sources based on fossil fuels, depletion of sources.	Development of renewable energy based on renewable sources (solar, wind, water).
Greenhouse gas emissions.	Clean production.
‘Unlimited’ economic growth based on the use of primary raw materials.	Decoupling economic growth from the use of natural resources.
Destruction of biodiversity.	Conservation of biodiversity.
Creates social inequalities on a global scale.	Intergenerational and interregional equity.
Unlimited consumption (overconsumption).	Sustainable consumption.
Lack of corporate social responsibility on the part of companies and stakeholders.	Corporate social responsibility on the part of companies and stakeholders.

Table 1.
 Comparison of the linear economy and the circular economy. Source: Own compilation based on: Deloitte [1]; Sulich and Zema [28].

3. The role of the consumer in a circular economy

The circular economy is based on extending the life cycle of products, minimising waste and making efficient use of resources through processing and reuse. In this context, it is important to emphasise the importance of consumer choices, which can contribute to extending the life cycle of products and their responsible disposal. It is up to the consumer to decide how long products will be used in the household and subsequently passed on to subsequent users or disposed of in a responsible manner. It is the motives and attitudes, but above all the habits, of the individual consumer that determine how long products will be used and whether the raw materials used in their production are not wasted.

Considering the data on the consumption behaviour of people in developed countries, worrying trends can be observed. According to a study by the European Environment Agency (EEA), between 1996 and 2012, the amount of clothing bought by an EU resident increased by 40 percent, while at the same time, more than 30 percent of clothes bought in Europe were not used for at least a year. More than half of discarded clothing is not recycled but ends up in mixed household waste and is then sent to incinerators or landfills, the study shows [29, 30]. A separate problem is food waste. Worldwide, 14 percent of all food produced is lost or wasted at the stage from harvest to transport, storage and processing. In 2019, some 931 million tonnes of food were wasted (representing 17 percent of total global food production): 61 percent was wasted by households, 26 percent by food services and 13 percent by retail [31]. This results in the loss of resources used for food production and unnecessary greenhouse gas emissions. Each year, 88 million tonnes of food waste are generated in the European Union, and food waste has a significant environmental impact, accounting for approximately 6% of total EU greenhouse gas emissions [30].

In order to achieve emission reductions and reduce demand for raw materials through the principles of the circular economy, consumption must be reduced and directed towards more sustainable, higher-quality and longer-lasting products.

The practical implementation of the circular economy model is based on the 10 R's concept. It involves the efficient management of resources to minimise waste and maximise the use of resources that are in a closed loop (**Figure 2**).

The different Rs are seen as [32]:

- R 0: refuse—i.e., encouraging consumers to reduce their level of consumption by showing alternative ways to meet their needs instead of buying another product, e.g., lending and borrowing.
- R 1: rethink—encouraging a change in thinking about needs and ways of producing, consuming and using waste. That is, seeking methods that reduce raw material consumption and waste generation through a more sustainable approach. Sharing products, buying used products, designing multifunctional products and buying products without packaging are used.
- R 2: reduce—reduce the consumption of raw materials by reducing the amount of materials used and producing items with a longer useful life.
- R 3: redesign—designing products, packaging and services so that they can be remanufactured, repaired, reused and recycled.

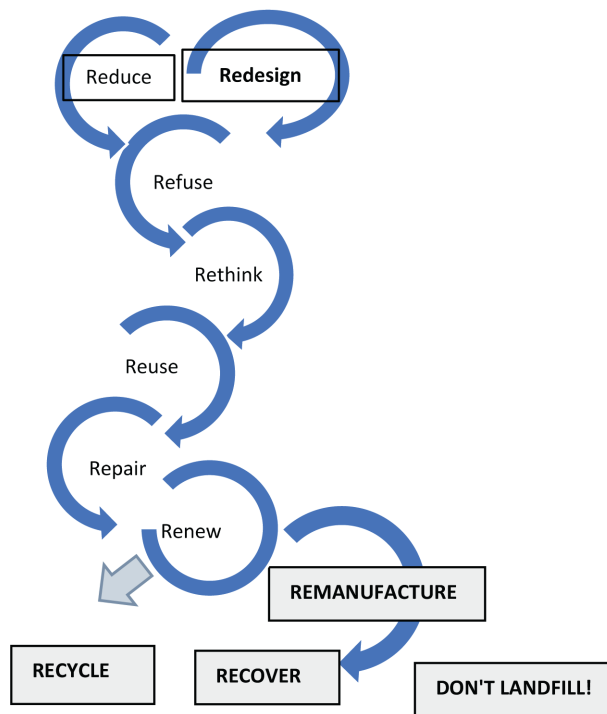


Figure 2.
The 10 Rs concept in the circular economy. Source: Own elaboration.

- R 4: reuse—to promote the reuse of objects that are still useful by passing them on to the next user.
- R 5: repair—enabling damaged items to be repaired rather than replaced by new products. This is done through appropriate design to enable repairs, greater availability of spare parts and the availability of repair facilities.
- R 6: refurbish—repair and refurbish objects to restore their functionality and attractiveness, where they have lost their aesthetic or functional qualities. Examples include repainting and replacing upholstery materials or fillings in the case of furniture.
- R 7: remanufacture—the refurbishment and restoration of worn-out products to their original condition and their subsequent remarketing.
- R 8: recycle— it is the process of processing waste and used materials to produce new products or raw materials.
- R 9: recover—using energy or value from waste that cannot be recycled in the traditional recycling process, e.g. through energy recovery or biogas generation.

The 10R concept aims to minimise the amount of waste generated, reduce negative environmental impacts and contribute to a more sustainable and efficient economy. The emergence of the 10R concept is difficult to attribute to a specific author. It is a holistic concept related to the sustainable management of resources in a modern economy through the minimisation of waste generation, which is being developed and disseminated by various organisations, institutions and experts involved in the circular economy, sustainable development and environmental protection. These organisations include, among others, the European Commission, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), as well as various research institutes and NGOs working on ecology and sustainable development. Thus, it can be concluded that the 10R concept is the result of a concerted effort by many experts to reduce the negative impact of human activities on the environment through more efficient and sustainable resource management.

The circular strategies available to consumers are mainly related to seven of the 10 Rs: refuse, rethink, reduce, reuse, repair, renew and recycle. The main outcomes are to reduce consumption by using fewer things or using the products they have more intensively (refuse, rethink, reduce) or to reduce consumption by using products longer (reuse, repair, refurbish).

4. Methodology of own research

In order to verify the research questions, three focus group interviews (FGI) were conducted, organised in the focus studio of a research agency in Warsaw. The interviews took place on 20–21.03.2024, each lasting approximately 2 h. The study was conducted by two moderators (including the author of the chapter), and each interview involved eight respondents. Thanks to the synergy created during the group interviews, diverse and in-depth opinions were obtained. During the analysis of the research material obtained, an analysis of the interactions taking place was included, which, in addition to showing how individual respondents reacted to the communicated content. It also made it possible to track the influence of the group on the perception of individual respondents. The face-to-face interviews allowed for a better observation of the non-verbal behaviour of the participants, and the dynamics of the conversation and the interactions between group members were more intense compared to online group interviews or individual interviews.

The study used purposive sampling, i.e., a non-random, non-representative selection of survey participants. Respondents were selected based on criteria that were defined at the survey design stage [33]. The main determinant of grouping was the age of the respondents, on which the assignment to a particular group depended. Each target group was differentiated according to the educational level, income, gender and interests of the participants. An additional criterion was the declared interest in ecology by one or two people in each group. The same research methodology was described in an article discussing other issues discussed during the study [34].

- Group 1: young people in the age range up to 30 years, eight participants/two reserve participants
- Group 2: adults aged 31–59 years, eight participants/two reserve participants

- Group 3: older people over 60 years of age, eight participants/two reserve participants

Total: 24 participants and six reserve participants.

5. Outcome of self-assessment

5.1 Knowledge of the circular economy issue

The first issue explored was knowledge of the term circular economy and the attitudes and emotions surrounding it.

5.1.1 Group young (up to 30 years old)

A moderate familiarity and understanding of the very definition of the circular economy in the Young group was observed. At the same time, when presented with the concept, the Young expressed support for the idea itself and for the principles involved. Above all, they supported the design and production of sustainable things that can be used for a long time. In the statements of the respondents, there were postulates that the procedures concerning production in line with the circular economy should be imposed top-down on companies through legislation. On the other hand, in the statements of young people, there was concern that the production of durable products might entail a higher purchase cost on the part of consumers. And a final statement that young people cannot afford such expensive solutions and will choose cheaper alternatives.

5.1.2 Group adults (31–59 years old)

The topic of the circular economy received positive responses, and it was not an unfamiliar issue for the adult segment of the survey group. Those surveyed even pointed to companies that are already implementing this way of working, producing clothes or backpacks from recycled materials. Significantly, for some of those surveyed, this issue is not of great importance, and there were even concerns about whether products made in this way would be harmful to health. Attention was drawn to the fact that this is a common topic (consumers, producers) and also to the need for a functioning institution to oversee this area.

5.1.3 Group elderly (60 and over)

The associations in the Elderly group with the concept of a circular economy were related to the reuse of materials from items that are no longer used. This issue was associated in this group with 'difficult topics', requiring a lot of money and advanced knowledge, which should be decided in a top-down manner. In the opinion of the respondents, this type of solution may meet with interest, but citizens must be provided with the tools (e.g., dedicated sites, bins). Communication showing how donated items will be reused is necessary. At the same time, elders expressed a sense of dissatisfaction due to the gap between involvement at the micro level (citizens sorting their rubbish) and action at the macro scale. The example was given of countries that contribute significantly to environmental degradation (for example, China and India). As a result, on a global scale, the efforts of citizens trying to protect the planet are nullified.

5.2 Consciously limiting purchases of certain products

Another question examined was whether consumers feel motivated to limit purchases for environmental reasons.

5.2.1 Group young (up to 30 years old)

In this group, there were examples of practical ecological behaviour while shopping. However, there was also no shortage of opinions that ecology is often not taken into account by them and does not play an important role as a factor influencing purchasing decisions. According to the youngsters, it is legislation that should oblige manufacturers to produce more ecologically friendly products. Toothpaste or creams, which are unnecessarily packaged in cardboard boxes that are immediately thrown away after purchase, were cited as an example. According to the young, this law should prohibit the use of unnecessary packaging.

5.2.2 Group adults (31–59 years old)

Respondents gave the example of limiting the purchase of bottled water, which they limit for environmental reasons. Filter bottles and home filters were cited as substitutes. Another example is limiting purchases of clothes, which are perishable and made of poor-quality materials. At the same time, some of the people in this group admit that they show little activity in issues of environmental behaviour.

5.2.3 Group elderly (60 and over)

Motivations for limiting purchases of certain product categories among the Elderly group are mainly financial and partly ecological (protection of local nature). Also in this group, dissatisfaction was expressed about the amount of unnecessary packaging that is thrown away immediately after purchase and represents an unnecessary burden on the environment.

5.3 Buying used products

An important issue within the circular economy is the propensity to change behaviour by buying second-hand products, thus extending the life of the product on the market.

5.3.1 Group young (under 30)

Items accepted by the Young as second-hand are sports equipment (e.g. a bicycle) and also electronics (a phone, a TV). However, there were doubts about buying categories perceived as more personal, e.g. washing machines, bathtubs and fridges. Concerns were particularly about hygiene and the ability of more people to use such equipment safely.

5.3.2 Group adults (31–59 years)

Product categories that are (or could be) bought by adults as second-hand are books and sporting goods (for example, bicycle parts). However, there were

more varied opinions on buying second-hand clothes, electronics and furniture. Arguments raised against buying used products were the questions of the functionality, the quality and the safety of the product in question.

5.3.3 Group elderly (60 and over)

The Elderly group was keen to buy second-hand products in the home furnishings and furniture categories. Concerns about buying items of a personal nature (e.g., underwear, shoes) were revealed. Also indicated was the very high popularity of secondary market purchases of items such as cars, telephones, computers, washing machines, fridges and dishwashers (due to the possibility of savings and good value for money).

5.4 Buying remanufactured products

Another circularity solution that promotes longer use of products is the purchase of remanufactured products. These are products that are collected from the market after use and refilled, repaired and put back into circulation by companies.

5.4.1 Group young (up to 30 years of age)

Respondents initially declared an interest among the young in purchasing remanufactured products, provided that the price would indeed be sensibly lower compared to buying new. However, if there is little difference in price, the young are inclined to buy new.

5.4.2 Group adults (31–59 years)

Respondents are open to purchasing remanufactured products in categories such as tools, printer cartridges and refurbished furniture. At the same time, there were concerns about using remanufactured items in combination with electronic equipment that is still covered by a warranty. Respondents expressed concern about losing it if there were problems with the quality of remanufactured products.

5.4.3 Group elderly (60 and over)

The categories of products purchased as remanufactured in the Elderly group are printer cartridges, car parts and photographic equipment. Declared openness to this type of purchase, but at the same time, indicated problems with availability on the market.

5.5 Renting products instead of buying

Another pro-circulation solution is to rent products instead of buying. It reduces the need for resources because many people can use one product.

5.5.1 Group young (up to 30 years old)

Openness of the Young to renting products—especially categories that are used occasionally (e.g., sports equipment—skis) or take up a lot of space (no possibility of storing their own in the flat or house). The main determining factors are practical and financial.

Attention was drawn to the limited awareness of operators and venues that offer rental opportunities for various types of equipment (e.g., used during renovation), as well as concerns about the potential damage or condition of rented equipment. Respondents have had experience with car-sharing services, although not all are convinced. Concerns are mainly about financial liability for potential damage to the rental vehicle.

5.5.2 Group adults (31–59 years)

Renting products in selected categories is treated as something natural (tools, carnival costumes). At the same time, when it comes to more valuable items, there are concerns about potential damage and possible additional costs.

5.5.3 Group elderly (60 and over)

Openness to renting products in the Elderly group was declared mainly for cost-saving reasons—construction equipment, tools used during renovation, sports equipment (e.g., canoes), items for a party (e.g., garden tents) and office equipment (e.g., printers and document shredders).

5.6 Repairing broken products

A behaviour conducive to the circular economy is to repair items that have broken down. Such repair can be done by oneself or outsourced to specialised entities. By doing so, the life of the product is extended, there is no demand for new products, and no waste is generated.

5.6.1 Group young (up to 30 years old)

Respondents declare experience with self-repair of selected groups of products, e.g., clothes, furniture and small household appliances, especially if the damage is not serious. However, repairing more technically advanced products requires specialist knowledge and is usually not cost-effective due to the comparable cost of buying a new appliance. The length of the whole process can also be a barrier against repair, which can be disorganising. In such cases, young consumers prefer to replace the product with a new one.

5.6.2 Group adults (31–59 years)

In the adult group, broken appliances are repaired by themselves in the first instance, as far as their skills allow. For some categories, products are repaired in specialised shops or by qualified people (footwear, small domestic appliances). This does not always turn out to be cost-effective, especially as the main motivation for repair is financial. As a last resort, equipment or a product that is difficult or unprofitable to repair can be sold on a classified site for a small amount.

5.6.3 Group elderly (60 and over)

The Elderly group indicated situations of repairing items—both on their own (to the extent of their skills) and by using the services of specialised establishments and service centres.

5.7 Giving unwanted products to the needy

The last surveyed issue was donating unnecessary items to people in need, thus prolonging the life of products and additionally fulfilling the postulate of increasing the welfare of the general public.

5.7.1 Group young (up to 30 years old)

Limited knowledge of SWAP-type actions among the Young. There were examples implemented a few years ago (in cafés, community centres). Nowadays, they encounter such initiatives less and less frequently. Young people are not inclined to donate products to the needy and are more willing to try to sell these items on the Internet. This solution also encourages circularity, but the motivation is financial rather than altruistic or pro-environmental.

5.7.2 Group adults

People in the adult group have numerous experiences of donating unnecessary items, both directly, as part of individual initiatives, and through organised campaigns. The latter are seen as effective in terms of getting help to where it is really needed. Self-donation was motivated in the respondents' case by the desire to help, but the experience tends to be moderately good. Respondents pointed out the high expenditure of time and effort and the low level of gratitude shown by the recipients. Selling on an OLX-type website is not always successful; it is more effective to advertise a free donation.

5.7.3 Group elderly (60 and over)

In the older people's group, there was an example of an action organised by one of the neighbourhoods, which took the form of a SWAP-type exchange (available hangers, located under a tent)—an initiative evaluated positively. In addition, the topic of PCK containers for second-hand clothes for the needy provoked a discussion—there were both favourable opinions (motivation related to the desire to help) and reminders of the controversies that arose in the past around this form of support.

5.8 Using pro-circulation solutions

The survey shows that knowledge of the principles and benefits of implementing the circular economy in society is at an average level. However, the practical and informed implementation of these principles by consumers faces numerous barriers. A common opinion was that this area should be regulated and controlled in a top-down manner by state institutions. An important issue that emerged among the youngest respondents was concern about a potential increase in the purchase price of products produced in this way. Respondents also highlighted concerns about the impact of 'circulating products' on the health of their users. Respondents' actions in relation to the 10R concept are summarised below.

5.8.1 Rethink

Respondents would be willing to change their purchasing habits but currently do not feel a strong pro-environmental motivation. It seems necessary to increase

the level of awareness among the public about the benefits of the circular economy. Especially younger groups of respondents showed openness to more sustainable consumption models, which include renting or sharing products. Greater acceptance and more widespread use of these solutions would undoubtedly reduce the need for raw materials and the amount of waste generated. The experience and openness to renting products in all three surveyed groups is therefore positive, but at the same time, there is a lack of general awareness of where and what products can be rented. Respondents emphasised the sense of renting, especially products that are used occasionally and also large products that take up a lot of space.

5.8.2 Reduce

Consumers highlight the role of producers who act irresponsibly and design unnecessary packaging. In the opinion of respondents, more responsible environmental behaviour should be imposed by law in order to reduce the amount of extra packaging on the macro level. Among both Young and Adults, attitudes indicating little interest in limiting purchases for environmental reasons also emerged. Respondents, especially older people, declared feeling motivated to limit the number of products purchased and wanting to extend their life cycle. Unfortunately, this was most often due to a desire to save money rather than pro-environmental motives. Younger groups, unfortunately, have a more pro-consumption approach and are susceptible to fashion and want to keep up with trends, which encourages earlier replacement of products with new ones.

5.8.3 Reuse: Buying used and donating

It is noticeable that there is a general acceptance of buying used products in all three groups. Above all, there is a noticeably high willingness and experience with purchasing categories of white goods, electronics or clothing. The exceptions are products described as 'personal' (washing machine, bathtub, refrigerator, underwear and shoes).

A moderately good experience with the direct donation of no longer needed items as part of assistance can be noted among respondents. The perception of organised forms of support as more effective than trying to find people in need on their own is noticeable. The willingness to reuse products was more evident in those with a higher environmental awareness. However, a noticeable barrier appeared to be the lack of adequate infrastructure in the places where people live and the availability of information about where to donate used and no longer needed items.

5.8.4 Recycle

A high level of acceptance of waste segregation was noted in all groups, and the main differences in segregation methods were due to the respondents' level of knowledge and access to recycling systems at the place of residence. Respondents declared the need for more education on which waste can be recycled, how it should be prepared in the household and which bins to put it in.

5.8.5 Repair

Respondents from all three groups say they are open to repairing items and have experience of doing so, both repairing themselves and using professionals.

Respondents indicated two barriers in the context of repair: firstly, cost-effectiveness (sometimes the cost of repair exceeds the purchase of a new product) and the duration of the process. Ecological motivations related to the issue of repairs did not emerge in any of the groups. The willingness to repair products was most noticeable among older respondents, who mentioned traditional methods of saving and repairing in this context.

5.8.6 Refurbish and remanufacture

Respondents from all three groups have experience with purchasing remanufactured products (e.g., printer cartridges, spare parts) and show a tendency to use this form of purchasing items. At the same time, young people indicated that the main decision factor is the real savings compared to buying new products. Regarding the availability of remanufactured products on the market, respondents indicate a limited offer, especially with regard to electronic equipment. A noticeable barrier, however, is a lack of confidence in the quality of these products, which may hinder their sale on a larger scale. In order for such products to be chosen on an equal footing with new products, it is necessary to introduce periodic warranties by their manufacturers and the possibility to return them in case of malfunction.

5.8.7 Recover

The topic of reclaiming materials was not discussed extensively, but respondents emphasised that they would like more information on how products can be recycled at the end of their life. Respondents would like to be assured that products made from recycled materials are safe for users' health.

5.8.8 Refuse

Respondents, especially from the youngest group of respondents, declared to be able to refrain from buying disposable products in favour of other solutions, but under the condition of their wide availability on the market and low price.

Respondents declared their willingness to engage in the circular economy but made their decisions conditional on the creation of the right external conditions. Respondents expect adequate support from the public environment in terms of education, accessibility to infrastructure and, above all, the availability of a range of green products. According to the respondents, it is up to the government and local authorities to create appropriate regulations forcing companies to introduce circular solutions. An important barrier, especially for the youngest and oldest respondents, is economic considerations—circular products cannot be significantly more expensive than goods purchased so far.

6. Conclusions

Motivations for joining the circular economy (CE) vary by age group and stem from their specific needs, values and lifestyles. These are summarised in **Table 2**.

Each generation requires a different approach to realise its full potential to support a circular economy.

Types of motivation		
Group young (under 30)	Group adults (31–59 years)	Group elderly (60 and over)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional and image motivation: Declared desire to participate in activities that are in line with current social trends, such as ecology or conscious consumption. • Economic motivation: Using cheaper alternatives, such as second-hand purchases. • Environmental motivation: Declared concern for the future of the planet and the impact of individual actions on the environment, but which does not translate into specific purchasing decisions by young people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical motivation: Looking for solutions to save money, e.g., repairing equipment instead of buying new or choosing more durable products. • Family motivation: Awareness of the impact of actions on the future of children and future generations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Austerity motivation: Repairing, reusing and separating waste are seen as ways to reduce spending. • Traditional motivation: Continuing certain habits from the past, such as caring about the durability of items and reducing overconsumption. • Environmental motivation: Concern for the local environment (e.g., condition of soils, water, air), which has a direct impact on their daily lives.

Table 2. Motivations for joining the circular economy (CE) by age group. Source: own study based on research results.

6.1 Young (under 30)

The survey results indicate that young consumers are emotionally and image-motivated to join CE. They want to participate in trends such as environmentalism and conscious consumption because of their popularity in the media, especially social media. The young are also driven by economic motivation, which supports the principle of reuse in a circular economy. However, a key aspect observed is their environmental motivation, where stated concern for the planet often does not translate into concrete purchasing decisions. This discrepancy is described in the literature as an attitude-behaviour gap. This suggests that despite positive attitudes towards sustainability, practical constraints may limit their actions, requiring targeted interventions to close the gap.

6.2 Adults (31–59 years old)

Adults exhibit a dual motivation structure, combining practical and family factors. Their practical motivation includes looking for ways to save money, such as repairing equipment instead of buying new or choosing more durable products, which directly supports the development of a circular economy. This is in line with so-called economic pragmatism. In addition, their family motivation, centred on awareness of the impact of their actions on their children and future generations, reflects a long-term perspective. This is in line with theories of consumer behaviour that emphasise a stage of life where family responsibilities influence consumer choices. This dual motivation emphasises the interplay between immediate economic benefits and the well-being of future generations. The adult group is a key demographic group for promoting circular economy practices by communicating both savings and family responsibility.

6.3 Seniors (60 and over)

Seniors are motivated by traditional habits, such as taking care of the shelf life of products and reducing overconsumption, which is in line with the circular economy.

This reflects their experiences from a time when resources were limited. Their environmental motivation focuses on local issues, such as soil, water and air quality, which directly affect their daily lives. In addition, a savings motivation is evident in the statements of this group. It includes repair, reuse and waste segregation as ways to reduce expenses and emphasises the practical and economical approach of this group of respondents. This aspect, called savings motivation, reinforces their commitment to sustainable practices, especially in the context of resource management. This suggests that strategies aimed at seniors should respect and reinforce these traditional values, emphasising how closed-loop economy practices correspond to their habits and local environmental concerns.

7. Practical implications

Based on the analysis, it can be seen that there is a need for different incentives to motivate representatives of a generation to change their behaviour to be more pro-circulation and environmentally friendly. Younger people need education on the environmental impact of their consumption behaviour in order to increase their pro-environmental motivation. So as to translate their declared concern for the environment into concrete consumption actions. They are looking for inexpensive products that are, at the same time, environmentally friendly. For young people, fashion and being 'trendy' are important, so it makes sense to run campaigns with social media celebrities. Adults need simple recycling solutions and widespread availability of circular products to meet personal and family needs while favouring the environment and the circulation of raw materials. Older people should be provided with recycling solutions that do not require too much effort (close to home, clear segregation rules), affordable pro-circulation products and services (min. Low-cost repairs) and support in accessing information about circular solutions.

8. Theoretical implications

The analysis presented here makes an important contribution to consumer behaviour theory by highlighting the importance of demographic factors, such as age, in shaping motivations for sustainable consumption. It shows that different age groups have unique priorities, requiring distinct motivational strategies and incentives. Particularly evident is the gap between attitudes and actions among the young, confirming the notion of the attitude-behaviour gap, which is well-known in theory. In addition, research has shown the influence of family possessions in adults as well as the importance of historical context in seniors, which expands the understanding of factors influencing consumer decisions.

It is worth remembering that individual consumption is one of the key drivers of economic development. The level of consumption translates into reported demand, provides an opportunity to develop the dynamics of businesses, increases their revenues and creates new jobs. However, the traditional model of consumption, which is based on disposable or perishable products, creates many negative environmental impacts. Problems that currently result from this are the overconsumption of natural resources, environmental pollution or an exponential increase in waste. In order to minimise these effects, it is necessary to direct consumption towards more sustainable products and services, in line with the principles of the circular economy.

Consumers from different generations show different levels and types of motivation to act pro-cyclically. Although pro-circular declarations are noticeable in all groups, they do not translate into actual consumption actions. The main barriers preventing more circular consumer behaviour are the lack of availability of sustainable products, higher prices for green products, insufficient infrastructure and lack of adequate information on circular economy principles.

Consumers declare to accept the idea of a circular economy and are ready to make some changes in their habits. It is noticeable that they will not undertake them on their own initiative unless the right systemic conditions and legal provisions are created. Among the main purchase motivations of consumers, convenience, fulfilment of their own needs and low product price dominate. In many cases, this contradicts the idea of sustainable consumption, which requires making sacrifices, rethinking consumption choices or putting effort into donating unnecessary products. Therefore, it is crucial for the development of the circular economy that sustainable products are available at affordable prices and provide similar comfort for users as the products currently chosen.

The respondents expect appropriate legislation to be created so that pro-circular solutions are available on the market. In their view, it is primarily the responsibility of governments and policymakers to take regulatory action to force producers to adapt production to the principles of the circular economy. The concept of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), which requires companies to manage the life cycle of their products, including collection, recycling and disposal, can play a particular role. In the European Union, such legislation is already in place for selected product categories, such as electronic and electrical equipment, which allows for a gradual reduction in their negative impact on the environment.

The introduction of appropriate regulations to encourage manufacturers to design durable, repairable and easily recyclable products seems necessary to support consumers in changing their habits. These regulations should also take into account the needs of different age groups, providing adequate education on recycling and reparability, access to infrastructure and economic support for sustainable products or services. Such an integrated approach can contribute to a real change in consumption habits and reduce the negative effects of population growth, while supporting national economic development.

From a practical perspective, the results obtained can assist decision-makers dealing with the implementation of circular economy principles in developing more effective solutions that respond specifically to the needs of different consumer groups. The identification of barriers to GOZ implementation enables the development of appropriate support mechanisms, such as the creation of suitable infrastructure, the design of information campaigns or the selection of incentives. In this way, the study contributes to facilitating the transition towards a circular economy, supporting both public initiatives and private sector strategies aimed at minimising the negative impact of consumption on the environment.

9. Limitations and suggestions for future research

Despite its significant cognitive and applied values, the study has some limitations, primarily due to the qualitative research methodology used. Limited generalisability of the results due to the fact that qualitative research is based on the analysis of in-depth data from a relatively small group of respondents. As such, the results may

not be fully representative of the population as a whole and require caution when generalising. Additionally, the opinions and attitudes of respondents may be influenced by specific social, cultural or economic conditions.

In conclusion, although the survey provides valuable information on motivations and barriers related to the implementation of a circular economy, its results should be treated as a starting point for further research, especially in other socio-economic settings. It would be valuable to carry out a quantitative international study allowing for statistical verification and comparisons between different countries.

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Conflict of interest


The author declares no conflict of interest.

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