



BUSINESS RESOURCES

2017 Study Finds Consumer Familiarity With Sustainability Reached All-Time High

Based on The Hartman's Group 2017 sustainability study findings, brands should explain to consumers the connection between actions it takes and sustainability to prove its image.

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Last year, The Hartman Group conducted a study about sustainability and presented their findings during a May 1, 2018 webinar , "Sustainability 2017." All data collected

and analyzed led to a deeper understanding of U.S. consumer engagement of those ages 18 to 71 with the word “sustainability.”

Of those surveyed, 87 percent have differing levels of participation in sustainability and 2017 was also the year that familiarity with the term “sustainability” reached an all-time high, according to the survey. The Hartman Group suggested brands explain to consumers in simple terms the connection between the actions it takes and sustainability to prove its image.

The survey indicated purchasing criteria is based on consumer’s sustainability orientation. For example, identified as the “core,” 13 percent of the 87 percent, are likely to base their purchasing decisions on products focused on the greater good, authenticity and transparency. The “periphery” group, 16 percent of the 87 percent, are more likely to purchase based on price, convenience and comparability to similar products. Those in between the core and periphery base their purchases on trust, experience and safety.

Survey topics and results are as follows:

- **Zones of Responsibility**

To explain how consumers think about and act on sustainability issues, The Hartman Group presented Zones of Responsibility: personal – responsible for one’s own needs/desires; social – responsible for the well-being of others, including animals; economic – responsible for supporting local, regional or national businesses financially and environmental – responsible for the well-being of the planet locally and globally.

Based on the zones, The Hartman Group found labor and employment issues have become more important to consumers during the past five years. Of the consumers surveyed, 62 percent based purchasing decisions on product quality; 48 percent on companies that avoid inhumane treatment of animals and 45 percent that provides safe working conditions for employees.

Speaking of animal welfare, 71 percent of survey respondents said when making purchasing decisions, it's important the company avoids inhumane treatment of animals. The top five animal welfare practices that increase purchase likelihood:

1. Animals not mistreated while alive.
2. Not using animals for product safety testing.
3. Other animals not harmed in capture/raising.
4. Animals raised in as natural environment as possible.
5. Animals not given antibiotics/hormones.

- **Information Seekers**

Consumers are proactively seeking information. Of those surveyed, 48 percent use the Internet with 28 percent of those focusing on brand/product websites while 42 percent rely on brand packaging with 29 percent focused on a product's label.

- **Millennials**

This group sees purchasing power as more impactful than voting. In fact, when asked what has the greatest impact on society, 35 percent of Millennials surveyed responded "my purchase decisions." Millennials also show a higher than 50 percent willingness to pay more for every sustainability attribute from toxin free to supporting local economy to minimal/eco-friendly packaging.

- **Personal Well-Being**

Sustainable food purchases are driven by the concept of personal well-being. Of the respondents, 71 percent want their food free of potential toxins; 61 percent want to support the U.S. economy; 59 percent want good animal welfare practices and 58 percent want fair treatment of workers/employees.

- **Willingness to Pay More**

Survey participants were asked if they are willing to pay an extra 50 percent or more for sustainable attributes in food and beverage. Of the 58 percent of consumers who rate “free from potential toxins” as important are willing to pay 50 percent or more for such a product.

- **Importance of the Ingredient Panel**

Consumers refer to the ingredient panel to determine brand transparency and to look for specific evidence of sustainable ingredients. For respondents to feel a company is open and honest about the ingredients they use, 52 percent want to know the company is pesticide free; 45 percent want to see the phrases “made in the U.S.” and/or “antibiotic free” on the packaging and 44 percent do not want to see chemicals or hard to pronounce ingredients listed on the label.

- **Influential Certifications**

For food and beverage brands, the most influential certifications concern pesticides and animal welfare. Sixty-four percent of respondents knew something about USDA Organic certification; 55 percent recognized energy star qualified and 53 percent understand certified kosher. Of those who know about certifications, 79 percent are more likely to purchase energy star qualified products; 77 percent are more likely to purchase animal welfare approved products; 75 percent likely to purchase certified pesticide residue free products and 74 percent certified human products.

- **Packaging**

Of those surveyed, 84 percent avoid products with excessive packaging, but 68 percent said packaging materials are important for protecting the product, followed by 60 percent wanting the packaging to be recyclable.

Overall, The Hartman Group found lack of consumer knowledge and cost to be the key barriers to purchasing food and beverage products. Forty percent of respondents won't purchase a product if they are unsure if the product is sustainable and 30 percent believe sustainable products are more expensive.

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