

Environmental Responsibility Less Important to Consumers in Terms of Health, Wellness

environmentalleader.com/2017/11/175023/

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11/8/2017



Consumers today increasingly view environmental responsibility as aspects of quality, not just a feel-good factor, according to the Hartman Group, a research firm which tracks consumer attitudes and behaviors surrounding sustainability in the US. In 2017, consumers view sustainability more holistically than ever before, looking at issues related to being both a responsible consumer and a responsible citizen, the Hartman Group's [Sustainability 2017](#) report indicates. But they also see sustainability as overlapping with (and perhaps being less important than) personal benefits, especially those related to health and wellness.

For example, the report shows that consumers are just a bit less likely to rate sustainability-related attributes as important in personal care and household cleaners than they are in food/beverage and pet food categories.

Transparency is of particular importance for retailers, whom consumers view as arbiters of sustainability standards and curators of sustainable products.

Generational Differences

More engaged consumers identify sustainability as relating to personal, social, environmental and economic issues, but there are differences by generation. Boomers link sustainability more strongly with environmentalism. Millennials are more likely to see it through the lens of personal responsibility, viewing attributes like organic and all-natural as both sustainability and quality cues.

However, most consumer attitudes also view large companies and the government as important actors, with more placing responsibility with governments than in the past.

Transparency a Particular Necessity for Retailers

Openness and honesty are becoming the currency of trust for consumers who care about sustainability. They want to see corporate responsibility efforts that indicate an authentic commitment to ethical action, especially on packaging.

Transparency is particularly key for retailers; consumer attitudes indicate they view retailers as arbiters of sustainability standards and products. Beyond retailer context, consumers identify transparent products and open and honest companies by looking for an accumulation of characteristics, including avoidance of toxins, animal welfare, fair labor practices, and minimizing pollution.

Consumer Preferences Reach across Categories

Consumers who value sustainability do not compartmentalize where and when they prioritize it, according to the report. If they are willing to pay more for a particular attribute in one category, then they are likely to pay more for it in another.

Nevertheless, consumers are just a bit less likely to rate sustainability-related attributes as important in personal care and household cleaners than they are in food/beverage and pet food categories. More engaged sustainability consumers are more likely to dine out at fast casual restaurants and coffee shops relative to the general population, suggesting that sustainability likely plays a more important role in those locations.