



Sustainability Consumerism

U.S. CONSUMER BEHAVIORS AND PREFERENCES



PREPARED BY

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Buzzwords and corporate marketing jargon are easy to mock and even easier to gloss over. Consider the “eco-friendly” or “green” products that turn out to be the same old thing, just repackaged for a younger consumer. While some of these misleading monikers ultimately fade away, companies are also being criticized or even “cancelled” for being deceptive about their supply chains and resources used to make these “new and improved” products. Understanding sustainability is not only a concept, but also as a necessary practice is critical for balancing what we take and then give back to the planet for a healthy future.

Today, brands across verticals are touting their sustainability practices and celebrating new environmentally-friendly initiatives. Whether a direct-to-consumer startup or storied heritage brand, sustainability is a term that everyone is keen to slap on their labels and incorporate into digital or recyclable marketing materials. But, many people—whether on the brand or consumer side—don’t know what sustainability actually means.

According to the **Environmental Protection Agency** sustainability is based on a simple principle: Everything that we need for our survival and well-being depends, either directly or indirectly, on our natural environment. To pursue sustainability is to create and maintain the conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony to support present and future generations. Similarly, the **UN World Commission on Environment and Development** defines sustainability as the “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” To put it in the simplest terms, sustainability is about our children and our grandchildren, and the world we will leave them.

Of course, creating and maintaining a sustainable brand or business is anything but easy. Factors include not only the materials used to create a product, but also the human element involved, which encompasses fair wages, and safe working conditions. Sustainable practices not only take into account how a product is made, and what it’s made with, but also who it’s made by, and how those people are treated and compensated in their work environment.

While this isn’t a novel concept (**The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969** committed the United States to sustainability, declaring it a national policy “to create and maintain conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony, that permit fulfilling the social, economic and other requirements of present and future generations.”), consumers’ appreciation for sustainable brands has increased significantly in recent years. In fact, sustainability drives purchasing decisions in 94% of adults—yes, that includes everyone from Boomers to Gen-Z—indicating that this buzzword, this concept, this value is shared by the vast majority of today’s shoppers.

Confusion about the meaning of sustainability and how to practice sustainable behaviours rings true across generations. Baby boomers and Gen Z often get too little or too much of the credit for leading the charge. For those who came of age in the ‘50s and ‘60s, understanding and appreciating our planet was part of the zeitgeist. And although the young people of today are lauded for their activism around people and planet, they are not solely responsible for extolling the values of doing business sustainably. As for Gen Xers and Millennials, don’t discount them just yet—they still wield significant purchasing power and desire to make informed shopping decisions that will help sustain life on this planet for generations to come.

Embracing Sustainability

94% OF ADULTS

consider it important to live a more sustainable lifestyle.



51% MEN

39% WOMEN

59%
MILLENNIALS

+

52%
GEN Z

Consider it **very** important to live a more sustainable lifestyle.

The **MAJORITY OF RESPONDENTS (43%)** wish there was **more information available** about living sustainably.



Varying Behaviors

BOOMERS and **GEN X** are **2x more likely** than younger consumers to:

Donate clothes, etc.
for reuse or recycling



THE GENERATIONAL SPLIT

41%
BOOMERS / **34%**
GEN X

Actively reduce their use of
single-use plastics



THE GENERATIONAL SPLIT

18%
BOOMERS / **14%**
GEN X

Practice composting



THE GENERATIONAL SPLIT

14%
BOOMERS / **11%**
GEN X

MILLENNIALS and **GEN Z** are **2-3x more likely** than older consumers to:

Purchase pre-owned
products



THE GENERATIONAL SPLIT

18%
MILLENNIALS / **18%**
GEN Z

Eat a vegetarian
or vegan diet



THE GENERATIONAL SPLIT

15%
MILLENNIALS / **10%**
GEN Z

Ride a bike instead of
driving, etc.



THE GENERATIONAL SPLIT

12%
MILLENNIALS / **15%**
GEN Z

Personal & Environmental Benefits



64%

of adults view a **SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLE** as **being better for the environment** and nearly half believe it helps **prevent climate change (48%)**.

61%

of adults view **PRODUCTS PRODUCED** with **minimal environmental impact** to be the **top marker of sustainability**.

47%

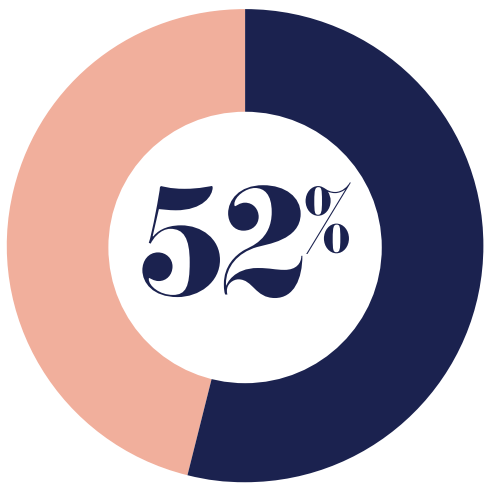
of adults say they would **pay more** for sustainable products.

On average, **BABY BOOMERS** and **GEN Z** are **30% more likely** than **GEN X** and **MILLENNIALS** to agree it's worth paying more for sustainable products.



MILLENNIAL and **GEN Z** consumers are **nearly 2x more likely** than **BABY BOOMERS** to view a sustainable lifestyle as having cost-saving benefits.

Personal & Environmental Benefits



A majority of **WOMEN** believe it's worth **paying more** for sustainable products.

+ **23%** compared to **MEN**

50%

of adults **believe** that **living sustainably** is **healthier** for them and their family.

75%

of adults wish there was a way to **offset** the **impact their travel** has on the **environment**.

80% WOMEN

68% MEN



Top Sustainable Triggers

60% OF ADULTS

consider **reusable products to be more sustainable** and **43% would pay more** for reusable products.

WOMEN are **25%** more likely than **MEN** to **pay more** for reusable products.

BABY BOOMERS & GEN Z are **20%** more likely than any other age group to say they'd **pay more** for **environmentally-friendly or reusable products**.

GEN Z WOMEN are **32%** more likely than **GEN Z MEN** to **pay more** for environmentally-friendly products.

72% of **BABY BOOMERS** consider **reusable and environmentally-friendly products as more sustainable**, more than any other cohort **(+35%)**



Top Sustainable Triggers



55% of **ADULTS** consider products made of **recycled materials** to be more sustainable.

64% would rather use products made from **recycled materials** vs. those made from **new/virgin materials**.

BABY BOOMERS are **40%** more likely than **MILLENNIALS** to say they **prefer products** made from recycled materials.



Shopping Sustainability

84% OF ADULTS

say it's **important** to buy **sustainable products**.

67%

of **ADULTS** view sustainability as an **important part** of their purchase decision making. Breakdown by demo:

53%

BABY BOOMERS

67%

GEN X

82%

MILLENNIALS

71%

GEN Z

Among **BABY BOOMERS**, **WOMEN** are **50% more likely** than **MEN** to view sustainability as an **important part** of their purchase decision making.



GEN X (37%), MILLENNIAL (50%) AND GEN Z (38%) consumers are **3x more likely** than **BOOMERS** to view sustainability as a **very important** part of their purchase decisions.

Shopping Sustainability

While **BABY BOOMERS** are the **least likely** among all cohorts to say sustainability is an important part of their purchase decision making, they're the **most likely** to say:

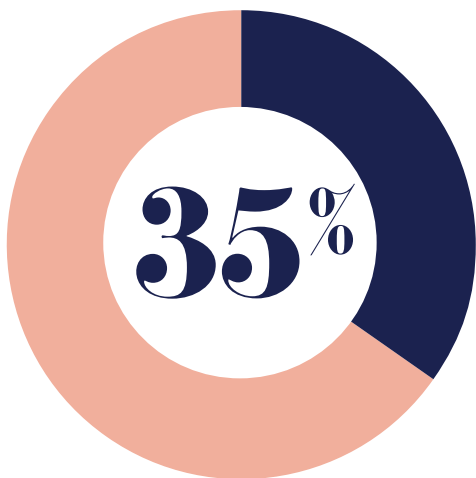
- If given the option to purchase a product **I know to be sustainable** vs. **one I'm unsure about**, I'll purchase the **sustainable option**.[•]

52% / + **83%** vs. younger cohort average



1 in 3

GEN X, MILLENNIALS, AND GEN Z, on average, say they will always choose the more sustainable option when making a purchase.



Of **MILLENNIAL AND GEN Z** consumers admit to recently **reducing** their volume of purchases for environmental reasons.

+ **75%** more so than **OLDER CONSUMERS**

Shopping Sustainability



1 in 3

ADULT CONSUMERS say they've **stopped** buying one or more brands recently after learning that the company's practices and values **didn't match their own**.

MOST VALUE MINDED: **42%** MILLENNIAL MEN + **50%** GEN Z WOMEN

60% of **ADULTS** say it's too expensive for them to **always** shop sustainable.

1 in 3



ADULT CONSUMERS say it's **hard to find** sustainable options across all product categories, but most especially when shopping for **electronics**.



Consumers Expect Companies To Do Their Part

An **OVERWHELMING MAJORITY** think commitment to sustainability and environmental transparency are **key**:

NEARLY 90%

believe companies should **look for ways** to make their products or services **more sustainable**.

80%

believe companies have an **obligation** to disclose the **environmental impact** of their operations.

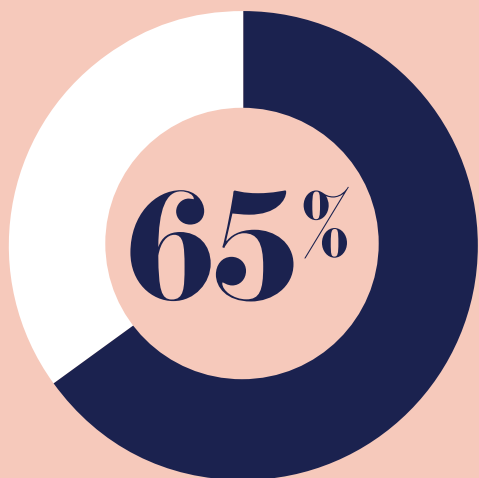


BABY BOOMERS (63%) are the **most likely** consumer generation to hold that brands **need to share openly** about how they make their products.

+ **20% BB WOMEN** more than **BB MEN**



Brands Should Gift Sustainably



Of **ADULTS** would be more excited to receive a Gift With Purchase made with **recycled materials** vs. **virgin materials**.

70%

of **ADULTS** would be excited to receive a GWP made from **recycled ocean plastics**.



Gifts that include instructions on **HOW YOU CAN RECYCLE OR REPAIR** the product at the end of its life (**62%**) or include a **LETTER TELLING YOU ABOUT THE PEOPLE WHO MADE** (**58%**) are all of interest.

GEN X, MILLENNIAL AND GEN Z consumers are + **20%** more likely to be excited by these gift additions compared to **BABY BOOMERS**.

Sustainable Word Association: #Recycled

The words **most likely** to influence **CONSUMERS**
when used in **product marketing**:

BABY BOOMERS

RECYCLED	65%
SUSTAINABLE	60%
REUSABLE	57%
FAIR TRADE	51%
GREEN	42%
ETHICAL	34%
ORGANIC	34%
RESPONSIBLE	32%
NATURAL FIBERS	30%
MADE FROM WASTE	26%
B CORP	3%

GEN X

RECYCLED	52%
SUSTAINABLE	44%
REUSABLE	43%
GREEN	41%
FAIR TRADE	39%
ORGANIC	36%
ETHICAL	31%
NATURAL FIBERS	30%
RESPONSIBLE	25%
MADE FROM WASTE	23%
B CORP	10%

MILLENNIALS

GREEN	51%
RECYCLED	49%
SUSTAINABLE	42%
ORGANIC	42%
FAIR TRADE	39%
REUSABLE	39%
ETHICAL	35%
NATURAL FIBERS	33%
RESPONSIBLE	29%
MADE FROM WASTE	23%
B CORP	13%

GEN Z

RECYCLED	52%
GREEN	43%
ORGANIC	42%
REUSABLE	41%
FAIR TRADE	37%
SUSTAINABLE	35%
NATURAL FIBERS	30%
ETHICAL	28%
RESPONSIBLE	26%
MADE FROM WASTE	23%
B CORP	11%

Looking For More?

COMPOSE [D]

Compose[d] is a digital creative services & strategy agency based in NYC, that focuses on addressing business goals for their client through sustainable solutions, and is proud to partner with the top brands across Retail, Fashion, Beauty, and Lifestyle.

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MaCher

MaCher is a globally inspired Certified B Corp that uses data and academic research to create thoughtful, meaningful and sustainable solutions that get brands noticed. It specializes in responsibly manufacturing products that solve business problems - all the way from design to delivery.

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Both companies are **Certified B Corps**, and share a passion for using business as a force for good. We've partnered together both on this report, and other projects for our clients—we'd love to do the same for your brand.

For a deeper dive on insights around your brand or for help crafting a campaign strategy or solution leveraging these insights, please contact us.

Study Methodology

Online survey fielded March 3 - March 10, 2021

1,000 Nationwide US Adult Respondents Ages 18-75

50/50 Male - Female

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