

Sustainability Perspectives

How consumers
consciously consume

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Sustainability Perspectives

‘How consumers consciously consume’

Today consumers are provided with endless options in the market, and how consumers choose a product is changing. They want to become better citizens and better understand sustainability and the companies that they form relationships with as they purchase goods in the market.

This report explores how consumers perceive and understand conscious living, brands, and products today. We explore how consumers face certain obstacles despite their high willingness to adopt a conscious lifestyle. We analyze what conscious consumers expect from companies and how brands and retailers can respond. This study uses data from the consumer survey we conducted in 2022. In addition to the survey outcomes, we have used proprietary data and insights gained from UX surveys for the ConsiderBeyond app and our experience evaluating hundreds of consumer brands with our framework.

Regardless of geographic location, consumers worldwide today are more thoughtful about their choices, actions, and the consequences of their actions. Our research shows that intentions behind more mindful consumption are driven by altruistic or individualistic motivations or both. For example, a consumer with altruistic motivation might be more mindful of the environmental and social impact caused by their actions, while a consumer with individualistic reasons will consider health and well-being as a more important factor. Those who fall into both categories of consumer motivation may come from a place of being responsible citizens, respecting the environment and the community, and being self-caring to enrich their lives positively. Regardless of where the motivation comes from, consumers are becoming more conscious of what they consume and expect the brands to do the same: to be more mindful of what and how they create and sell.

Living & Buying Consciously

Perception and Understanding of Conscious Living

Since there is no standard definition of conscious living, consumers may have different perceptions according to their personal values. We asked respondents the first words that came to mind when hearing the term. The respondents had varying understandings of what conscious living means to them; however, we identified several commonly used words. The top five words used mainly by respondents were:

Health, Awareness, Sustainability, Decisions, and Environment

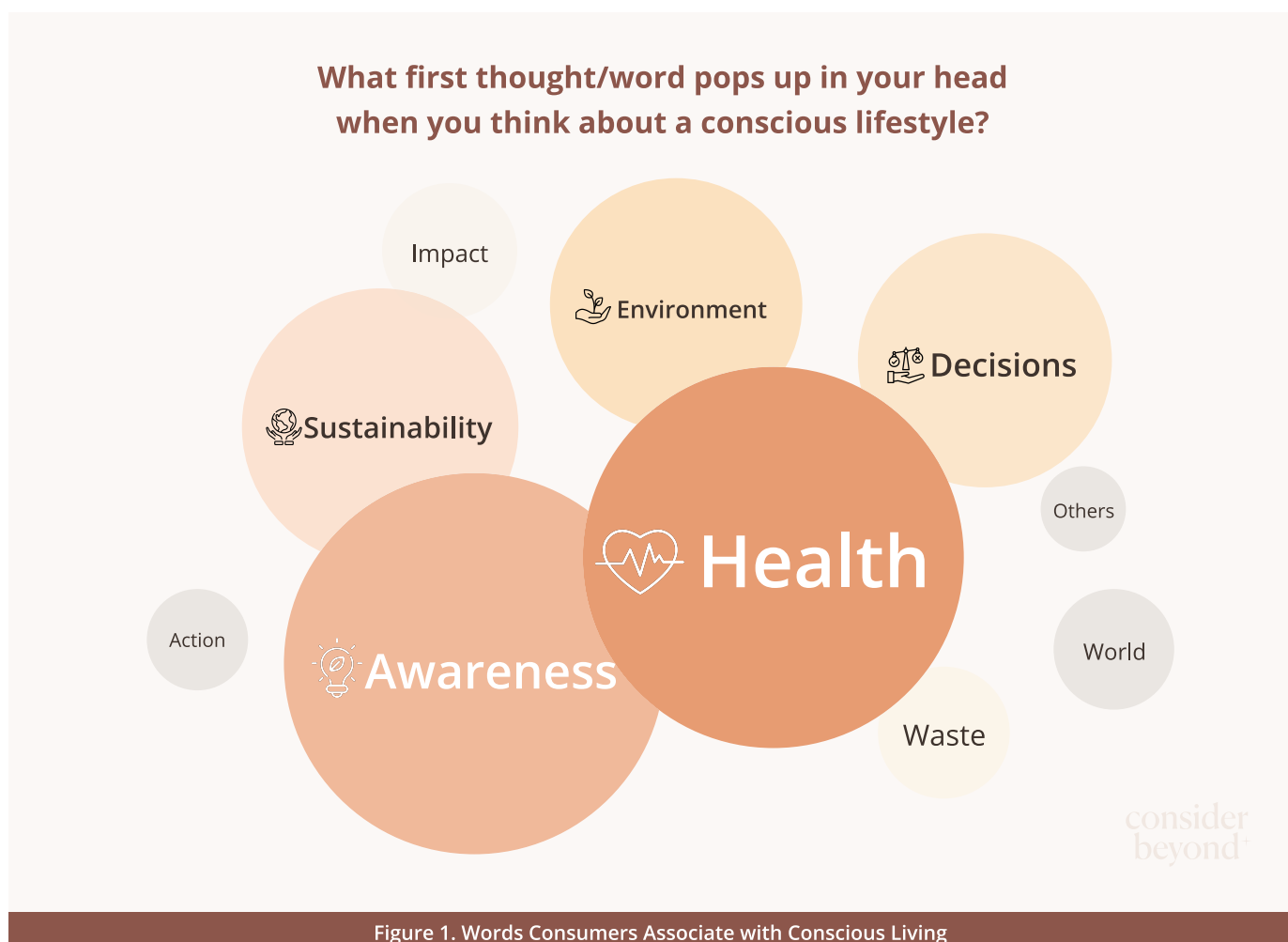
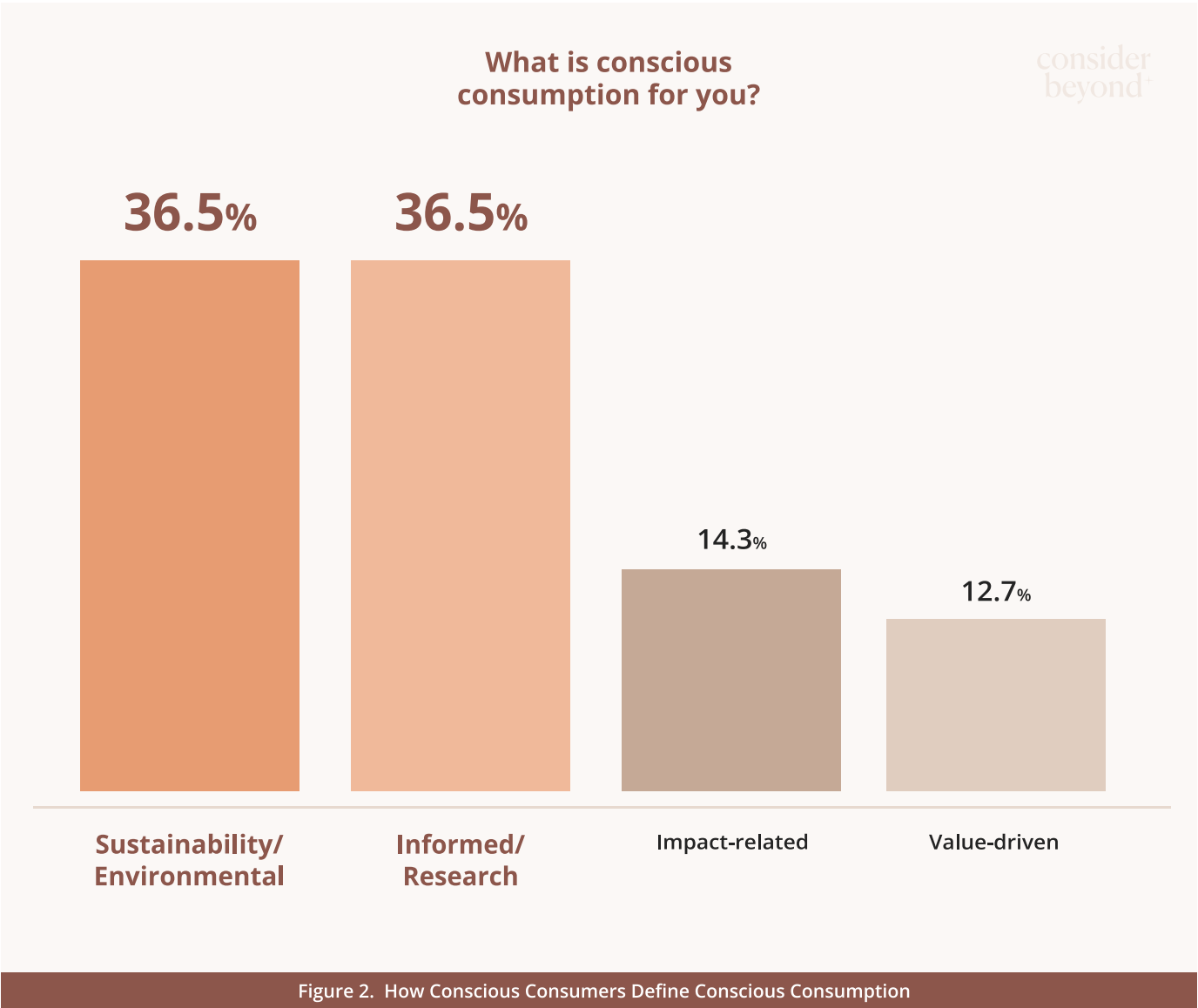
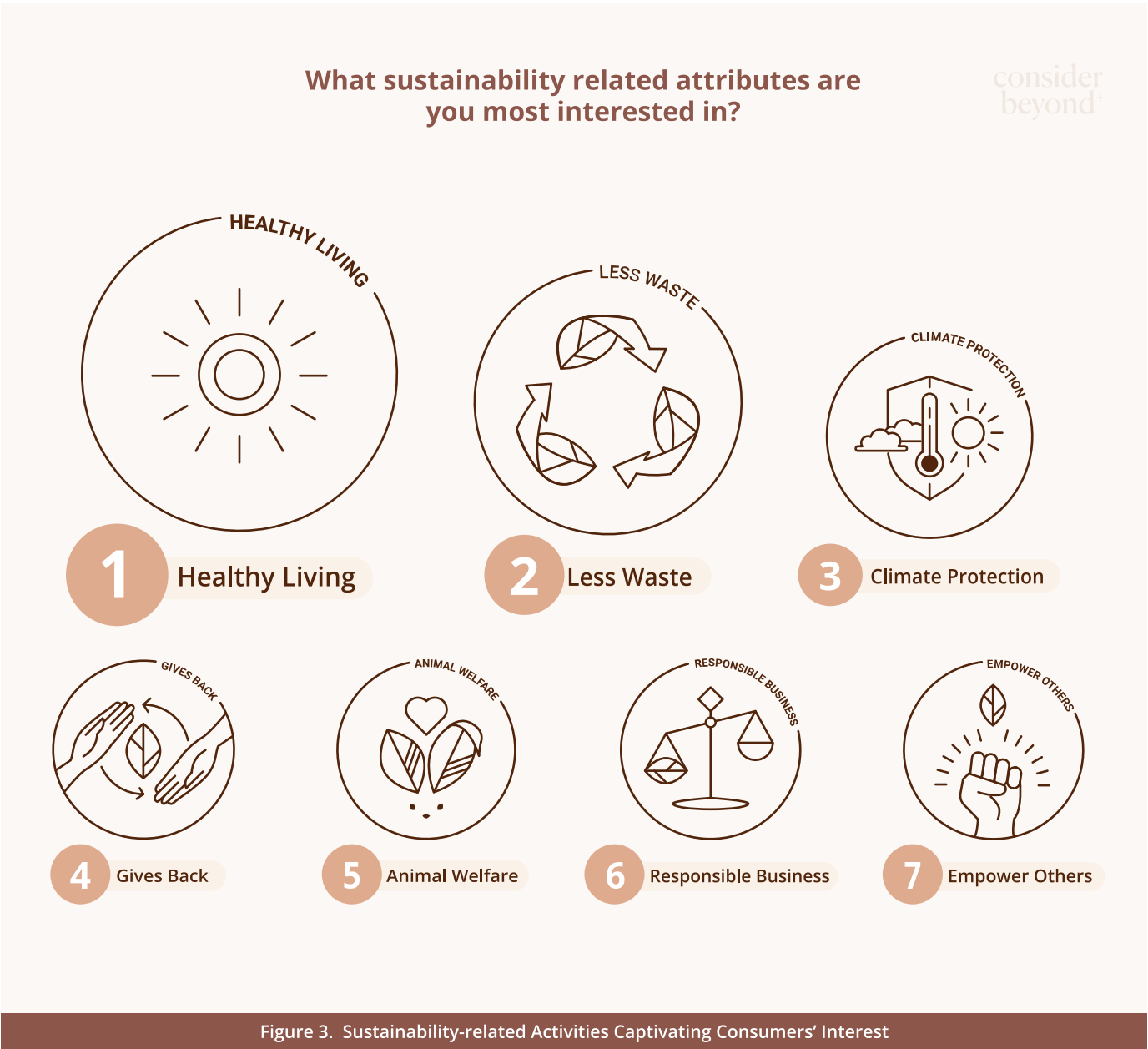


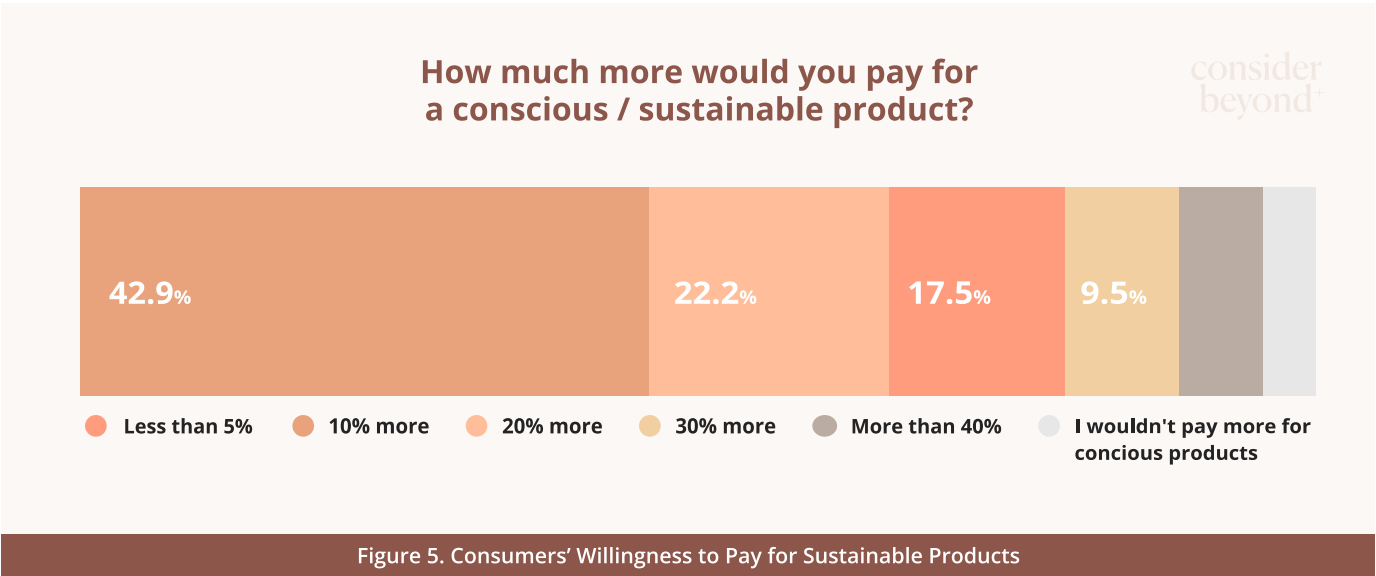
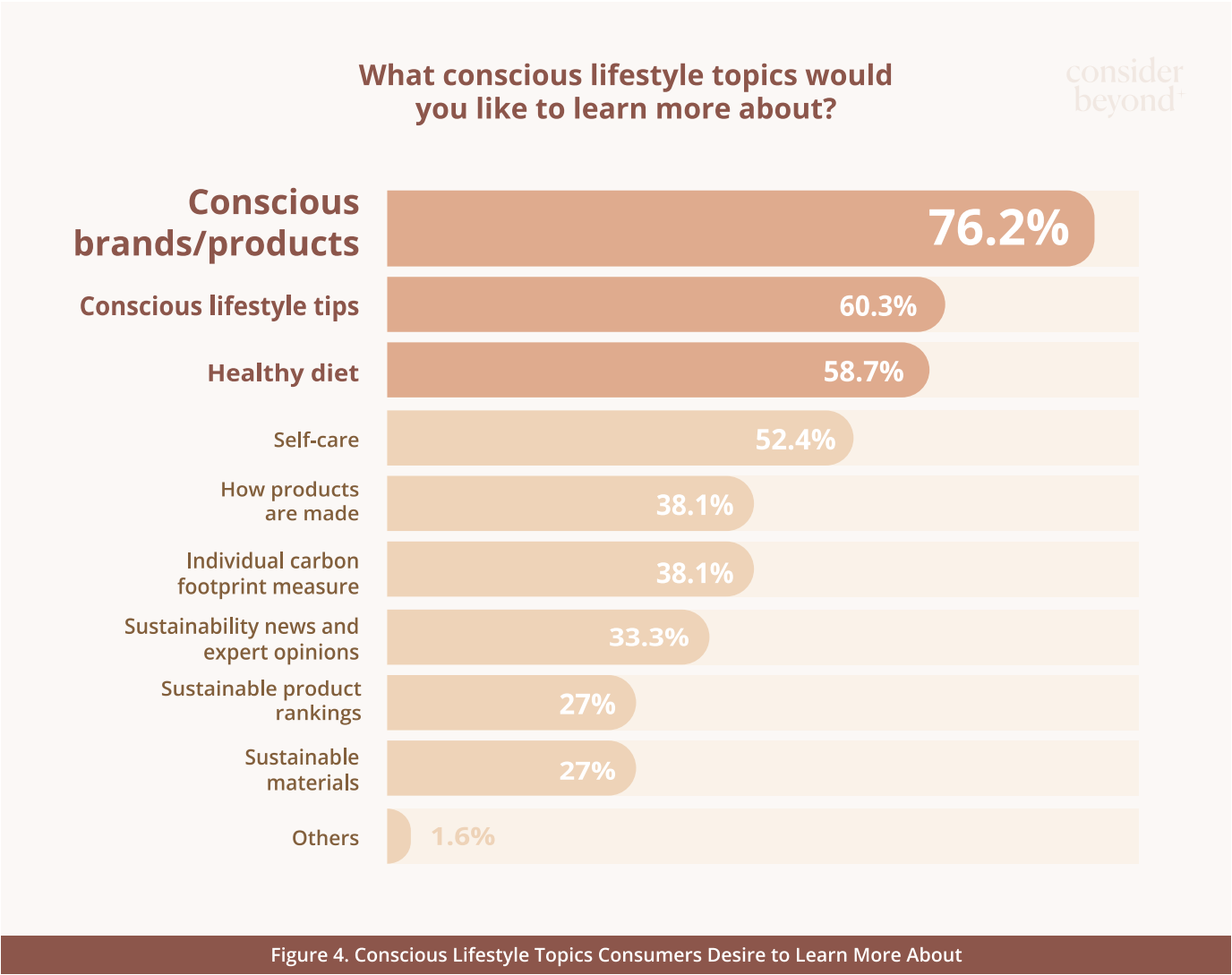
Figure 1. Words Consumers Associate with Conscious Living

Over the past decade, people have become more aware of climate change issues, and, even in certain places, some have been more directly exposed to climate change. Our research finds that more consumers want to be educated on environmental topics to become more knowledgeable to make their own informed decisions. When we asked our respondents to define a conscious consumer, 36.5% responded that consumers do their homework and research before making purchasing decisions. Another 36.5% viewed it as consumers considering their actions' environmental and sustainability aspects, such as reducing waste. The other 14.3% responded as consumers that make purchase decisions according to their personal beliefs and values.



Sustainability is a broad topic and encompasses different aspects depending on one’s personal values. The respondents were interested in the following sustainability activities, in particular:





Challenges Encountered by Conscious Consumers

Our research shows that only a minority of consumers (6.3%) were unwilling to adopt a sustainable lifestyle due to indifference. However, despite the increasing willingness to adopt a sustainable lifestyle, we found two main obstacles that made it difficult to do so: budget constraints and uncertainty in knowing which brands and products are more sustainably and consciously made than others.

Expensive Lifestyle

68.3% of respondents viewed sustainable products as comparatively more expensive than conventional products. Although sustainable products may be more costly, due to the high cost of sustainable materials, certified manufacturers, fair labor practices, better ingredients, and other factors, we have seen the price difference between sustainable products and conventional products reduce yearly, especially in beauty and necessity products.

Arduous Discovery Process

A conscious lifestyle is a path that many consumers worldwide are willing to attempt but still lack guidance and information. 52.4% of respondents found it difficult to search for conscious brands and products in the first place. Currently, there is little agreement on what constitutes a sustainable brand or product and what information should be used as a reference point. As more and more consumers are concerned with greenwashing and seek credible information, having a dedicated and credible platform that allows consumers and brands to effortlessly and effectively connect with one another improves active participation in sustainable lifestyle and consumption by making navigation of conscious brands and products less arduous.

What is the biggest challenge when it comes to living a conscious lifestyle?



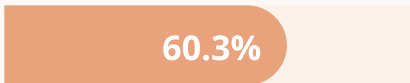
Cost



Too expensive



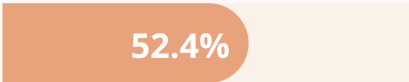
Proof / Information



Lack of brand / product information



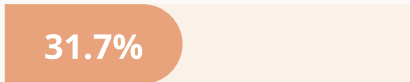
Lifestyle Tips



Lack of conscious lifestyle information



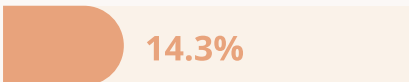
Availability



Lack of product availability near my location



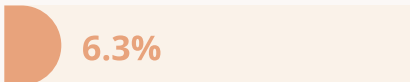
Complexity



Too complicated of a process



Unconcern

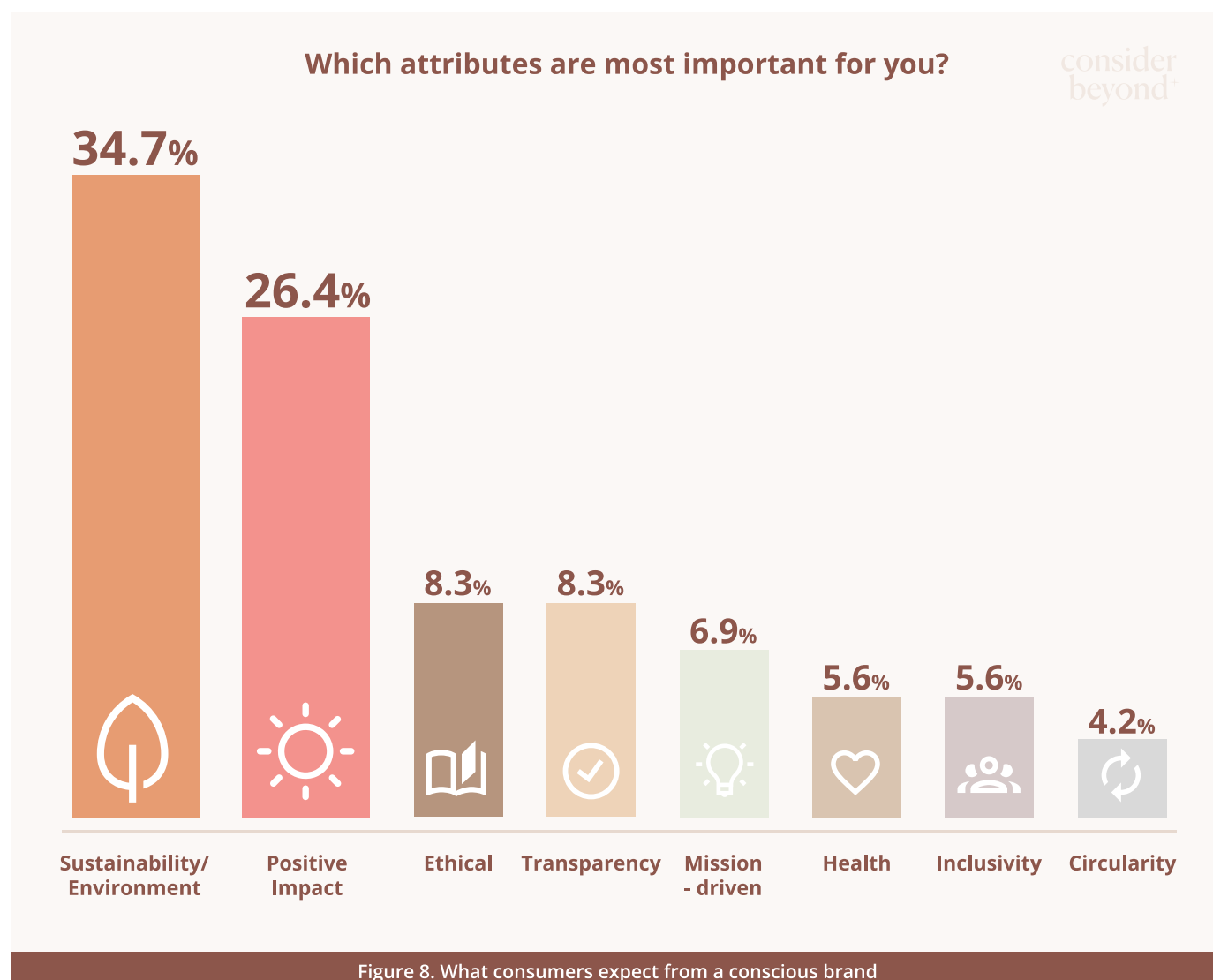


I don't care enough about consious living

Figure 6. Biggest Challenges of Adopting a Conscious Lifestyle

Consumers Expect Brands to have a Bigger Mission

Today's consumers are continuously looking for brands that they trust, are inspirational, and know that they are making efforts for larger causes and our society. 34.7% responded that they would expect a conscious brand to consider sustainability and environmental aspects from all angles of the operation. 26.4% said that they would expect a brand to impact positively, both socially and environmentally, while 8.3% found transparency and ethical behavior to be important.



Consumers Seeking Approval and Guide

Overall, consumers are struggling to navigate without a dedicated, trustworthy platform to find verified, conscious brands and products. 76.2% of respondents said they search for conscious brands and products through product or brand rankings. Consumers are searching for lifestyle tips and healthy habits that can enhance their daily well-being and within the process of conscious living. Many consumers research different aspects of products and brands, yet many times, they seem unsure whether the information is correct, particularly in relation to sustainability. With growing concerns over greenwashing, they want an extra layer of verification of the brand's sustainability claims. Consumers increasingly want brands to prove their sustainability claims. 38% of the respondents strongly factor in third-party certifications when they purchase sustainable products. Even with the abundance of different third-party verification services out in the market, the level of authentication primarily is communicated to the consumer ineffectively or not at all. While important in practice, these verifications require a layer of interaction between the brand and the consumer in order to effectively communicate the brand's dedication to sustainability.

Consumers' Concern on Greenwashing but Greenhushing is Not the Solution for Brands

With rising concerns about greenwashing, brands seem to be more cautious about what and how they communicate their sustainability efforts and goals. Greenhushing is a new term that is known when companies choose not to disclose details of their sustainability goals or achievements. This may be a temporary solution to reduce the risk of greenwashing, but in the larger trend of sustainability, brands would need to find innovative ways to be transparent and authentic about their product manufacturing, supply chain, pricing, and other aspects involved in the business. It is imperative that brands strike a balance between emotional connections with consumers through storytelling and providing fact-based evidence of their actions. While storytelling is an as a marketing technique for brands, brands should aim to strike a balance between establishing emotional connections with consumers and providing fact-based evidence of their actions, as this establishes a solid foundation of credibility and reliability with consumers. Innovative tools such as digital product ID to verify the sustainability aspects of a brand are seen to be imperative.

Our Recommendations

Take an Active Role in Educating Consumers

It is apparent that today's consumers are interested in learning about sustainability. Herein lies an opportunity to educate consumers on the various aspects of sustainability and position your brand as an educator within the category, whether that may be beauty or fashion. Raise the questions that consumers may have regarding sustainability, and explain how your brand is tackling the issue now and/or plans to in the future.

Be Clear on Sustainability Commitment but Be Realistic

Consumers respond well to transparent communication that exudes authenticity. Brands should ensure that their sustainability commitments are realistic and share their actions on their journey toward sustainability. By taking a genuine and consistent stance on sustainability, brands can increase their trustworthiness, creating brand loyalty with consumers.

Gather Active Supporters of Your Sustainability Mission

Consumers seem to usually show pride in their actions to live consciously, which leads to their willingness to share their favorite conscious brand with others or hear about conscious brands from others. They are also more likely to be loyal fans of the brand if the values they stand for align with the brand's sustainability mission. Although sustainability should be considered in all aspects of business, small brands can choose certain areas within sustainability that the brand is most geared toward and be specific about their actions.

Embrace the Social Dimension of Sustainability

The social dimension refers to people-centered issues like workers' rights, gender equality, diversity and inclusion, and impact on local communities. Social aspects can fall into the peripheral view compared to environmental issues as they tend to be more broadly defined with a wide scope of issues involved. If brands offer products that support social causes and needs, consumers can create connections with the product, mission, and efforts to advance or work towards solving societal problems that personally resonate with them.

Take Advantage of the Power of Design and Quality

To meet and exceed customer expectations, sustainable products need to be able to compete with regular products on the market in terms of performance and quality. Nevertheless, another element that brands should not underestimate is the power of design and aesthetics. From visually captivating impact communication on the website to packaging design, there are many advantages to marketing sustainable products and brands to consumers that are visually attractive. Consumers should feel satisfied with the performance, quality, and aesthetics of sustainable products, equal to or better than their non-sustainable counterparts.

Merge Health, Sustainability, and Awareness Together

32% of respondents said conscious living is about considering the environment and sustainability, while 24% viewed it as enhancing their well-being and health. 29% of the respondents saw it as being more aware and mindful of their actions so that they make better decisions around conscious living. We forecast an increasingly positive outlook for brands that connect health, well-being, and sustainability if they can educate consumers on how they interconnect. Consumers want to be mindful of what they purchase; at the same time, they want the products they use to benefit their health and well-being and positively impact the environment and other people. Beauty and food brands can satisfy the different motivations that trigger conscious consumption decisions by sharing transparent and factual information about ingredients, health benefits, production, and planet-betterment efforts.

Verify Sustainability Claims

We forecast that as more information about sustainability is assimilated into accessible consumer spaces, more consumers will choose products with a stronger sustainable brand reputation in the market along with a seal of approval. To accomplish this task, it is imperative to promote information sharing from both the brands and sustainability-related organizations.

Bottom Line

More consumers want to know the impact of their consumption and are looking to support brands that align with their internal values. For conscious consumers to maintain long term loyalty to a brand, the brand should deliver the following:

1. Benefits to the consumers (i.e., quality of products, affordable pricing).
2. Benefits to society and the environment.
3. Authenticity conveyed through evidence-based actions and transparent communication of where they are and where they are heading.

Consumer-facing companies not only need to respond to market demand and stricter regulations, but they must push the boundaries of sustainability forward to be the leaders in the space. Businesses are uniquely positioned to improve consumers' views of sustainability through education, transparency, and establishing genuine their connections with the audience. They can also be advocates for industry rules and strengthen the regulatory landscape of sustainability.

The sustainability trend offers an opportunity to grow with rising conscious consumers worldwide. The opportunity to engage the empathetic and aware group of conscious consumers lies in understanding the consumers' preferences, intentions, and purchasing behavior in relation to sustainability and conscious brands.

Methodology

This report is based on the consumer survey conducted between January to April 2022 by the ConsiderBeyond team with 100 participants from around the world. Our survey questions were focused on consumption habits and behavior, personal values, willingness to learn about sustainability, understanding of specific terminology, and consumer information gathering process.

In addition to the survey outcomes, we have used proprietary data and insights gained from our experience running the ConsiderBeyond app, such as our recurring UX survey, to understand better the perception, obstacles, and expectations of consumers wishing to live more consciously and responsibly. This report aims to share this understanding of these perceptions, obstacles, and expectations of consumers wishing to live more consciously and responsibly.

Location

North America - 62%
Asia - 27%
Europe - 11%

Age Group

16-25 - 30.2%
26-35 - 58.7%
36-45 - 11.1%

As an individual and a consumer, participating in surveys like this can influence brands to take more responsible actions as a result of learning directly about consumers' expectations and responses. Please participate in our ongoing 2023 survey and be part of the positive change.

Get in Touch

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Discover conscious brands all around the world

ConsiderBeyond is where conscious brands meet
conscious consumers worldwide, vice versa.



