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Greenwashing strategies. What makes customers trust them?

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Abstract

Greenwashing has been a response to the current concern towards sustainability. Companies using misleading promotional messages to convince consumers about the *greenness* of their performances when they are not as ecofriendly. This paper analyzes, from a consumer behavior perspective, the factors that make *greenwashing* marketing trustworthy among consumers. Incentives such as the absence of a regulatory framework around these activities and, thus, no ethical and organizational standards are what enhance firms perform *greenwash*. In addition, a quality certifying organization is shown to execute deceptive practices. Resulting in a skeptical and confusing atmosphere for consumers. Then, the survey conducted aims to find out the relation between respondents' behavior towards sustainability and their capability of identifying *greenwashing* when purchasing goods. Results accord with the mistrust and confusion generated from *greenwashing* and contend that there is misinformation about this whole matter. Despite that, respondents have expressed their willingness and attempts to avoid *green* persuasion.

Introduction

Just by walking on the street, watching TV or even listening to the radio, it is increasingly noticeable that the market has changed towards sustainability. Transactions that can make both consumer and seller feel better with themselves by contributing to the preservation and improvement of our society and ecosystem.

Therefore, there is a growing number of companies that are investing in *green* advertising campaigns and public image to meet this growing demand and benefit from it.

The problem arises when companies engage in *green* marketing even though their activities are not as sustainably performed. This practice has been called *greenwashing*. Etymologically, it comes from the combination of the words *whitewashing* – "*an attempt to stop people finding out the true facts about a situation*" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020b) – and *green* – regarding the preservation of the environment (Lexico Dictionaries, 2020). Thus, concealing and misinforming consumers about the firms' activity.

Accordingly, consumers have to deal with the uncertainty of whether their purchases are actually beneficial for the environment. Constituting a responsibility that should be primarily behold by public institutions. In fact, a German Ministry for Environment, Jochen Flasbarth, once affirmed that it is the government's job to make sure that companies do not perform in a non-sustainable way (Reutter & Ladwig, 2019).

The aim of this paper is to discover what makes consumers trust a firm's *green* marketing and, thus, purchase its products. Is it because they find the company's message trustworthy and convincing? Is it because they do not care about the preservation of the environment? Or is it because in this way they can keep consuming their favorite products and feel better with themselves by choosing what is presumably more beneficial? The list can surely be more extensive.

Objectives

In order to accomplish the purpose mentioned, this paper will deepen, firstly, to what it has been stated at the beginning of the introduction: why and how *green* consumption started and developed. By understanding the market's current situation, it is important to acknowledge the meaning, origin and evolution of the term *greenwashing*, along with how it can be seen within the market. Followed by a section about skepticism and confusion towards *greenwashing* and a final summary of a documentary revealing *greenwashing* practices by a non-profit organization.

What is sought in this paper is to understand the trust and credibility consumers give to *green* products and services. Thus, it is focused on a consumer's behavior perspective. To do so, a survey has been distributed among different types of consumers. The survey includes questions such as for what they look out when choosing a *green* product. In addition, the survey inquires about factors related to the product itself, the product's history, its industry, its marketing campaign, etc.

I present the analysis and results of the survey, and then a conclusion and discussion.

Framework

Green consumption

Green consumption can be described as decisions – purchasing ones or not – that consumers make by relying on environmental criteria (Peattie 1995, cited on Darnall et al., 2012).

This environmental concern when purchasing products or services first appears in the 1970s (Vazquez and Liston-Heyes 2008, cited on Darnall et al., 2012). Not long after, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the concern turned into a new mindset: "*green* thinking". A movement that argued the necessity of changing the socio-economic system of production and consumption, advocating that this system was the main reason for environmental degradation (Dryzek, 1997).

In fact, consumers, already at those first steps of *green* consumption, started to believe that, instead of uniquely depending on the government's regulations, it was the individual's own actions what could make a difference to help the environment (Feinstein, 2012).

Consequently, during the last decade of the XX century environmental marketing grew enormously. Companies introduced the market's environmental concern into their own activity by means of new product development strategies and *green* publicity. (Greer 1992, cited on Feinsten, 2012) Therefore, in the last twenty years, the market has experienced a dramatic change in the number of products promoted under environmental claims (Bradley, 2011).

Some studies, including Ottman's (2011), have obtained data that shows this increase in the purchase of *green* products. The survey demonstrated, in 2009, that 84% of shoppers were occasionally consuming *green* goods; for instance, using organically-grown-fiber clothing, foods produced organically, biological pesticides and fertilizers, devices made with water filtration, etc. The demand side was already looking for some changes in the market.

This is due to an essential change within consumers' mindset. Consumers are nowadays guided by values, not mainly by price, performance or convenience – as it was before. That means, consumers give more importance to "*how products are sourced, manufactured, packaged, disposed of – and even […] how factory and farm workers are treated*" (Ottman, 2011).

Therefore, Ottman (2011), in her book *The New Rules of Green Marketing*, concludes with the following statement:

> *"Sustainability represents an important consumer need, and is now an integral aspect of product quality. Green is no longer simply a market position. Products need to be green. Brands need to be socially responsible. Period."*

Greenwashing

It is necessary to properly understand the meaning and origin of the term *greenwashing*. However, since its first mention and creation this concept has brought many controversies over what its exact definition is (Seele & Gatti, 2017).

It came to life in 1986 when activist Jay Westervald described a case of misleading messages within the hospitality industry. Some hotels were showing off their environmental activism by encouraging customers to reuse towels, which was also profitable for the hotel. Yet, other concerns much more urgent were failed to undertake as it would entail higher expenses (Pearson, 2010).

It was not until ten years later that the term became popular and its literature grew steadily. Yet, it still does not exist a completely accepted definition for the concept, and even new concepts regarding these same issues have been included, such as *bluewashing* (Seele & Gatti, 2017). This last term follows the same structure as *greenwashing*, but in this case blue stands for the color of the United Nations. Thus, it indicates a whitewash for humanitarian matters like poverty or human rights (Seele, 2007).

Therefore, as an example for this controversial definition, we can find some experts who consider that *greenwashing* consists exclusively of environmental issues, discerning it from *bluewashing*. Whilst others do not see this differentiation and believe *greenwashing* relates both to social and economic matters (Seele & Gatti, 2017).

Despite that, it can be found that some institutions and scholars have come up with similar definitions (Terrachoice Group Inc., 2009; (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020a). The one tailored by Delmas & Burbano (2011) stands out for its clearness and simplicity: "*a greenwashing firm engages in two behaviors simultaneously: poor environmental performance and positive communication about its environmental performance*".

Moreover, Delmas & Burbano (2011) created a chart, as the one below (see Figure 1), to elaborate the definition and visually demonstrate the reasoning of *greenwashing*.

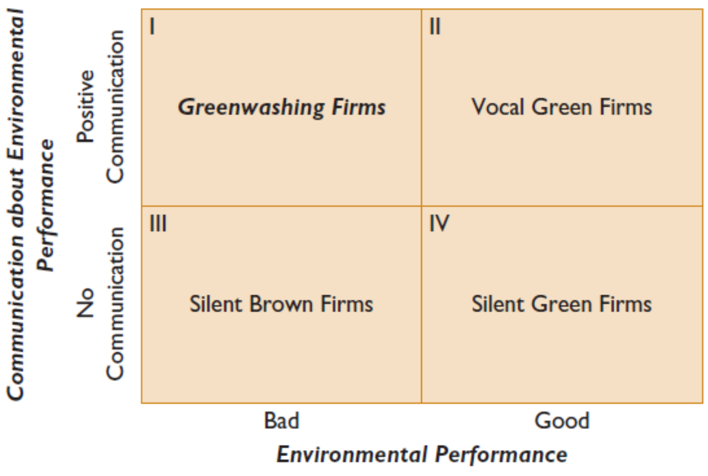


Figure 1. A typology of firms based on environmental performance and communication (Delmas & Burbano, (2011).

Firms are classified by their environmental performance: “brown” firms for those with poor environmental performance and “green” for those considered as good environmental performers.
Likewise, another distinction is done between “vocal” firms, which broadcast themselves as good environmental performers, and “silent” firms, as the ones that do not give away any information about their environmental performance (Delmas & Burbano, 2011).

As a result, the chart shows four types of firms (Delmas & Burbano, 2011):

- “Vocal green firms” which perform environmentally well and positively communicate it accordingly – quadrant II in Figure 1.
- “Silent green firms” which also perform a good environmental activity but do not communicate about it – quadrant IV.
- “Silent brown firms” which do not positively communicate about their performance since they do not perform accordingly – quadrant III.
- “*Greenwashing* firms” which give away positive messages about their environmental activities, even though their performance is not environmentally friendly – quadrant I.

Additionally, the same study conducted by Delmas & Burbano (2011), published on their article “*The Drivers of Greenwashing*”, goes through the possible reasons and factors that can lead a “brown” firm to a *greenwashing* one, taking into account the US market.

Delmas & Burbano (2011) dug out that even though NGOs and media have the power of damaging the reputation of *greenwashing* firms, it does not seem to be enough, since the legal regulation and imposition for this issue is limited. They stated that, in the US, “*the threat of exposure would have much more of a deterrent impact on greenwashing if there were legal ramifications for being “caught” and exposed.*”

Moreover, this lack of regulation, joined together with the pressure exerted by consumer and investor demand for firms to be ecofriendly, strongly influence the performance of “brown” firms within the market. Especially when their organizational-level circumstances, such as the way the firm behaves, its characteristics, its ethical climate, or even the resilience to survive in front of external changes, shape their way of response. Hence, Delmas & Burbano (2011) affirm: “*In a lax regulatory context, there is little incentive for firms to ensure that organizational characteristics such as incentive structures and ethical climate are aligned to minimize greenwashing*”.

In conclusion, *greenwashing* still represents a threat to the progress of achieving real sustainability (Chen & Chang, 2013).

Skepticism and confusion

As stated in former sections, surveys conducted throughout customers have shown an important increase in consumer awareness for environmental concerns. However, trustworthy information is limited when concerning corporate environmental performance, which prevents consumers from purchasing *green*. It has been demonstrated that customer skepticism has, likewise, increased in the past years. Firm's *green* production are not taken for granted anymore. "*The distrust is warranted*", as Darnall et al. (2012) affirm.

Alongside the drivers of *greenwashing* previously mentioned, Delmas & Burbano (2011) highlight the big impact limited regulation and unsettled enforcement play on consumer and investor demand. Consumers find it difficult to trust that a firm would be caught and penalized for communicating misleading. What might result in consumers becoming growingly cynical about *green* declarations and, thus, weakening the *green* market.

It has been demonstrated that a big number of consumers agree that they become mistrustful when seeing a *green* product advertised, since they see it as a usual marketing strategy of conviction (Lyon & Maxwell 2011, cited on Chen & Chang, 2013).

Likewise, several non-governmental organizations emphasize the potential danger of leaving these corporate performances unchecked and undetermined. That is, NGOs criticize the market for drifting towards *greenwashing*. There has been a controversy over the UN Global Compact activities for this lack of control and standards, and the existent confusion between firms' voluntary compromise and the implementation of certifications that prove this ecofriendly commitment (Ramstein, 2012).

In fact, Sustainable Living Fabrics (2010) elaborated a report on the *Communication on Progress 2010* for the United Nations Global Compact, where *greenwash* is mentioned as their third challenge for achieving their principles of "*building sustainable markets, combating corruption, safeguarding the environment and ensuring social inclusion*". Therefore, *greenwashing* is a continuous challenge. As the report exposes, despite governments', the UN's and corporate institutions' efforts since 2005, this issue still represents a threat, and it calls for "*consistent and enforceable regulatory frameworks being implemented and enforced globally*".

However, the same report mentions the complexity of establishing environmental standards. They affirm that it is difficult to know what is implicated, since stakeholders (both suppliers and consumers) cast them according to their own needs (Sustainable Living Fabrics, 2010).

Therefore, Sustainable Living Fabrics (2010) suggest "*a transparent standard addressing the main environmental loads based on the whole of product life cycle*" for simplicity. As well as, the implementation of certified *ecolabels* that assure products and/or services meet certain standards.

However, the coexistence of several *ecolabels* in the market intensifies confusion among consumers (Langer et al., 2008). Especially when the provided decisionrelevant information does not differ from one another, or is "*too complex, too ambiguous, and too much*" (Chen & Chang, 2013). Which accords with the definition Turnbull et al. (2010) set for *green* consumer confusion: "*consumer failure to develop a correct interpretation of environmental features of a product or service during the information processing procedure*."

As a result, having a well-known brand name is no longer enough to be trusted. Consumers who seek *green* products and services trust firms that practice "*radical transparency*", which means revealing not only the good, but the bad (Ottman, 2011).

Nonetheless, *green* advertising can exert persuasive power differently depending on consumers' awareness and commitment to the environmental cause (Parguel et al., 2015). Those considered as 'expert' consumers are less likely to believe in and be influenced by "*the use of advertising executional elements evoking nature*". Whereas 'non-expert' consumers are expected to perceive a more positive appreciation of the brand's environmental image.

On the same account, Parguel et al. (2015) mention that humans' attitudes are strongly connected to their beliefs. What it can be extrapolated to the marketing matter. It has been denoted that "*the influence of advertisements on attitude toward the brand is mediated through brand perception*". Thus, consumers' trust in a brand mostly depends on what they perceive from its marketing.

The case of Forest Stewardship Council

A recent example of *greenwashing* is the case of Forest Stewardship Council (FSC, Reutter & Ladwig, 2019). FSC is a non-profit organization that promotes responsible management towards the world's forests by conceding certifications and permits to timber companies that follow their guidelines of sustainability.

Its motto "*Forests For All Forever*" stands all over during the regular conferences that take place to determine the future of forests by reviewing forest management policies. Three groups are represented and are allowed to vote: forest dwellers, who fight to preserve their habitat; environmentalists from WWF and Greenpeace pursuing the salvation of primeval forests; and timber industry representatives who are interested in the amount of trees they can cut down while keeping the FSC seal of approval.

The problem arises, however, as all three groups are supposed to have equal voting rights, but it is claimed that environmentalists are being pushed around by the timber industry. A co-founder of FSC, who soon quit over policy discords, Simon Counsell, also believes the timber companies hold too much power, preventing the FSC from being a truly independent party. Similarly, a Greenpeace member states: "*Image matters to multinational companies, an FSC approval helps them look good*".

Throughout the documentary different experts on the matter share their insights and knowledge. Meanwhile, the investigation team travels to different countries where there are controversies between FSC certified timber companies and local communities.

Reutter & Ladwig's (2019) team headed to forests in Peru, where it is demonstrated there is a lack of strictness over illegal cutting. On that area, the FSC guidelines establish that, from a size of a football field, only one tree can be cut down in 20 years. This process is called selective cutting. However, everyone in the area seem to know that the amount of illegal cutting is still increasing, and some of them are being shipped to timber companies with the FSC seal of approval.

In fact, Simon Counsell, referring to the different FSC labels (see Illustration 2), declares that FSC 100% – in which the product contains only FSC certified timber – represents barely a very small part of the picture, while the other labels refer to, the euphemistically called, "controlled wood"; which have not actually been controlled. Consequently, he affirms:

> "*Products with a MIX FSC label may have no FSC material in it. So, in that sense, this label is misleading to the consumer and letting us believe that is from responsible sources, though it may not be at all. It is impossible to know from the FSC label which are logged in responsible sources and which are not.*"

Consumer behavior towards *greenwashing*

In order to understand what makes consumers trust a firm's *green* marketing and, thus, purchase its products, I have conducted a survey focused on the consumer's point of view towards sustainable products and the credibility of their labels.

Survey's objectives

The purpose of the survey is, firstly, getting to know the opinion and daily habits people do – or not – towards the preservation of the environment. And secondly, and most important, this market study aims to discover whether someone trusts a company when it promotes itself as sustainable.

Moreover, with a sociodemographic question section it can be found out which age range or which gender or even in which living background, it is more likely to make ecofriendly decisions and trust the companies' *greenwashing* strategies.

Methodology

Proceeding with the size and population targeted on the survey conducted. With a sample of 164 interviewees, the study wants to show the behavior of different sociodemographic segments in the market.

The sample was aimed at people of all ages, with internet access. The survey has been conducted to people around the world. From Americans to Finns, and Spanish, different cultures and mindsets are represented on this survey's answers. Therefore, the survey annexed at the end of this project was used for people outside Spain, and another one was translated into Spanish to reach the most Spanish people and, thus, avoid language unknowledge issues. The survey was deployed using Google Forms.

It was distributed via WhatsApp to friends, classmates and family. Additionally, some of them redirected the link to other groups of friends and relatives. Instagram and Facebook were also used by posting the link to the questionnaire and letting more friends and acquaintances respond it. Hence, respondents to whom the survey was redirected or accessed through Instagram and Facebook constitute a random sample.

The survey is divided into four sections. Respondents firstly answer some questions about themselves along the sociodemographic section. Secondly, the "Consumer's behavior and trust in *green* labels" section inquires interviewees about their awareness towards environmental issues and their selection and confidence process when purchasing a *green* product. Next, the third part presents two real-life examples. The first one shows the different *ecolabels* from FSC (see Illustrations 1 and 2), and it is formulated in order to discover respondents' perspective and knowledge about them. Concretely, the aim is to find out whether respondents consider the "*MIX*" ecolabel trustworthy, since it is demonstrated that this label is misleading. The other example focuses on the case of a *green* packaging within the Coca-Cola brand. An image with the newest release of the brand, Coke Life, is exhibited (see Illustration 3), and respondents are asked whether observing this *green* product makes them trust the brand's responsiveness towards sustainability. Finally, the survey concludes with the section about *greenwashing*. The concept is explained, and respondents are asked whether they would change their previous answers if they knew about the term beforehand. Moreover, four final questions are formulated as to checking respondents' overall perception of the market.

Hypothesis

In a previous study undertaken in 2009 by Ottman (2011), it was already shown that environmental concern was shared within the majority of American citizens. The survey showed that most of the respondents were already engaging in environmentally friendly activities at home. Although small, those activities can make a difference, such as recycling or changing to light-emitting diodes (LEDs). Therefore, I expect to find high percentages of respondents carrying out daily chores for the environment's sake.

Next, I believe the living situation of respondents will be a significant differentiator between their responses about purchasing behaviors. For instance, I reckon people living with their parents would rarely be the ones who go shopping and, hence, make the buying decisions. Thus, even though they cared about the environment, if their parents don't, they could not put that in practice.

Another result I would expect is that people mostly look out for the packaging and the price when deciding what product to buy, regardless of its features or the brand's responsiveness towards sustainability.

Which leads me into believing that less than half of the people interviewed will actually pick the product that less impacts the environment and society. Since that can take long research or even more monetary costs.

Regarding the trustworthiness topic, I would expect respondents considering themselves quite skeptical, but then trusting *green* marketing by the mere image of the brand, regardless of what it is actually performed. I reckon people tend to consider themselves less influenceable than they really are, or that they do not want to show that they can be easily convinced.

Corresponding with this lack of research I expect from respondents, I think they will have never noticed the FSC label and, despite that, fully trust its credibility. I believe that because, from my own experience, this kind of labels tend to be unnoticed. Yet, it would seem logical that an ecolabel transmits trustworthy content. Therefore, it could demonstrate that, if paying attention, certified labels substantially help consumers trust on *green* products.

On a similar account, the Coke Life section serves as an example for a lifelong brand that evolves into a *green* alternative. With this part, I think respondents will understand the green packaging as a deceptive factor in order to gain sales.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning the reason behind explaining the definition of *greenwashing* – the core topic of this project – at the last section of the survey. I pondered whether to introduce the topic at the beginning or not. However, as my purpose is obtaining the most honest answers possible, I did not want to influence them beforehand. I considered that knowing about misleading marketing strategies, such as what *greenwashing* does, would already alert interviewees about the credibility of *green* labels. Hence, not being truly unbiased about their daily choices and opinions.

Consequently, it was as well interesting to formulate the last four questions after the *greenwashing* definition. I consider it might show whether consumers, when having some knowledge of what is happening in the market, can make them be more careful and concern about their purchases and the environmental situation. Just the same, I believe less than half, or even just a third part of interviewees will have known about *greenwashing*. It is not usual to hear about this concept on the media; thus, I find it difficult for people to be aware of it. Additionally, throughout the realization of this paper I encountered several people not aware of it.

Sample

The survey was distributed through three social networks – WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook – for 11 days – from 13/03/2020 to 24/03/2020, ending up with a sample of 164 participants, from which 116 are women and 48 men.

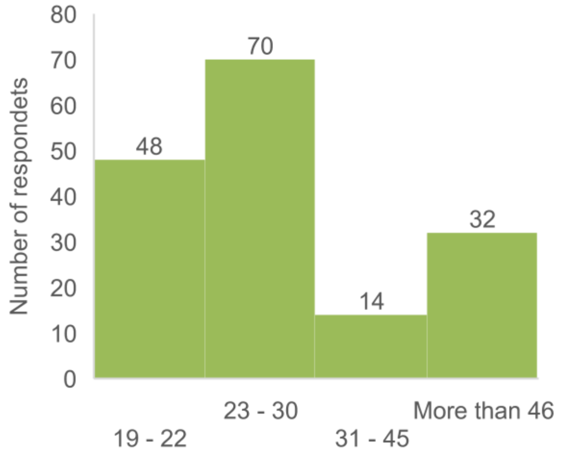


Figure 2. Age distribution.

The age range stands from older than 18 to 65-year-olds, distributed differently between 4 age groups. The first group is formed by 48 people from 19 to 22 years old; the second one, with the majority of respondents, counts with 70 respondents between 23 and 30 years old; followed by the less numbered group, with 14 people between 31 and 45 years old; and the oldest group constituting 32 people more than 46 years old.

Regarding the place of residence, respondents can be differentiated into two groups: Spanish and non-Spanish. The Spanish count for the biggest number with 120 participants, whereas non-Spanish count for 44. In addition, the non-Spanish group is formed by people from the Netherlands, France, Egypt, Jordan, Canada, US, Finland, Italy, Tunisia, UK, Germany and Mexico. The list of residence of those from Spain is less extensive, most of respondents are from the Balearic Islands, and in lower amount from Catalonia, Andalusia, Valencia and Madrid.

Finally, the working situation is divided into 7 groups. Displayed by number of participants: students and intern students count for 81 participants – 20 of whom are intern students, 46 respondents work in a full-time job, temporary jobs add up to 14 respondents, closely after respondents who work in partial-time jobs sum up to 13, and both retired people and those who do not work nor study count for 5 interviewees each.

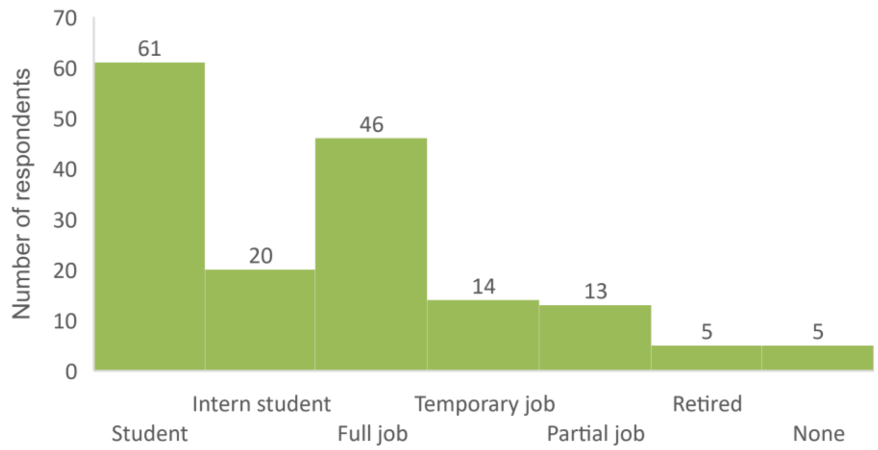
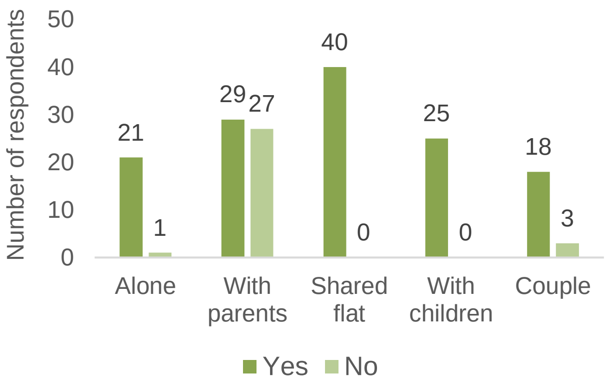


Figure 3. Working situation distribution.

Results

First of all, as it was expected, all respondents positively answered the question "*Do you think it is important to look out for the environment?"*. Pinpointing that 92.07% of them answered *Fully agree*.

Next, since this survey is focused on consumer behavior towards *green* products, it is interesting to know whether respondents are the deciders in their homes when shopping. Thus, the relation between the question "*Living situation*" and "*Are you the one, or part of the ones who make the decisions when purchasing products?*" turns out in the charts below (Figures 4 and 5).



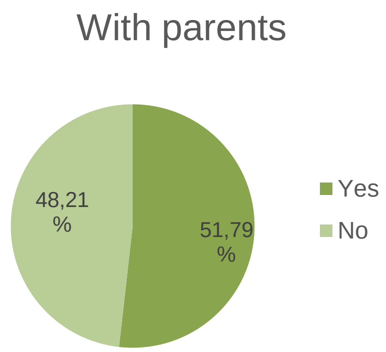


Figure 4. Deciders or not by living with parents.

Figure 5. Deciders or not by living situation.

It is clear that the majority of interviewees, except those that live with their parents, are deciders when it comes to go for groceries or shopping. As a consequence, the information that will follow with the rest of questions will mostly show the households' decisions made according to their beliefs and concerns. Contrarily, half of those living with their parents depend on their parents' decisions, which could be shared or not with the respondent's values and concerns.

Following with purchasing habits, the question "*To what extent do you choose a product promoted as sustainable before one without any kind of specification on its label?*" shows that the majority of respondents are likely or most likely to choose a product as such (see Figure 6). Whereas only 14.63% would rarely make that choice.

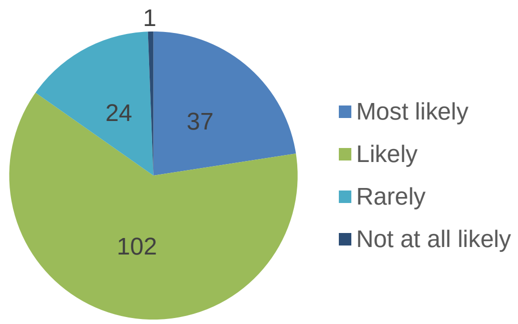


Figure 6. Frequency of agreement with choosing a green product over a non-green one.

The age range of interviewees related to the previous question analyzed (vertical axis, see Figure 7) shows a clear predominance of likelihood between all ages. However, it is salient the section of respondents who are more than 46 years old with regard to the percentage of *Most likely* answers, representing 40%; whereas the proportion for the rest of age ranges oscillates around 20%. It seems as older interviewees are stronger with their convictions and habits, or it might mean they trust more on *green* marketing than younger generations.

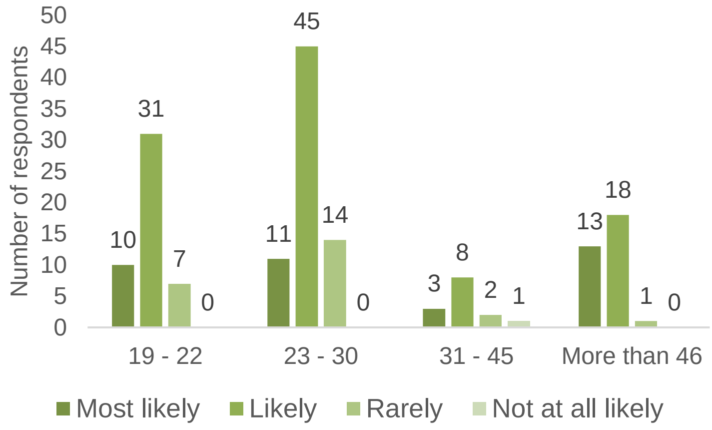


Figure 7. Choosing green over non-green products by age.

In order to analyze that last supposition, the question "*Whenever I see a green label on a product, I immediately trust its responsiveness*" (vertical axis) is related to the age range, which shows that, though in a small difference, respondents older than 46 years old show a higher percentage of agreement with this question – bar at 28.13% in Figure 8. Therefore, comparing younger ages, this segment tends to trust lightly more on *green* marketing.

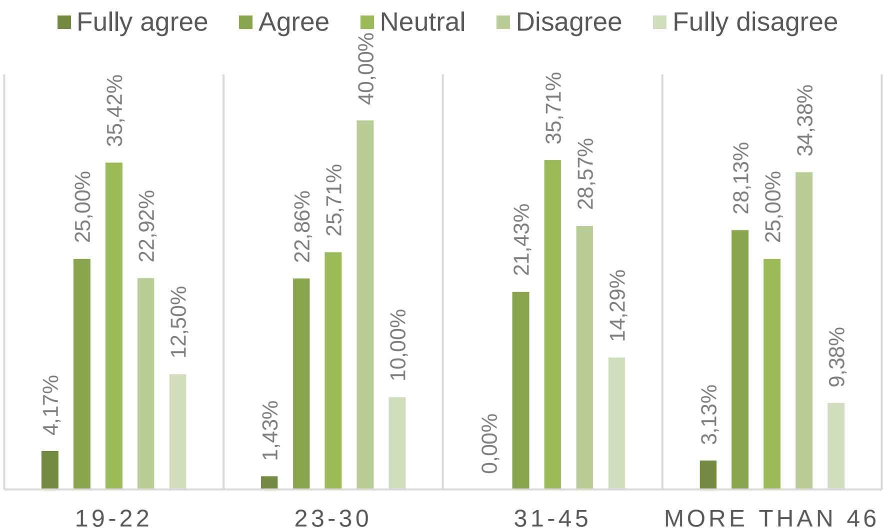


Figure 8. Trust on green labels by age.

Moving on to the question "*What are your daily choices you carry out for this cause?*", the frequency of respondents who carry out these activities are shown on the chart below (Figure 9). Note that this question was a multi-answer, thus, percentages are calculated over the totality of the sample (164). So, recycling is the most carried with 90.24% of interviewees, followed by reducing energy consumption and footprint which represent 68.29% and 59.15% respectively.

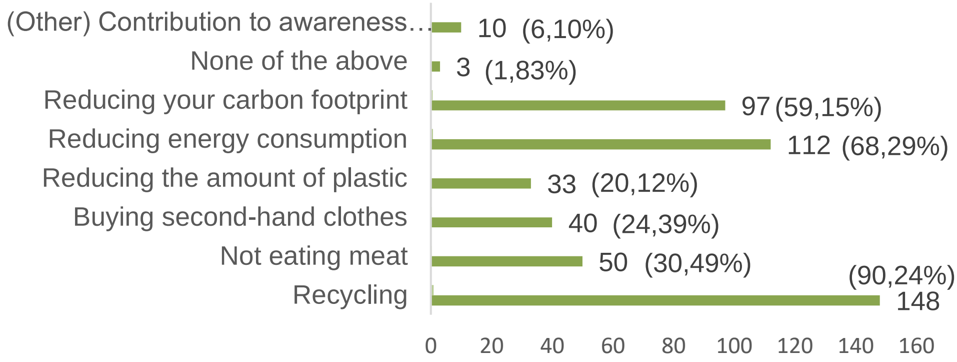


Figure 9. Daily activities for environmental preservation.

Similarly, also a multi-answer question, "*What makes you value a product as sustainable?*", Figure 10 indicates those features and details mostly looked for by respondents. In this case, the option most selected, with 76.83% of answers, is the information on the label; followed by the presence of a quality certification label with almost 70%. Therefore, it appears that interviewees try to figure out the credibility of a product by their labels mostly.

What makes you value a product as sustainable?	Frequency (multi-answer)	%
The packaging	92	**56.10%**
The name	2	1.22%
The brand	21	12.80%
The information on the label	126	**76.83%**
A quality certification label	113	**68.90%**
The advertisement	10	6.10%
Recommendations from famous people	3	1.83%
The price	23	14.02%
The brand's values	90	**54.88%**
Total	164	

Figure 10. Options to value a product as sustainable.

Next, in order to help answer the question formulated in this paper, it could be revealing to analyze the question "*Please select the value in which you consider yourself a trusting person*", as to know interviewees' opinion of themselves before answering trust-related questions. The answer is a scale from 1 to 5, being 1 "*Very trusting*" and, thus, 5 "*Skeptical*". Both ends have low punctuations, whereas being quite skeptical or little trusting (4) scores 25% of respondents, which gets a total of 26.83% with "*Skeptical*" answers; while being trusting (2) represents 28.66% of the totality, which added to very trusting (1) sums up to 37.80%. Thus, the percentage remaining, constituting those who consider themselves not trusting nor skeptical (3), rises the highest percentage by itself with 35.37% of interviewees. Figures that could indicate that interviewees did not want to venture or did not know how to respond.

Nonetheless, it is interesting to analyze the association between the variable "*Whenever I see a green label on a product, I immediately trust its responsiveness*" (vertical axis) and the previous question discussed, which can be observed within the chart below (Figure 11).

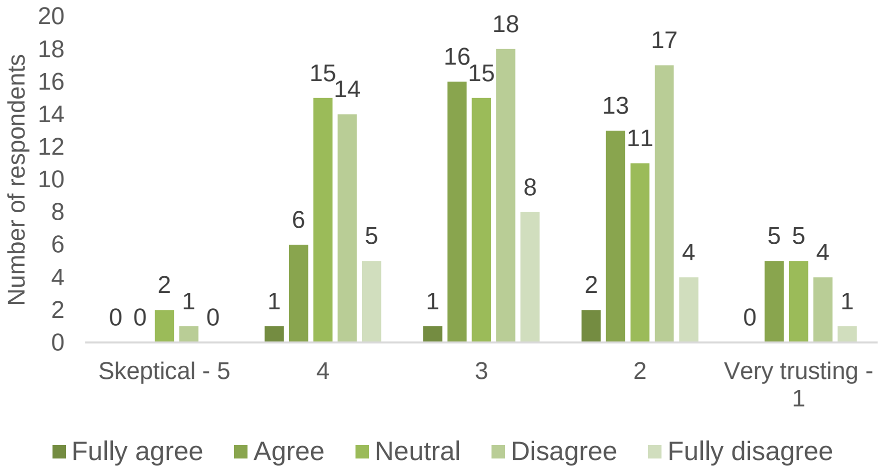


Figure 11. Relation between being a trusting person and trusting a green label.

In general, it is noticeable that the majority of interviewees, regardless the scale of trusting character, expressed they do not base their trust in a product's responsiveness by only a *green* label – that is, since the *Disagree* bars are one of the highest in each number of the scale. In fact, the highest bar at 18 corresponds to the number of respondents who do not consider themselves skeptical nor trusting (3) that disagree with the formulated statement. Followed by the bar at 17, which indicates that, despite considering oneself as trusting (2), respondents do not trust *green* labels. On the other hand, only in the levels 3 and 2 of the trusting scale, the second highest bars correspond to respondents agreeing with trusting *green* labels. Whereas, the highest bar for the level 4, at 15, indicates that respondents who consider themselves quite skeptical present a neutral opinion on whether they trust or not.

Chi-squared probability (p)	0.90285879
H0: there is not association when p > 0.05	
H1: there is association when p < 0.05	

Figure 12. Chi-squared test between being a trusting person and trusting a green label.

Having made a chi-squared test over this last two variables (see Figure 12), it is, hence, shown that it does not demonstrate any association between considering oneself as a trusting person, and the fact of trusting a product's responsiveness by seeing a *green* label on it. That is due to hypothesis 0 meaning there is no association between the variables when the probability obtained is higher than 0.05; whereas the alternative hypothesis shows association when the probability is lower than 0.05. Therefore, with a probability of 0.9029, it can be said that either people are not really aware of their own trust process, or the answers of how much of a trusting person they are were chosen taking into account unrelated factors.

Continuing with trust-related questions, the educational level could be a determinant when deciding over the credibility of a product. So, Figure 13 shows the relation between the question "*Before buying a product I first do some research until I find the best product regarding ecofriendly-price relation*" and the educational level. In the chart are only represented those who have university/college or master/doctorate levels because both answers were the most selected, thus, high school and professional formation, with 8 and 5 respondents respectively, cannot represent the population.

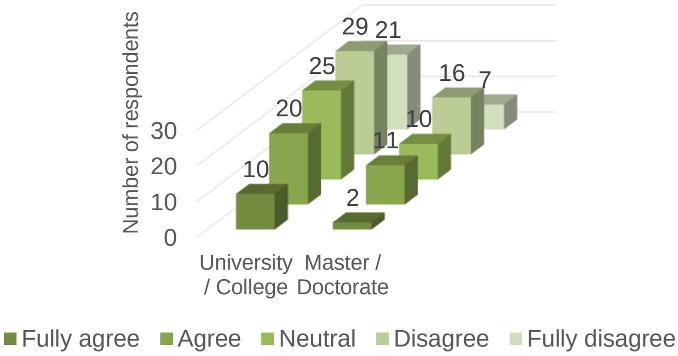


Figure 13. Doing some research before buying a product by educational level: university/college and master/doctorate.

It can be observed that the educational level of respondents does not seem to be associated with the habit of doing research to find the best sustainable product. In fact, it appears to be universal that people do not spend time looking for the benefits and damages a good's production could cause to the environment. As the highest bars – 29 for "*University/College"* and 16 for "*Master/Doctorate"* – represent the number of respondents who disagree with the formulated statement.

Moving on to the real-life examples presented on the survey. The FSC case, in which an illustration of one of the organization's label is exposed (see Illustration 1), the question "*I don't really notice whether the paper I buy has this certification*" could be extrapolated to noticing all kind of quality certifications. In the table below (Figure 14) the percentages of interviewees for each level of agreement are represented.

Notice certification	Frequency	%
Fully agree	22	13.41%
Agree	56	34.15%
Neutral	34	20.73%
Disagree	37	22.56%
Fully disagree	15	9.15%
Total	164	

Figure 14. Level of agreement among interviewees with noticing a certification label on a product.

The highest percentage corresponds to the "*Agree*" and "*Fully agree*" sections – both considered together since they indicate that respondents do not really notice if there is a certification on the paper they buy. Thus, almost half of all respondents tend not to pay attention to the certification labels, which accords with the issues previously exposed in the FSC section. In fact, the same happens when inquiring about the three FSC's labels (Illustration 2). Results show that 47% of respondents are not sure of having seen them before, and 17% directly answer that they have not seen any of them.

Nevertheless, *green* products are also marketed by the brand's reputation among consumers. Perceiving that the market is, in general, moving towards ecofriendly practices, could influence on the buying process. Which leads to the question "*Do you think companies are recently more concerned about their activities to be more sustainable and ecofriendly?*". The results are visually distributed on the pie chart below (Figure 15), where it is, by far, believed that companies are more concerned about sustainability. In addition, more than 90% of participants have once bought a product sold as ecofriendly.

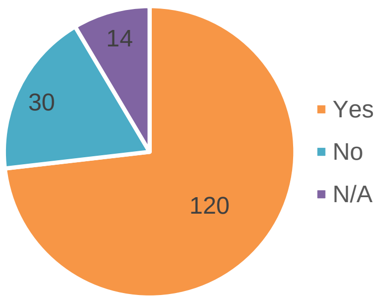


Figure 15. Number of respondents who believe companies are recently more concerned about sustainability.

Next, since the following two questions have very similar meanings, it is interesting to find out if respondents answered similarly, which could indicate answers being coherent throughout the survey. Hence, a chi-squared test is calculated between the variables "*Whenever I see a green label on a product, I immediately trust its responsiveness*" and "*Even though I don't know the meaning of the word "MIX" here, I completely trust its sustainable purpose*". The latter question applies to the controversial FSC label. Thus, both questions refer to trusting *green* labels, despite not knowing the meaning of them. Accordingly, the number of respondents for each case is shown in Figure 16.

	Meaning "MIX" and trust its sustainable purpose					
Green label responsiveness	Fully agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Fully disagree	Total
Fully agree	1	1	1	1	0	4
Agree	3	12	16	5	4	40
Neutral	1	9	23	11	4	48
Disagree	1	8	11	27	7	54
Fully disagree	0	2	6	4	6	18
Total	6	32	57	48	21	164

Figure 16. Relation between trusting green labels responsiveness and trusting the "MIX" certification without knowing its meaning.

Conducting a Chi-squared test, it is set that with a hypothesis 0 (H0) there is no association when $p>0.05$, and with an alternative hypothesis (H1) there is association when $p<0.05$. Then, with a resulting probability (p) of 0.0015 (which is under 0.05), it demonstrates that both variables are associated. Therefore, people that trust in a *green* label, would trust as well that the label "*MIX*" means the product is made sustainably; and vice versa.

Moreover, Figure 16 reveals that there are more people who, even if not knowing the meaning of the "*MIX*" FSC label, would neither believe its environmental purpose – visible on the "*Disagree"* and "*Fully disagree"* columns with a total of 48 and 21 respondents, respectively.

Which leads to considering the percentages of people that indeed knew the meaning of this label. Almost two thirds of respondents (56.71%) answered either "*Fully disagree*" or "*Disagree*", and another 15.85% answered "*Neutral*", which might mean that they are not sure about the meaning. Thus, it is again shown that most interviewees were not aware of it or led them to confusion.

Next, the question "*I wouldn't buy a paper made product unless it has this or similar certifications*" has shown that more than half of interviewees would buy wood-made products even though there was no certification. Demonstrating that, at least on the case of paper-made products, consumers do not choose the one that is supposed to be the best for the environment's sake.

On the other hand, the Coke Life case scenario brings more determinant results. Respondents' opinion about this brand can be understood from the following pie chart, where the question "*I believe the company's purpose is entirely towards sustainability and health*" is segmented into levels of agreement (see Figure 17).

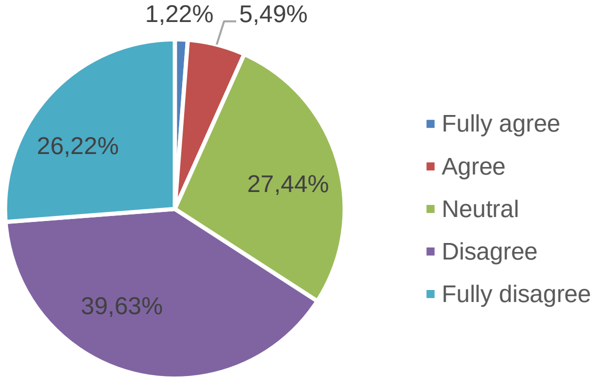


Figure 17. Belief in Coke's purpose towards sustainability and health.

Most respondents do not believe the purpose of Coke is exclusively for sustainability and health. Only around 7% of them trust on the brand's evolution, whereas more than 65% do not consider this marketing as credible.

Following with similar information, the majority of respondents also admit that they disagree with the question "*Even if the color was not green, I would choose this product over others as long as the advertisement's message convinced me*". As a result, it is shown that in cases where the brand does not have an established sustainable reputation, launching a *green* product does not make a difference on consumers' perception, and the advertisement's messages would not influence either.

Moving on to the *greenwashing* related questions, almost half of interviewees answered they had not heard of this concept before. Additionally, including the percentage of those that answered they were not sure about it, it turns out to be 67.68% of the totality.

However, more than two thirds of whom responded negatively in having heard of *greenwashing* would not change their previous answers. Which happens similarly with those that were not sure. Consequently, the outcome of people who would not change their previous answers rises to 68.29% of all respondents.

This majority of negative answers can, nevertheless, be on account of different reasons:

- On the one hand, 50.46% of respondents already knew about *greenwashing* or were aware of the existence of firms communicating misleading messages but did not know the concept itself.
- Contrarily, 46.79% of respondents would not change their previous answers because knowing about *greenwashing* would not influence on their daily choices.
- Only 2.75% of respondents do not believe *greenwashing* happens within the market.

Regarding the second group of interviewees stated on the points above, it would be interesting to try to understand what makes them answer that. It could be because they are aware about the environmental problem, but do not carry out environmentally conscious activities. Or, on the contrary, it would not influence on their responses because, even if they did not know about *greenwashing* or similar phenomena, they were already carrying out ecofriendly daily activities – maybe even without being totally conscious.

Therefore, analyzing the connection between the question "*Do you follow any process of selection when buying*" with the answer of "*Knowing this concept wouldn't have influenced on my previous answers*" results in the following chart:

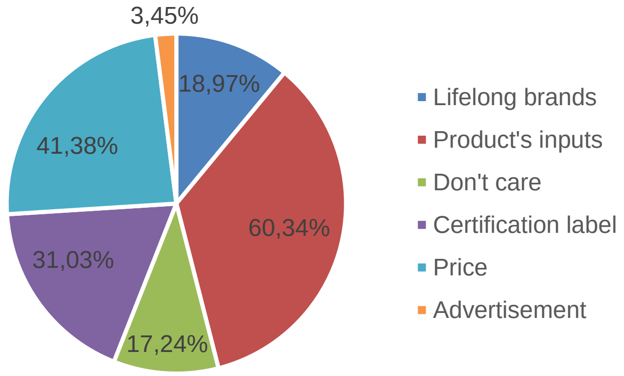


Figure 18. Following any selection process when buying by not been influenced on their previous responses.

Figure 18 shows that most of those who would not be influenced if they knew of *greenwashing* decide what to buy depending on the product's inputs; followed by 41.38% of them who decide regarding the price, and close after those who decide on a certification label with 31.03%.

Likewise, the same answer "*Knowing this concept wouldn't have influenced on my previous answers*" could be analyzed alongside the question "*What are your daily choices you carry out for this cause*". Resulting also in a pie chart as the one next:

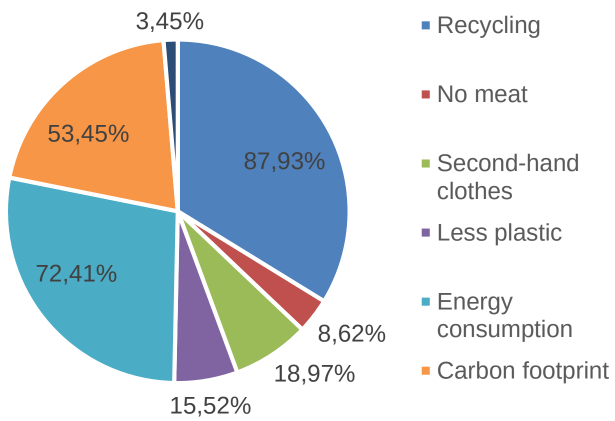


Figure 19. Daily choices carried out by not been influenced on their previous responses.

In this case, the percentages of activities carried out for the environment are not much different to the totality of interviewees, though the percentage of "*None of them*" is lightly higher. While in Figure 9 only 1.83% of all interviewees do not carry out any of the activities stated, Figure 19 shows there is 3.45%.

Therefore, it seems that respondents were already carrying out environmentally friendly choices in their daily routines. In spite of that, it could be interpreted that this segment of respondents mostly carry out what can be considered "easy" chores or already typical, such as recycling and reducing the energy consumption. Whilst other habits, such as buying second-hand clothes or reducing the amount of plastic could suppose bigger efforts. However, as mentioned before, results are not much different to the overall percentages.

Finally, to conclude with this part of the paper, it could be interesting to analyze a gender related question. Firstly, it is remarkable the fact that female responds represent 70.73% of the totality, which, although not being a discussible topic for this paper, it might show their greater willing of cooperating with surveys.

Therefore, in Figure 20 it can be seen the relation of the question "*I would stop purchasing a product or service if I found out it was not produced sustainably*" with "*Gender*". On a first sight, the differences between genders are that women seem to choose fewer times than men the extreme options. In addition, the same number of men selected both "*Neutral*" and "*Agree*" options (16 men each).

	Gender			
Stop purchasing	Male	%	Female	%
Fully agree	10	20,83%	17	14,66%
Agree	16	33,33%	43	37,07%
Neutral	16	33,33%	31	26,72%
Disagree	4	8,33%	21	18,10%
Fully disagree	2	4,17%	4	3,45%
Total	48		116	
%	29,27%		70,73%	

Figure 20. Stop purchasing a product if it is not sustainable by gender.

Consequently, from this table it can be said that, even though not visually obvious, men would be lightly more likely to stop purchasing a product or service if they found out it was not produced sustainably: adding up the "*Fully agree*" and "*Agree*" answers it results in 54.16% of men and 51.73% of women.

Referring the final questions of the survey, which are more general to respondents' beliefs, the questions "*I can tell when I'm being convinced something is sustainable, when it is not entirely true*" (see Figure 21) and "*I believe there is a lack of information about sustainability within the market*" (see Figure 22) are represented in the next charts.

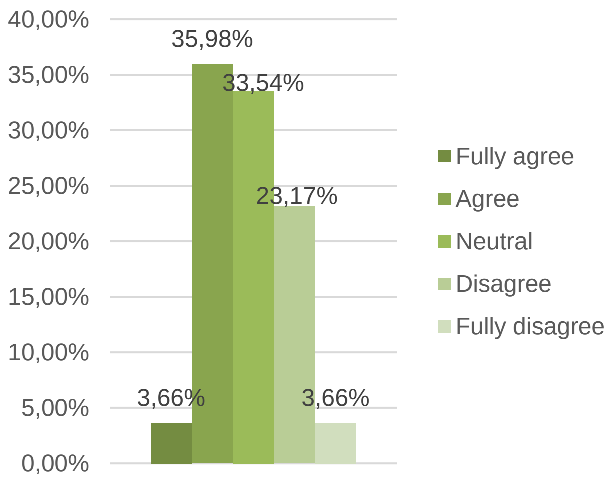


Figure 21. Percentage of respondents who can tell when there is a misleading message.

As it is observed, the majority of respondents believe they are able to show up the presence of misleading marketing messages trying to convince them about the firms' *greenness*. Although it is remarkable that the second highest percentage comes from neutral answers, possibly indicating that they do not know if they are capable of it – which seems to lead to confusion among themselves and the market. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning the fact that both extreme answers ("*Fully agree*" and "*Fully disagree*") weight exactly the same percentage, leaving a huge gap between agreeing and fully agreeing.

Completing the survey with Figure 22, it is by far agreed that respondents would like to have more information about sustainability. Furthermore, it could be pulled out the lack of knowledge concerning how the market deals with the assurance of firms carrying out the responsible practices needed to achieve *green* marketing.

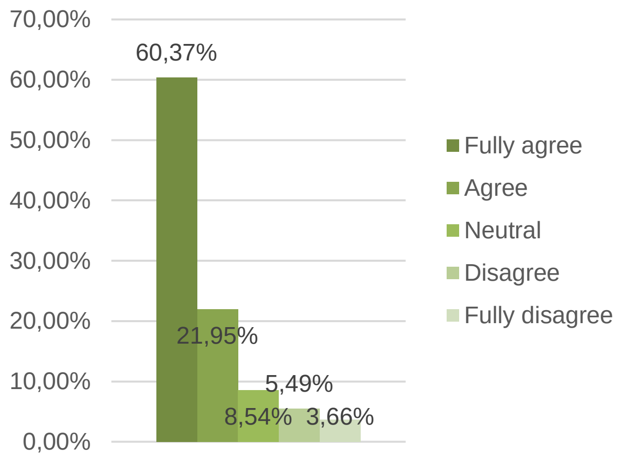


Figure 22. Percentage of respondents who believe there is a lack of information about sustainability.

Conclusions

Beyond doubt, results have shown a generalized concern about the environment. At least the acknowledgement that it is necessary to look out for its conservation. Consequently, respondents put this concern into action through their daily routine.

In fact, among their daily activities, recycling is already carried out by almost every respondent. Which could be because recycling is part of governments' and public institutions' social messages – citizens have been asked to recycle for several years now and governments facilitate its implementation (separate containers, pick up service). Similarly, energy consumption and carbon footprint reduction – both representing two thirds of the totality – have been enhanced on TV commercials and some educational institutions.

Likewise, almost the totality of respondents believes that companies are recently more concerned about sustainability. Which represents a relevant factor for the realization of this questionnaire, since perceiving a market turn to environmental concern does not assure their practices to be, in fact, true or perceived as trustworthy.

Parallel, as an overall assurance that the answers and, consequently, results correspond to the respondents' reality, two verifications were conducted throughout the results section. With the first one it was found out that most respondents are the buying deciders of their households, thus, their answers represent both their beliefs and their daily life chores. The other one was focused on whether the trust-related questions were answered coherently along the survey. The second Chi-squared test, calculated between two similar trust-related questions, indicates that the responses are associated. Hence, the answers obtained are coherent.

Noting that the question of considering oneself as trusting, ended up being not associated to whether they trust a *green* label. Which could be explained by respondents not properly understanding the question or considering other factors – such as faith – that do not influence the purchasing process of *green* goods.

Firstly, it has been concluded that age could partially influence on trust: the oldest range of respondents seem to be more trusting than the other ranges. Additionally, the youngest segment presents a higher likelihood of trusting than respondents between 23 and 45 years old. Despite this, the majority of respondents declares they would not trust a *green* label by itself, regardless of other socio-demographic factors.

Regarding the trustworthiness of *green* promoted products, respondents have revealed that they base their trust on the labels' information, which might show a willingness to understand exactly what they are buying. Close behind, a high percentage of respondents also look out for the presence of a quality certification label. However, it has been shown that, at least in the case of products with FSC labels – although I reckon it could be extrapolated to all kind of products –, respondents tend not to pay attention to the certification labels.

Moreover, the FSC labels have proved not to be trustworthy. Most paper-made products with an FSC seal of approval present a "*MIX*" label, which is meaningless as for the preservation of the forests since it cannot assure the product's responsible origin. In addition, these labels have led to confusion among respondents. Results show that most interviewees are not aware of the meaning of the FSC labels shown. Thus, even if they notice them on a product, they would not be able to identify its quality assurance.

On the other hand, however, it is worth mentioning that more than half of interviewees base their criteria on the packaging, letting their judgement be more emotional or aesthetical than objective.

Notwithstanding that, seems contradictory that most respondents do not spend time searching for the best ecofriendly-price relation when purchasing a product. Consequently, it seems that their trusting convictions are being based on a relative lack of knowledge.

Contrarily, there are some cases in which the lack of accurate information does not affect the trusting opinion of respondents. With the Coke Life example, it could be demonstrated that when a lifelong brand – with no previous sustainable reputation – launches a *green* product, consumers do not perceive it differently from the whole brand. Hence, not believing its *green* promotional messages.

As expected on the hypothesis, more than two thirds of respondents did not hear or were not sure about *greenwashing*'s meaning. However, a significant percentage of respondents, although not having heard of this concept before, were aware of the existence of this phenomenon within the market.

Therefore, it might partially explain the surprising high percentage (68.29%) of respondents who would not have changed their answers after knowing about *greenwashing*. Contrarily to what was believed to happen, respondents would not have been influenced by it.

Lastly, regarding the respondents' capacity of identifying the presence of misleading messages, results show two different conclusions. On the one hand, almost 40% of interviewees express that they are indeed able to tell when they are being misled. Whereas more than one third of them seem not sure about it, which might show their confusion among themselves and the market.

As a result, it is noted that most respondents would like to have more information about the relationship between sustainability and enterprises. Considering it also as a situation of misinformation about the way firms are controlled so that their performances accord with their *green* marketing campaigns.

Discussion

I would conclude that the key words that sum up what has been disscused throughout this paper are: misinformation, lack of regulation, trasparency and confusion.

It has been demonstrated that *green* consumption is characterized by misinformed consumers. Few know or actually do research into *green* goods' features and production to base their buying decisions. Accordingly, the feeling of mistrust and confusion is spread among them.

The market of *green* products currently witnesses a contradictory situation. On the one hand, it is clear there is a general concern about sustainability and, thus, the presence of a strong *green* demand. On the other hand, *greenwashing* behaviors are damaging this same demand by leading consumers to skepticism and confusion and so, preventing them from purchasing *green* goods.

Moreover, this behavior is encouraged by a lack of regulation and control over this matter. Not only are enterprises' actions not checked, but ecolabeling does not make a difference, since it is also not regulated (based on FSC case). In addition, ecolabels do not seem to work for consumers either, as they tend not to notice or understand them.

Therefore, the solution to this problem lies not only on what companies should do, but on what governments and public institutions should implement. Consumers ask for credibility and truth when purchasing a *green* product. They ask for trasparency, full disclosure and information. Consequently, legal regulations should be applied so that companies would not be tempted to promote misleading information. Resulting in firms not worrying about giving away their real performances and, hence, full trasparency.

Finally, I would say that *greenwash* has worked for firms for several years now, causing a big impact on both society and environment, but I reckon it will not last much longer. Awareness about this issue is increasingly being revealed by documentaries or activitists, or even self involvement, who are calling for action.

Annex

Survey questionnaire

Access to the distributed questionnaires:

https://forms.gle/FE4s2mHTmvG1ZdGYA (English version)

https://forms.gle/qVP5brKVzipaGx877 (Spanish version).

Welcome! Thank you in advance for taking part in this survey. You are going to help me get some feedback about consumers' perspective towards ecofriendly/sustainable products and services. The information obtained will be used for my university thesis.

Please, answer in the most honest possible way. There are no wrong answers! It will only take you around 5 minutes.

Sociodemographic:

1. Gender
   - Male
   - Female
   - Other
2. Age
   - Underage
   - 19 – 22
   - 23 – 30
   - 31 – 45
   - More than 46
3. Educational level
   - Primary school
   - High school
   - Professional formation
   - University/College
   - Master/Doctorate
4. Living situation
   - Alone
   - With parents
   - Shared flat
   - With children
   - Couple
5. Working situation
   - Temporary job
   - Partial job
   - Full job
   - Student
   - Intern student
   - Retired
   - None
6. Are you the one, or part of the ones who make the decisions when purchasing products?
   - Yes
   - No
7. Please select the value in which you consider you have a healthy eating habit. Being 1 – Very healthy; 5 – Very unhealthy.
8. Please select the value in which you consider yourself as a trusting person. Being 1 - Very trusting; 5 – Skeptical.
9. Please rate your level of agreement with: Do you think it is important to look out for the environment?
   - Fully agree
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree
   - Fully disagree

Consumer's behavior and trust in *green* labels:

* green labels: labels on products that promote them as sustainable.

10. What are your daily choices you carry out for this cause? Please, select the ones you agree with the most:
    - Recycling
    - Not eating meat
    - Buying second-hand clothes
    - Reducing the amount of plastic
    - Reducing energy consumption (electricity, water, petrol, gas)
    - Reducing your carbon footprint (more public transport or walking, biking)
    - None of the above
    - Others: ________________________

11. Do you follow any process of selection when buying? Please, select the ones you agree with the most:
    - Yes, I always go for my lifelong brands
    - Yes, depending on the product's inputs (ex.: added salt free, sugar free, preservatives free, etc.), regardless of the brand.
    - No, I don't care about the brand nor the product's features
    - Yes, as long as their label certifies certain ecofriendly quality
    - Yes, depending on the price
    - Yes, depending if I like their advertisement campaign
12. Do you think companies are recently more concerned about their activities to be more sustainable and ecofriendly?
    - Yes
    - No
    - N/A
13. Have you ever bought a product sold as ecofriendly?
    - Yes
    - No
14. To what extent do you choose a product promoted as sustainable before one without any kind of specification on its label?
    - Most likely
    - Likely
    - Rarely
    - Least likely
15. What makes you value a product as sustainable? Please, select one or more options.
    - The packaging
    - The name
    - The brand
    - The information on the label
    - A quality certification label
    - The advertisement
    - Recommendations from famous people
    - The price
    - The brand's values
16. Please rate the level of agreement with the following statements:
    - Whenever I see a green label on a product, I immediately trust its responsiveness.
    - The more the brand advertises its greenness, the less I trust its compromise with the environment.
    - Before buying a product I first do some research until I find the best product regarding ecofriendly-price relation.

Next, I would like to know your opinion about some real-life examples of *green* labels. Let me note that the following questions are merely informational, I am not sentencing any of the brands presented.

* green labels: labels on products that promote them as sustainable.

<u>Examples with real products:</u>

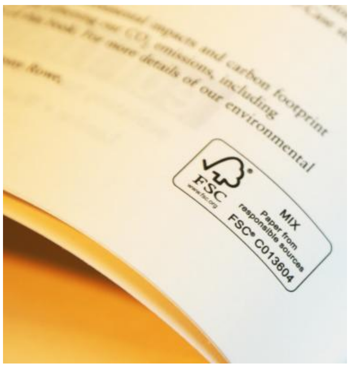


Illustration 1. FSC label on a book (Forest Stewardship Council, 2020)

17. What do you think this label means?
    - Total quality assurance
    - Not sure
    - Company pays for having this certification
    - Paper from responsible sources
    - Don't care
    - Other: ______________________________

18. Once you've seen this picture, please rate your level of agreement with the following statements:
    - I completely trust that the paper obtained comes from responsible sources.
    - I don't really notice whether the paper I buy has this certification.
    - I wouldn't buy a paper made product unless it has this or similar certifications.
    - I understand what the word "MIX" means here.
    - Even though I don't know the meaning of the word "MIX" here, I completely trust its sustainable purpose.

Illustration 2. Three FSC labels (Forest Stewardship Council, 2020).

19. After seeing the three different certifications of FSC that exist, which of the three have you seen most?
    - "MIX"
    - "100%"
    - "RECYCLED"
    - None of them
    - Not sure

Illustration 3. Bottles of Coca-Cola Life.
("The Death of Coke Life," 2014)

20. Have you ever tried the newest Coca-Cola's product, with stevia instead of all sugar?
    - Yes
    - No

21. If so, do you recognize a difference between it and traditional Coke?
    - Yes, they are very different
    - Yes, though it is subtle
    - No, I wouldn't be able to distinguish them by the flavor
22. It is noticeable that Coca-Cola's newest launch is made to meet up with the recent demand for sustainable and healthy products. Please rate the level of agreement with the following statements:
    - I believe the company's purpose is entirely towards sustainability and health.
    - The packaging makes me trust in the company's responsiveness.
    - I would not purchase this product because soft drinks could never be healthy.
    - Even if the color was not green, I would choose this product over others as long as the advertisement's message convinced me.
23. Have you ever heard about *greenwashing*?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Not sure

Greenwashing strategies can be described, in general terms, as those that enterprises, institutions or even governments undertake to match the current concern about sustainable and ecofriendly practices. However, their activities and processes are not as sustainable as they sell them, thus they incur into false publicity.

From the words *green* (= environment, ecofriendly, sustainability…), and *brainwashing*, the concept implies that enterprises try to make consumers believe their products and/or services are sustainable, when, actually, they are not.

* green labels: labels on products that promote them as sustainable.

24. Would you change your previous answers once you know about this phenomenon?
    - Yes
    - No
25. In case of an affirmative answer, choose the option that best fits with your reason:
    - Now that I know about *greenwashing,* I would be more skeptical about the labels' truth
    - I would be more careful on my answers, as I don't want to seem carefree
    - Other: ________________________________
26. In case of a negative answer, choose the option that best fits with your reason:
    - I wouldn't change my answers because I already knew about *greenwashing*
    - Knowing this concept wouldn't have influenced on my previous answers
    - I don't really care about sustainability
    - I don't believe *greenwashing* happens
    - Other: ________________________________
27. Please rate the level of agreement with the following statements:
    - I can tell when I'm being convinced something is sustainable, when it is not entirely true.
    - I have noticed changes within most of the companies' marketing messages.
    - I would stop purchasing a product or service if I found out it was not produced sustainably.
    - I believe there is a lack of information about sustainability within the market.

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