

Strategic Management of Corporate Sustainability: The Role of Gender Differences

Petrea Ivanov, Mădălina I.¹ (Romania)

Abstract: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved from an ethical obligation into a strategic advantage, encouraging companies to integrate sustainability into their operations. However, the success of these strategies depends on how well businesses understand consumer preferences. This study examines the relationship between gender and sustainable consumption, highlighting differences in attitudes and behaviors. Using a cross-sectional survey of 65 participants, the research analyzes purchasing habits, awareness, and perspectives on future sustainability trends. The findings reveal significant gender differences: women are more proactive in purchasing sustainable products, more attentive to sustainability certifications, and more supportive of policies promoting sustainability, even at higher costs. These results are consistent with existing literature, which attributes women's stronger engagement to higher ecological awareness and a more holistic understanding of environmental issues. The study offers important implications for corporate strategy, suggesting that businesses should tailor sustainability initiatives to female consumers by enhancing transparency, ensuring credible certifications, and clearly communicating sustainability efforts. Overall, the research contributes to understanding gender dynamics in sustainability and provides practical insights for companies and policymakers.

Citation: Petrea Ivanov, M. I. (2026). Strategic management of corporate sustainability: The role of gender differences. *Cross-Cultural Management Journal*, 28(1), 17–29.
<https://doi.org/10.70147/c281729>

Received: 31 March 2026

Revised: 26 April 2026

Accepted: 29 April 2026

Published: 1 May 2026



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Keywords: CSR, sustainability, gender differences, consumer behaviour

JEL Classification: M14, Q56, D12, J16

¹ Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, Iași, Romania

INTRODUCTION

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a strategic framework that encourages companies to operate sustainably while addressing ethical, social, and environmental issues. It reflects a commitment to balancing profit-making with societal welfare, evolving from a mere obligation to a strategic advantage for businesses. CSR encompasses voluntary actions by companies to act ethically and responsibly towards their stakeholders and the environment (Marco-Lajara, et al., 2022). It includes initiatives like community development, environmental protection, and ethical labor practices, aiming to enhance societal well-being (Ratnasari, 2012). CSR can serve as a strategic advantage, potentially leading to increased profitability and improved public perception (Ratnasari, 2012). It can also influence stakeholder preferences, thereby altering the economic dynamics within firms and enhancing overall welfare (Prinz, 2017). Some companies may engage in CSR superficially, using it as a facade to improve their image without genuine commitment (Ratnasari, 2012). The effectiveness of CSR initiatives can vary, with some being criticized as unproductive or merely redistributing existing economic rents (Prinz, 2017).

Engaging in CSR initiatives can profoundly affect a company's performance. Research shows that CSR activities enhance consumer perception, leading to increased customer loyalty and retention. As customers become more aware of and responsive to ethical business practices, companies that invest in CSR can experience notable improvements in sales and profitability (Eccles, et al., 2014). The positive correlation between CSR and financial performance highlights the strategic value of integrating ethical practices into business operations.

CSR is increasingly recognized as a crucial factor in attracting and retaining top talent. Companies that emphasize CSR often witness higher levels of job satisfaction and employee commitment. This focus on social responsibility can create a more engaging and supportive work environment, which is essential for retaining skilled workers and fostering a loyal workforce (Chakraborty & Ganguly, 2019). The alignment of employee values with corporate values can enhance overall job satisfaction and reduce turnover rates.

In competitive markets, CSR can serve as a key differentiator. By adopting and promoting CSR strategies, companies can distinguish themselves from competitors, thus gaining a strategic advantage. CSR initiatives not only foster

innovation but also contribute to a positive organizational culture, which can be a significant factor in attracting customers and business partners (Kumar, et al., 2022). The ability to showcase a commitment to ethical practices can be a powerful tool for differentiation in crowded marketplaces.

Effective CSR strategies contribute to a company's enhanced reputation and increased market value. Positive CSR disclosures and practices can significantly improve how a firm is perceived by stakeholders, who are increasingly prioritizing ethical behavior and sustainability (Duan & Zhang, 2024). Companies that are transparent and proactive in their CSR efforts are often rewarded with a stronger reputation and greater market valuation. CSR is integral to achieving sustainable development, as it aligns corporate objectives with broader societal needs and environmental stewardship. By focusing on sustainability, companies can address long-term societal and environmental challenges while pursuing their business goals (Duan & Zhang, 2024). This alignment not only supports global sustainability efforts but also ensures that corporate strategies are resilient and adaptable to future challenges.

Despite the numerous benefits, CSR also presents challenges. Implementing CSR strategies can entail significant costs and risks, including the need for substantial initial investments and the management of complex stakeholder expectations. Balancing these factors is crucial for the effective integration of CSR into business models. Companies must carefully navigate the trade-offs between the short-term financial impacts and the long-term benefits of CSR. Effective management of CSR initiatives requires a strategic approach that aligns with both corporate goals and societal expectations, ensuring that the pursuit of ethical practices leads to sustainable and meaningful outcomes.

Overall, CSR offers a framework through which companies can enhance their performance and societal impact. However, the successful implementation of CSR requires thoughtful consideration of both the potential benefits and the associated challenges, making it a critical component of modern business strategy.

Sustainability offers a strategic advantage for companies by significantly enhancing their competitive positioning, securing long-term viability, and spurring innovation. When companies integrate sustainability into their corporate strategies, they not only meet regulatory and societal expectations but also achieve operational efficiencies and improve employee well-being.

Embracing sustainable practices can significantly enhance a company's corporate legitimacy, especially in emerging markets. This alignment with global sustainability standards and stakeholder expectations allows companies to build credibility and trust with both customers and investors (Gomez-Trujillo, et al., 2023). Such legitimacy is crucial for sustaining long-term success, as it fosters stronger relationships and support from key stakeholders. Adopting sustainable practices often results in superior resource management and increased innovation efficiency. These improvements can lead to substantial gains in productivity and reductions in operational costs (Kushermanto & Rohman, 2024). Additionally, companies that prioritize sustainability typically see enhanced employee morale and productivity. This boost in workforce engagement and efficiency can further contribute to a company's competitive edge (Nkemdilim, 2023). Integrating sustainability into strategic management is vital for navigating today's complex business environment. This approach enables companies to stay agile and responsive to evolving market conditions (Duh & Štrukelj, 2023). By adopting a holistic sustainability strategy, companies can develop unique capabilities that set them apart from their competitors, creating a distinctive competitive advantage (Liwafa, et al., 2023).

While the benefits of sustainability are numerous, some critics argue that the initial investments and adjustments required can be significant and may impact short-term profitability. Despite these challenges, the long-term benefits often outweigh the initial costs, establishing sustainability as a crucial element of strategic advantage. The forward-looking approach of sustainability not only ensures compliance and operational excellence but also positions companies for enduring success in an increasingly conscientious market.

Understanding gender differences is crucial for enhancing management decisions, as it influences leadership styles, decision-making processes, and organizational performance. By recognizing these differences, organizations can leverage diverse perspectives to improve outcomes. Gender diversity in leadership correlates with improved decision-making quality. Companies with women in top management often exhibit higher profitability due to varied approaches to problem-solving and decision-making styles (Sieweke, et al., 2023).

Female managers tend to adopt more collaborative and inclusive decision-making processes, which can lead to more thorough evaluations of alternatives (Afanaseva, et al., 2022). Gender differences affect how managers handle work-family conflicts, impacting their reliance on information sources for

decision-making. Female managers may face greater challenges in balancing these roles, leading to more intuitive rather than analytical decisions (Leaptrott & McDonald, 2011). Understanding these dynamics can inform policies that support managers, ultimately enhancing decision quality and organizational performance (Leaptrott & McDonald, 2011).

Cultural factors also shape gender-specific management styles, with women often exhibiting greater sensitivity to non-verbal cues and emotional intelligence, which can enhance team dynamics and decision-making processes (Afanaseva, et al., 2022). While recognizing gender differences can lead to better management decisions, it is essential to avoid stereotyping. Not all individuals conform to gender norms, and effective management should focus on individual capabilities and contributions rather than solely on gender.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research consistently indicates that women are generally more mindful of sustainability when making purchasing decisions compared to men. Empirical studies have demonstrated that women exhibit a stronger predisposition towards choosing sustainable products, a trend that persists regardless of their educational background. Furthermore, women are more significantly influenced by the moral satisfaction that arises from engaging with sustainability-oriented product designs (Núñez, et al., 2024). This contrasts with men, who tend to prioritize factors such as price and quality over sustainability, suggesting a relatively lower emphasis on environmental considerations in their consumer behavior (Núñez, et al., 2024). Additionally, research findings highlight that younger consumers, along with women, generally exhibit more positive attitudes towards sustainability. This underscores a gender-based difference in the perceived importance of sustainable consumption (Nichols & Holt, 2023). Moreover, women are often found to possess greater ecological awareness and a more favorable disposition towards sustainable purchasing behaviors, reinforcing the significant role that gender plays in shaping consumer attitudes and actions related to sustainability (Berlanga, et al., 2023). In parallel, research also suggests that men tend to exhibit higher levels of food wastage than women, although these findings are often context-dependent. A study conducted in Malaysia revealed that male respondents were more likely to waste food compared to their female counterparts, thereby

highlighting a significant gender disparity in food waste behavior (Ariffin, et al., 2023). Similarly, research from Nigeria supports this trend, showing that food waste was more prevalent in households headed by men (Sunday, et al., 2022). However, contrasting findings have emerged from a study in Romania, which noted that although women generally display greater concern about food waste and its broader implications, there were no significant differences in the actual amounts of food wasted by men and women (Cantaragiu, 2019). This suggests that while men may be more prone to food waste, women's proactive attitudes towards food conservation might mitigate the extent of waste. Overall, the body of evidence tends to indicate that men are greater contributors to food waste, but the complexities surrounding gender-specific attitudes and behaviors toward food waste necessitate further scholarly exploration.

Further research suggests that women tend to exhibit a stronger engagement with sustainability issues compared to men. For example, studies have shown that women are more actively involved in sustainability initiatives and often possess a more holistic understanding of sustainability-related challenges, a perspective that is increasingly reflected in their participation in sustainability research and entrepreneurial endeavors (Mets & Vettik-Leemet, 2024). Despite this heightened interest and their substantial contributions, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership roles within sustainability sectors. Moreover, their research outputs are frequently less recognized, pointing to a systemic gender disparity that undermines their visibility and impact (Barreiro-Gen & Bautista-Puig, 2022). This gender disparity suggests that while women are more inclined towards sustainability, systemic barriers limit their visibility and impact. Addressing these inequalities is crucial for enhancing sustainability efforts across various sectors. Research also indicates that women generally display a stronger concern for environmental issues compared to men. Numerous studies consistently reveal that women demonstrate more robust pro-environmental attitudes and concerns across various social and cultural contexts. For instance, a study involving college students found that women expressed greater concern about environmental problems compared to their male peers, with 39.1% of participants from both genders sharing similar opinions; however, women overall exhibited higher levels of concern (Cantú-Martínez, 2020). On the other hand, a study conducted in China suggests that while men historically displayed greater concern for environmental issues, this gender gap has significantly narrowed in recent

years. Women now demonstrate equal or slightly higher levels of environmental concern, particularly when their environmental knowledge is taken into account (Xiao & Hong, 2017).

Moreover, the preoccupation with health issues tends to be more pronounced among women than men. Research consistently indicates that women are more likely to seek medical care and utilize health services on a regular basis, reflecting a higher level of engagement with health-related matters (Park, 2014). This heightened involvement is partly due to the array of unique health challenges that women face, including reproductive health issues and higher incidences of certain chronic diseases, which necessitate more active participation in healthcare (Albino & Tedesco, 1983). Conversely, men's health issues are often less discussed, with a focus primarily on a limited range of conditions such as prostate cancer (Geale, 2015). Additionally, health interventions historically target women, suggesting that men may be less engaged in health care behaviors (Geale, 2015). This disparity underscores that while both genders confront significant health challenges, women generally exhibit a greater preoccupation with their health, as evidenced by their more proactive approach to seeking care and addressing a broader spectrum of health concerns.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This study used a cross-sectional survey design to investigate consumer behavior, awareness and information, and future trends. The questionnaire was designed to capture a broad spectrum of insights across these dimensions while also gathering demographic data.

The research instrument was a self-administered online questionnaire composed of five sections:

Section 1: Introduction and Consent. This section provided a descriptive overview of the study, outlined the objectives of the research, and included implied informed consent for participation.

Section 2: Consumer Behavior. Focused on understanding participants' purchasing habits, decision-making processes, and behavior patterns.

Section 3: Awareness and Information. Assessed the participants' level of awareness regarding relevant topics and the sources of information they use.

Section 4: Future Trends. Explored participants' opinions and expectations concerning future developments in the relevant field.

Section 5: Demographic Data. Collected information on the participants' demographic characteristics, including age, gender, education,

and occupation, to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the sample population.

The questionnaire was distributed online. The distribution was conducted via social networks, specifically within Facebook and WhatsApp groups where the researcher was an active member. Participants were invited to complete the survey through posts in these groups. A total of 65 responses were collected during the data collection period. The sample was deemed to be well-balanced in terms of demographics, reflecting a diverse range of respondents. Specific demographic details of the sample are summarized in the results section.

Quantitative analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel. A comparative analysis was also performed between the responses given by male and female respondents. This comparison aimed to uncover any gender-based differences in behavior, awareness, and expectations regarding future trends. This study adhered to strict ethical standards throughout the research process to ensure the protection of participants' rights and the integrity of the research. Several measures were implemented to address ethical concerns. Before participating in the survey, all respondents were provided with a detailed introduction in the first section of the questionnaire, which explained the purpose of the research, the nature of their involvement, and the voluntary nature of participation. Implied informed consent was obtained by asking participants to proceed with the questionnaire only if they agreed to the terms provided.

The questionnaire was designed to collect data anonymously, with no identifying information requested from the participants. This anonymity was emphasized to the respondents to encourage honest and candid responses. Additionally, all data were stored securely, and access was limited to the research team to ensure confidentiality. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, with participants having the freedom to withdraw at any time without any consequences. This was clearly communicated in the introductory section of the questionnaire. The research was designed to pose minimal risk to participants. The questions were crafted to avoid sensitive topics that could cause discomfort or distress. The research also complied with the relevant ethical guidelines and standards for conducting social research, ensuring that the study did not negatively impact the participants. Participants were informed about the general aims of the research upfront, and the findings of the study will be made available to them upon request. This transparency helps build trust and maintains the ethical integrity of the research process.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study, focusing on the differences in sustainable consumption behaviors and attitudes between male and female respondents. The analysis covers several key areas, including the frequency of sustainable purchases, the importance of product categories, engagement with sustainable certifications, food waste behavior, support for sustainability policies, and outlook on the future of sustainable consumption.

The data were collected through a cross-sectional survey, with a total of 65 participants representing a diverse demographic background. The results are analyzed through both qualitative and quantitative methods, providing insights into the gender-specific tendencies that influence sustainable consumption. By comparing the responses of male and female participants, the study aims to identify patterns and trends that can inform corporate strategies and policymaking in the realm of sustainability.

The survey was completed by 65 respondents, whose ages ranged from 18 to 64 years. The age distribution was fairly balanced, with the majority of respondents falling within the 25-34 and 45-54 age brackets. Specifically, 13 respondents were aged 18-24, 17 were aged 25-34, 10 were aged 35-44, 18 were aged 45-54, and seven were aged 55-64. In terms of gender, the majority of respondents identified as female (47 respondents), while 17 identified as male, and one respondent chose not to disclose their gender.

Regarding educational background, the largest group of respondents had completed a college degree (32 respondents), followed by those with a master's degree (23 respondents). Additionally, seven respondents had a high school degree, two had a PhD, and one respondent indicated having no formal studies. When considering occupation, the majority of respondents were full-time employees (46 respondents). Other categories included part-time employees (two respondents), entrepreneurs (four respondents), students (10 respondents), those without a job (two respondents), and one respondent who was retired. Marital status data revealed a nearly even split, with 33 respondents being married or in a stable relationship and 32 respondents being single. Finally, in terms of residence, 48 respondents lived in urban areas, while 17 resided in rural areas. The findings offer a comprehensive view of how gender differences manifest in various aspects of sustainability, highlighting areas where women and men diverge in their attitudes and behaviors. These differences are crucial for businesses and

policymakers to understand, as they can shape the development of targeted initiatives that resonate with each gender. The following sections delve into the specific results obtained from the survey, offering detailed interpretations and strategic implications based on the observed gender differences.

The data indicates a difference in how often men and women consciously purchase sustainable products, as shown in Figure 1. The question asked was “*How often do you consciously purchase sustainable products/services? (a product or service is sustainable if it manages to maintain a balanced balance between economic aspects, social equity and environmental preservation)*”. Among men, the majority fall into the “Often” (seven) and “Sometimes” (10) categories, with no respondents selecting “Always”, “Rarely”, or “Never”. In contrast, women exhibit a higher frequency of sustainable purchasing, with two women stating they “Always” purchase sustainably, 22 “Often”, 18 “Sometimes”, five “Rarely”, and none selecting “Never”.

When asked which categories a “sustainable consumer” prioritizes, as it can be seen in Figure 2, both men and women overwhelmingly identified “Food” as the top category (five men, 28 women). Other categories, such as “Clothing” (one man, seven women), “Personal Care” (two men, two women), “Household Items” (five men, five women), and “Electronics and Appliances” (four men, five women), were less frequently prioritized, with “Food” being the most significant by far.

The frequency of reading product labels or descriptions to verify sustainable certifications varies between men and women. Among men, one always checks labels, nine do so “Often”, one “Sometimes”, five “Rarely”, and one “Never”. For women, 10 always check, 17 “Often”, eight “Sometimes”, nine “Rarely”, and three “Never”.

Food waste behaviors show a broader distribution are shown in Figure 3. For men, responses were distributed as follows: one “Always”, one “Often”, 10 “Sometimes”, three “Rarely” and two “Never”. Women's responses indicate higher food waste, with one “Always”, 12 “Often”, 21 “Sometimes”, 10 “Rarely” and three “Never”.

Awareness of the UN Sustainable Development Goals is lower among both men and women. Among men, five are familiar with the SDGs, while 12 are not. Among women, 11 are familiar, whereas 36 are not. The results show that there is strong support for local sustainability policies, even if they result in slightly increased product prices, the question asked being “*Would you support local policies or regulations that prioritize sustainability, even if*

they would slightly increase product prices?”. Among men, two expressed “Strong Support”, six “Support”, and nine a “Neutral Attitude”, with no opposition. Among women, support is higher, with eight expressing “Strong Support”, 24 “Support”, 13 a “Neutral Attitude”, two in “Opposition” and none in “Strong Opposition”.

Men and women share some optimism about the future of sustainable consumption. Among men, five are optimistic that “sustainability will become the new normal”, 11 are “cautiously optimistic”, one is neutral, and none are pessimistic. Among women, five are optimistic, 36 cautiously optimistic, three neutral, and three pessimistic.

When considering the future, both men and women anticipate growth in their commitment to sustainable consumption, as it can be seen in Figure 4. Among men, three foresee a significant increase, 12 anticipate moderate growth, two expect their commitment to stay the same, and none foresee a reduction. Among women, 14 foresee a significant increase, 27 moderate growth, five expect to stay the same, and one anticipates a reduction.

Environmental concern is a key factor in purchasing decisions. Among men, 10 rated it as “Important”, four as “Very Important”, one as “Neutral”, and two as “A little bit important”, with none saying it's “Not at all important”. Among women, 16 rated it as “Important”, 17 as “Very Important”, eight as “Neutral”, five as “A little bit important” and one as “Not at all important”.

Health and safety are also significant considerations. Among men, eight rated it as “Important”, four as “Very Important”, five as “Neutral”, and none said it was of lesser importance. Among women, 11 rated it as “Important”, 28 as “Very Important”, five as “Neutral”, one as “A little bit important” and two as “Not at all important”.

Financial considerations are similarly important. Among men, eight rated it as “Important”, six as “Very Important”, two as “Neutral”, one as “Not at all important”, and none as “A little bit important”. Among women, 15 rated it as “Important”, 18 as “Very Important”, 10 as “Neutral”, two as “Not at all important” and two as “A little bit important”.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Sustainable purchasing behavior

The literature consistently highlights that women are generally more mindful of sustainability in their purchasing decisions than men. Studies by Núñez et al. (2024) and Berlanga et al. (2023) suggest that women prioritize sustainability more than men, who tend to focus on factors like price and quality. This

is strongly supported by our findings, where women reported higher frequencies of consciously purchasing sustainable products than men. Specifically, two women reported "Always" purchasing sustainably, 22 "Often," and 18 "Sometimes," compared to men, who predominantly fell into the "Often" (7) and "Sometimes" (10) categories. These results align with the literature, reinforcing the notion that women are more inclined towards sustainability in their consumption behaviors. This finding suggests that companies should consider tailoring their marketing strategies to emphasize sustainability, particularly when targeting female consumers. Highlighting eco-friendly features, certifications, and sustainable practices in advertising and product packaging could resonate more with female audiences, potentially increasing brand loyalty and driving sales. Additionally, businesses might consider developing products that align with women's sustainability preferences, ensuring that these products are easily identifiable through clear labeling and marketing.

Product category prioritization

The literature indicates that women are more inclined to engage with sustainability-oriented product designs, regardless of the category. Our findings show that both men and women prioritize food when considering sustainable products, with 28 women and five men selecting this category. While this aligns with the general trend of women prioritizing sustainability, it also highlights that food, in particular, is a category where both genders recognize the importance of sustainability, albeit with women showing a much stronger inclination. Given that food is a top priority, companies in the food and beverage industry should prioritize sustainability in their product offerings. This could include sourcing ingredients from sustainable suppliers, reducing packaging waste, or obtaining certifications that verify sustainable practices. Emphasizing these efforts in marketing campaigns could attract both male and female consumers, but particularly appeal to the more sustainability-conscious female demographic. Furthermore, businesses could explore expanding their sustainable product lines in categories like household items and personal care, where there is also significant interest from women.

Reading labels for sustainable certifications

Our results show that women are more diligent in checking product labels for sustainable certifications, with 27 women doing so "Always" or "Often," compared to 10 men. This finding corresponds with the literature, which indicates that

women are more engaged with sustainability issues, likely driven by their holistic understanding and greater ecological awareness (Mets & Vettik-Leemet, 2024; Berlanga et al., 2023). This behavior underscores the importance of transparency in sustainability claims. Businesses should invest in obtaining credible sustainability certifications and ensure that these are prominently displayed on product labels. This could help build trust with female consumers who are more diligent in verifying such claims. Additionally, companies might consider educational campaigns that inform consumers about the value and meaning of different sustainability certifications, further enhancing their product appeal.

Food waste behavior

The literature presents a somewhat mixed picture regarding gender differences in food waste. Research suggests that men may be more prone to food wastage (Ariffin et al., 2023; Sunday et al., 2022), although this is context-dependent, and women's proactive attitudes might mitigate actual waste levels (Cantaragiu, 2019). Our data shows that food waste is a common issue among both genders, but women report higher frequencies of food waste ("Often" and "Sometimes") than men. This contrasts with the literature's suggestion that men waste more food, indicating that in our sample, women might either be more honest about their waste habits or that men are less likely to admit to waste, or there could be cultural or contextual factors at play. This finding suggests an opportunity for businesses, especially in the food industry, to develop products and services that help reduce food waste. Solutions such as portion-controlled packaging, food preservation technologies, and waste-reduction tips could be marketed to female consumers who might be more aware of or concerned about their food waste habits. Additionally, companies could engage in partnerships with organizations that focus on food waste reduction, thereby positioning themselves as leaders in sustainability and appealing to consumers who are concerned about this issue.

Support for sustainability policies

Both the literature and our results indicate that women are more supportive of sustainability initiatives. Our data shows stronger support among women for local sustainability policies, even with potential price increases, compared to men. This aligns with the findings that women tend to be more actively involved in sustainability and more supportive of related policies (Barreiro-Gen & Bautista-Puig, 2022).

This indicates that businesses can gain support from female consumers for initiatives that might come with a premium, provided they are tied to genuine sustainability efforts. Companies should not shy away from implementing or supporting policies that advance sustainability, even if they lead to slightly higher prices. Communicating the long-term benefits of these policies, such as environmental protection, community impact, and the ethical sourcing of materials, can help justify the cost and maintain consumer loyalty, particularly among women.

Future of sustainable consumption

Our results indicate a general cautious optimism about the future of sustainable consumption among both genders, with women displaying slightly higher levels of optimism. This is consistent with the literature, which suggests that women have a more proactive and hopeful outlook on sustainability (Mets & Vettik-Leemet, 2024). However, the stronger optimism among women in our results might reflect their broader engagement with sustainability issues, as highlighted in the literature. This optimism, particularly among women, suggests a growing market for sustainable products. Companies should capitalize on this trend by continuing to innovate and expand their sustainable offerings. A proactive approach to sustainability, such as setting ambitious sustainability goals and publicly committing to them, can help align the company with the optimistic outlook of consumers, enhancing brand reputation and market position.

Commitment to sustainable consumption

Both the literature and our data suggest that women are more likely to increase their commitment to sustainable consumption in the future. Our findings show that a larger proportion of women foresee a significant or moderate increase in their commitment compared to men, which is consistent with the literature's depiction of women as more engaged in sustainability initiatives (Mets & Vettik-Leemet, 2024). This anticipated increase in commitment presents an opportunity for businesses to deepen their engagement with female consumers. Companies can introduce loyalty programs or incentives that reward sustainable purchasing behaviors, such as discounts on eco-friendly products or rewards for reducing waste. Additionally, brands might consider launching campaigns that emphasize the long-term benefits of sustainable consumption, aiming to convert this growing commitment into consistent purchasing patterns.

Environmental and health concerns

The literature strongly supports the idea that women are more concerned about environmental issues than men (Cantú-Martínez, 2020; Xiao & Hong, 2017). Our findings are consistent with this, as women rated environmental concern as "Important" or "Very Important" in their purchasing decisions at a higher rate than men. This confirms the literature's findings on the gender differences in environmental attitudes. Research indicates that women generally have a higher concern for health issues (Park, 2014; Albino & Tedesco, 1983), which our results also support. Women in our study placed more importance on health and safety when making purchasing decisions compared to men, aligning with the literature that suggests women are more engaged with health-related matters. Businesses should integrate environmental and health considerations into their core product offerings and communicate these aspects clearly to consumers. For example, highlighting the health benefits of using natural or organic ingredients, or the environmental advantages of sustainable packaging, can resonate strongly with women. Companies might also consider developing educational content or campaigns that link sustainability with personal health and well-being, further strengthening their appeal to this demographic.

Financial considerations

While the literature focuses less on financial considerations, our results indicate that financial aspects are important for both men and women, with women placing slightly more emphasis on it being "Very Important." This finding adds a nuanced layer to the literature, suggesting that while women prioritize sustainability, financial considerations remain a significant factor, possibly indicating the need for affordable sustainable options. While sustainability is important, cost remains a key factor in purchasing decisions. Companies should focus on making sustainable products more affordable, possibly by finding efficiencies in production or offering value packs. Additionally, communicating the long-term financial benefits of sustainable products, such as durability, energy savings, or reduced waste, can help justify higher upfront costs to consumers, particularly women who are balancing sustainability with financial considerations.

Our empirical results generally align well with the existing literature on gender differences in sustainable consumption. Women consistently demonstrate a stronger commitment to sustainability across various behaviors, including purchasing, policy support, and concern for the environment and

health, while men tend to prioritize other factors such as price and quality. However, our findings on food waste behavior and financial considerations suggest some complexities that may require further exploration, particularly in the context of cultural or situational factors that might influence these behaviors.

LIMITATIONS

This study is subject to several limitations. First, the sample size of 65 respondents may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. Second, the cross-sectional nature of the survey captures only a snapshot in time, which may not account for evolving attitudes toward sustainability. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias, as participants might overstate or understate their behaviors and attitudes. Furthermore, the study focuses primarily on the differences between male and female consumers, potentially overlooking other demographic factors such as age, income, or education that could influence sustainable consumption. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating longitudinal data, larger and more diverse samples, and a broader range of demographic variables.

CONCLUSIONS

This study offers valuable insights into the intersection of gender differences and corporate sustainability, underscoring how these dynamics influence consumer behavior and, by extension, corporate strategy. The research aligns with existing literature that consistently highlights the stronger inclination of women towards sustainability in various domains, including purchasing behavior, environmental awareness, and support for sustainability policies.

The findings confirm that women are more proactive in their engagement with sustainability, as evidenced by their higher frequency of consciously purchasing sustainable products, greater diligence in verifying sustainability certifications, and stronger support for local sustainability policies, even when these might result in increased costs. These behaviors resonate with studies by Núñez et al. (2024) and Berlanga et al. (2023), which found that women prioritize sustainability over other factors such as price and quality. This gendered predisposition towards sustainability also supports the work of Mets and Vettik-Leemet (2024), who emphasize the holistic understanding and

commitment of women to sustainability-related challenges.

Moreover, the study's results concerning the prioritization of product categories reveal that both men and women view food as the most critical area for sustainable consumption. However, women demonstrate a much stronger inclination towards sustainability in food products, consistent with the literature that points to women's greater ecological awareness (Berlanga et al., 2023). This finding suggests that companies in the food and beverage industry should focus on sustainability as a key differentiator, particularly when targeting female consumers.

The research also highlights a complex picture of gender-specific behaviors concerning food waste. While the literature presents mixed findings on whether men or women are more prone to food wastage (Ariffin et al., 2023; Sunday et al., 2022), this study suggests that women report higher frequencies of food waste. This discrepancy could be due to cultural or situational factors, or it may indicate that women are more honest about their behaviors in this area. It also suggests a potential area for further investigation, as understanding these nuances is crucial for developing effective waste reduction strategies. In terms of support for sustainability policies, the study found that women are more likely to endorse policies that prioritize sustainability, even when these might lead to higher product prices. This finding aligns with the literature, particularly the work of Barreiro-Gen and Bautista-Puig (2022), who noted that women tend to be more supportive of sustainability initiatives. For businesses, this suggests that integrating and communicating sustainability efforts in a transparent and meaningful way can help gain the support of female consumers, who are more likely to appreciate and back such initiatives.

The overall cautious optimism regarding the future of sustainable consumption, particularly among women, suggests a growing market for sustainable products. This optimism, highlighted in the literature (Mets & Vettik-Leemet, 2024), indicates that companies should continue to innovate and expand their sustainable offerings. The study's findings that women anticipate an increase in their commitment to sustainable consumption further emphasize the importance of addressing this market segment with targeted, sustainability-focused products and services. Financial considerations, while not as heavily focused on in the literature, emerged as a significant factor for both men and women in this study. This indicates that while women may prioritize sustainability, they also weigh the financial aspects of their purchasing decisions. This

nuance adds depth to our understanding of gender differences in sustainable consumption and suggests that businesses should aim to make sustainable products both appealing and affordable to maximize their market reach.

In conclusion, this study reinforces the critical role that gender plays in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors toward sustainability. Women, as the more sustainability-conscious gender, represent a key demographic for businesses seeking to leverage sustainability as a competitive advantage. However, the study also highlights the importance of understanding the complexities and nuances in gender-specific behaviors, such as food waste and financial considerations, which may not always align with general trends found in the literature.

For businesses, the implications are clear: sustainability strategies must be nuanced and tailored, particularly when targeting female consumers. Companies that successfully integrate gender perspectives into their sustainability initiatives are likely to see stronger consumer loyalty, enhanced brand reputation, and long-term market success. Future research should continue to explore these gender dynamics, particularly in different cultural and situational contexts, to provide more detailed insights that can inform both corporate strategy and policymaking.

Biographical sketch

The author is a 28-year-old PhD student in Management at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, Romania. She holds a bachelor's degree in Law and a master's degree in European Law. Her research interests focus on sustainability, corporate social responsibility, and environmental protection. Her academic work explores the intersection between business strategy and sustainable development, with a particular emphasis on consumer behavior. Contact information: madalinapetrea@hotmail.com.

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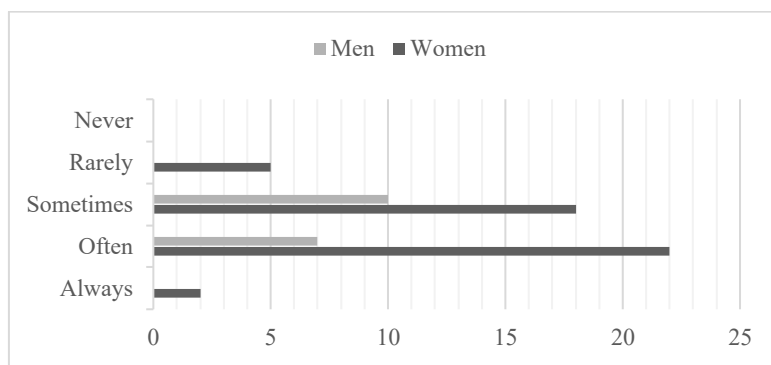


Figure no. 1
How often do you consciously purchase sustainable products/services?
Source: Author's own representation in Microsoft Excel

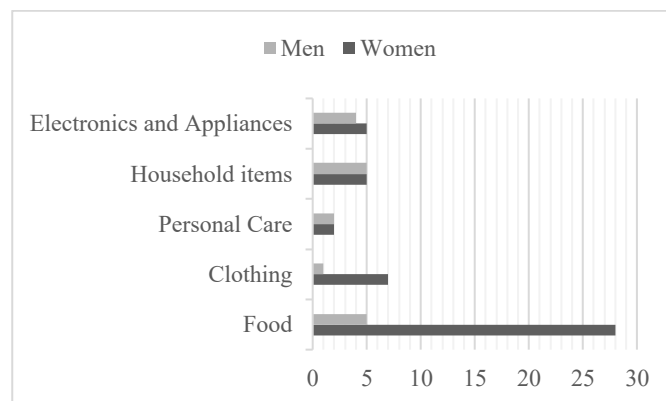


Figure no. 2
What products do sustainable consumers prioritize
Source: Author's own representation in Microsoft Excel

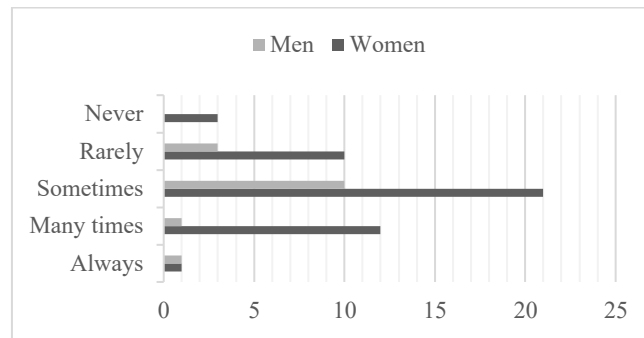


Figure no. 3
How often do you throw away food in your household?
Source: Author's own representation in Microsoft Excel

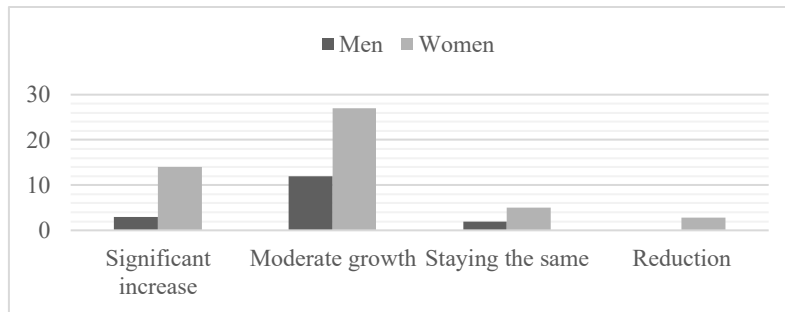


Figure no. 4
How do you see your commitment to sustainable consumption in the next 5 years
Source: Author's own representation in Microsoft Excel