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*THE INFLUENCE OF SUSTAINABLE MARKETING ON THE PURCHASE
DECISION OF COSMETICS BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS¹*

**A INFLUÊNCIA DO MARKETING SUSTENTÁVEL NA DECISÃO DE
COMPRA DE COSMÉTICOS POR ESTUDANTES UNIVERSITÁRIOS**

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to identify the influence of sustainable marketing on the purchase decision of cosmetic products by university students. A quantitative and descriptive research was conducted through an online questionnaire applied on the Google Forms platform. Overall, it was found that sustainability has become a growing concern among consumers, who value companies that incorporate sustainable practices into their strategies in the cosmetic segment. Another aspect highlighted by the respondents was the importance of environmental responsibility, especially when based on current legislation and transparency in disclosing information about pollutant treatment. Furthermore, students indicated that the topic of sustainability is addressed in the classroom, although they recognize the need for greater depth and emphasis on this content.

Keywords: sustainable marketing, sustainability, purchase decision, university students, environmental responsibility, cosmetics.

RESUMO

O presente estudo tem como objetivo identificar a influência do marketing sustentável na decisão de compra de produtos cosméticos por estudantes universitários. Para isso, realizou-se uma pesquisa de natureza quantitativa e descritiva, por meio de um questionário online aplicado na plataforma Google Forms. De modo geral, constatou-se que a sustentabilidade tem se tornado uma preocupação crescente entre os consumidores, que demonstram valorização pelas empresas que incorporam práticas sustentáveis em suas estratégias no segmento cosmético. Outro aspecto destacado pelos respondentes foi a

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importância da responsabilidade ambiental, especialmente quando fundamentada nas legislações vigentes e na transparência quanto à divulgação de informações sobre o tratamento de poluentes. Além disso, os estudantes indicaram que a temática da sustentabilidade é abordada em sala de aula, embora reconheçam a necessidade de maior aprofundamento e ênfase nesse conteúdo.

Palavras-chave: marketing sustentável, sustentabilidade, decisão de compra, estudantes universitários, responsabilidade ambiental, cosméticos.



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INTRODUCTION

The cosmetics industry is constantly growing and, according to the Brazilian Association of the Personal Hygiene, Perfumery and Cosmetics Industry – ABIHPEC, international trade in personal hygiene, perfumery and cosmetics grew by 17.2% in exports in the first four months of the year and by 25.5% in April 2023 (Abihpec, 2023). Currently, Brazil ranks as the 4th largest cosmetics consumer market in the world, showing a 17% increase in sector exports in 2023 (Grynbaum, 2024). In this sense, the industry needs to remain attentive to transformations and new market trends.

Globalization has increased consumer access to information about products and brands, which has made the purchasing process more complex. This has also made competition among companies fiercer, requiring them to make a constant effort to innovate and differentiate themselves from competitors (Oliveira, 2023).

In recent decades, there has been a significant increase in the attention devoted to environmental issues, and with this it is undeniable that consumers are becoming increasingly aware of environmental problems and changing their behavior in purchasing decisions. Sustainable cosmetics are following an annual growth trend, and the Brazilian beauty market is no different. According to Talarico (2022), health and sustainability are at the top of the list of interests of approximately 32% of Brazilians, and according to the study “Green is The New Black”, conducted by Nielsen Brasil in 2020. The results show that being sustainable is no longer merely a discourse and has become a decisive factor at the time of purchase.

From this perspective, studies on sustainable marketing and sustainability in the cosmetics market are increasingly widespread, but most consumers are still unaware of the benefits that such actions bring or do not know how to identify the certifications and seals present on products (Santos, 2021).



Therefore, it is certain that there is still a deficit related to studies that seek to identify the influence of sustainable marketing on the purchase decision process of cosmetic products and, furthermore, on the perception of how university consumers position themselves in relation to sustainability, considering that existing studies do not focus on this audience (Severo et al., 2019; Rosa Borges et al., 2020; Oliveira, 2023; Santiago et al., 2025).

In this sense, it is important to highlight that university students, especially students in the Business Administration course, for example, have a particular profile. These students have access to courses and activities that, in general, promote a deeper sustainability awareness, which can substantially influence their consumption choices. For this reason, investigating how the knowledge acquired in the classroom about sustainable business practices is directly reflected in the purchase decision of cosmetics, a group of products that has been gaining prominence in the sustainable market due to growing concern with health, the environment and ethics in consumer choices.

In view of what has been presented, the present study is based on the following research problem: What is the influence of sustainable marketing on the purchase decision of university students? The study aims to identify the influence of sustainable marketing on the purchase decision of students in the Business Administration course at the State University of Ceará (UECE).

The topic is relevant because the research will contribute to the growth of academic knowledge about consumer behavior in specific regional contexts, in addition to providing important information about consumers' positioning regarding sustainable actions practiced in organizations. The study also has the advantage that the courses in most business administration programs have great similarities and the theme of sustainability/environmental management is transversal to many of them.



The present study is structured as follows: Theoretical framework, research methodology, results obtained and final considerations of the study. Through the analysis and discussion of the research, the aim is to understand the influence of sustainable marketing on the purchase decision of the defined target audience.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This part of the study presents the theoretical framework. First, a brief summary of the development of the industry and sustainable marketing is addressed, followed by the study of purchasing decisions and consumers' sustainable behavior, and then the relationship between the business administration course and sustainability is addressed.

Purchase decision

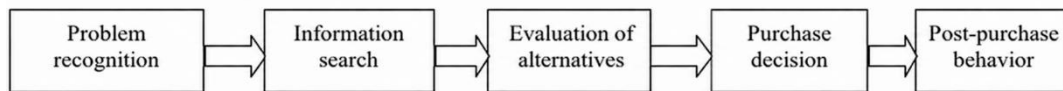
Consumer behavior is a profound topic, and understanding the stimuli that lead people to make purchases is of utmost importance to administrators. The field of consumer behavior concerns the area of studies focused on consumers' decision-making processes, being defined as a group of reactions dependent on certain stimuli (Santiago, 2023).

The act of purchasing is the intermediate process of the act of consumption. According to (Kotler, 2018), the consumer goes through five stages before actually making a purchase, namely: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase behavior. However, depending on the product to be purchased, the five stages will not necessarily be followed, or a stage may also be repeated. Below, Figure 1 illustrates the five-stage model proposed by Kotler:



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Figure 1 – Kotler's Five-Stage Model



Fonte: Kotler, 2018.

In the first stage, problem recognition is described, which is where the purchasing process begins; in it, a problem or need is recognized by the consumer, which may be triggered by internal or external stimuli. Internal stimuli are a person's normal needs, such as hunger and thirst, while external stimuli are needs triggered by desires, for example, an advertisement, a new pair of sneakers, something that may trigger the desire to purchase the product or service (Kotler, 2018).

In the second stage, the search for information is subdivided into four categories of sources, namely: Personal, where information is sought from people close to the consumer; commercial, where information is sought in advertisements and websites; public, where communication channels such as social media are sought; and lastly, experiential, where information is acquired through handling and using the product (Kotler, 2018). Also according to Kotler, it is the responsibility of those in charge of marketing to understand which information is interesting and feasible to attract the consumer.

In the third stage, the evaluation of alternatives is the stage in which the consumer processes information about the product as well as other brands and defines their perception of the final value of the product. The fourth stage is where the consumer will actually decide whether or not to make the purchase, divided into 5 sub-decisions, namely: brand decision, reseller decision, quantity decision, occasion decision, and payment method decision (Kotler, 2018).

Lastly, the fifth stage portrays post-purchase consumer behavior. If for some reason they feel uneasy or hear something unfavorable about the product purchased, they may experience some type of cognitive dissonance. Because of



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this, they will always remain attentive to any information that reassures their purchasing decision. In view of this, it is the responsibility of marketing communications to ensure evaluations that guarantee the consumer's well-being regarding their decision (Kotler, 2018).

Organizations that are strategically positioned in the market occupy a prominent place for consumers, which is a major advantage for maintaining market leadership and building consumer loyalty. For a company to differentiate itself in the sector, it must offer values different from those that exist in the market, achieving a unique value position and thus obtaining competitive advantages over competitors (Ribeiro, 2022).

Also according to Ribeiro (2022), the study of customer behavior makes it possible to understand their purchasing activities and understand the role of consumption in their routine. How they purchase, use, evaluate, and dispose of products that satisfy their needs.

When considering the profile of university consumers, especially in the context of sustainability, there is a growing trend toward valuing responsible business practices. According to Benites and Silva (2024), aspects such as environmental responsibility, ethics in production practices, and corporate transparency are determining factors in the purchasing decision of this public, in addition to providing an opportunity for companies to improve social and environmental performance, creating bonds with consumers. Given the greater awareness of university students regarding environmental issues, driven by the knowledge acquired during their academic education, sustainability has proven to be an essential element in product choice, especially in the cosmetics sector, where the search for options that encompass quality and socio-environmental responsibility is evolving.



History and development of the sustainable industry

According to Barros (2020), the history of cosmetics evolved along with the human race; the first cosmetics found in humanity date back 30 thousand years, to the prehistoric era, when people painted themselves with natural substances for rituals. But it was with the ancient Egyptians, thousands of years ago, that they began to use products to beautify themselves, having their own cosmetic formulas.

In the past, natural resources were abundant, which is why the extraction of raw materials and the improper disposal of waste in the soil were not considered problems. Nowadays, concern for the environment is a central issue on society's agenda (Alves, 2016; Menezes et al., 2022).

The increased access to information about environmental impacts and industrial production stimulated the search for more sustainable measures, which directly affects the consumption of beauty products: according to a study by Kantar Wordpanel, approximately 60% of Brazilians base their consumption on the protection of nature (Mendonça, 2018).

The concept of sustainability in the cosmetics industry ceased to be a trend and became a basic item in brand planning. In recent decades, there has been a significant increase in concern about environmental impact, since there has been an understanding that natural resources are exhaustible (Miranda, 2022).

According to Braga and Morgado (2007), the concept of sustainable development originated in 1987, through the Brundtland report "Our Common Future" – prepared under the auspices of the United Nations in the World Commission on Environment and Development -, and defined as "development that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".



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The sustainable products market has grown exponentially in recent years as a response to current consumer preferences. According to data published by the Institute for Business Value - IBM, 60% of consumers are willing to change their purchasing habits to reduce environmental impact and 80% indicate that sustainability is important to them. Among those who refer to sustainability as very or extremely important, more than 70% would pay on average 35% more for brands that claim to be sustainable and environmentally responsible (IBM, 2020).

According to Lambin (2002), sustainable products are those that can be developed based on ecological standards or labels that meet consumer needs through actions such as the use of recycled or recyclable materials and the reduction of packaging or natural resources.

Sustainable marketing

In the 1990s, after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Eco-92), held in Rio de Janeiro, ISO developed the 14000 standard, encompassing a complex set of standards and rules aimed at developing and standardizing sustainable practices in organizations. The ISO 14000 series encompasses six areas, each containing a specific subcommittee, namely: environmental management systems, environmental audits, environmental performance evaluation, environmental labeling, life cycle analysis, and environmental aspects related to products (Nahuz, 1995).

According to Costa (2021), green marketing communication strategies are defined as conveying ideals that support environmental issues, such as consumption reduction, recycling programs, environmental improvements, and the communication of the organization's values to the consumer.

One of the main means of sustainable marketing to influence consumer choices and stand out in the market is sustainability labels and certifications on product labels; these seals and illustrations have great power to encourage, in



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addition to showing consumers their commitment to sustainable practices, as well as highlighting positive results in the market in which they operate (Santos, 2021). Below is Chart 1, presenting the main sustainable labels and certificates used in the market.

Chart 1 – Sustainable labels

LABEL	MEANINGS
SELO ECOCERT 	The Ecocert seal is a certification that attests that the entire manufacturing process of a product was carried out following organic production standards, as established in the legislation (Sebrae, 2022).
LEAPING BUNNY 	Seal granted by the Leaping Bunny Program. It requires brands to audit their entire supply chain to determine whether there are cases of animal testing. Leaping Bunny approval must be granted to all of a brand's final products (Garnier, 2024).
PETA APPROVED CRUELTY-FREE 	Certification granted by PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals). The seal certifies that the products are free from any ingredients of animal origin or animal testing (Prates, 2022).
ISO 22716 	The ISO 22716: 2007 standard is the international standard for good manufacturing practices for cosmetics. The seal proves that the organization follows control, storage, and distribution standards throughout the entire production chain (Sebrae, 2022).

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Chart 1 – Sustainable labels - continuation

LABEL	MEANINGS
SELOS DE MATERIAIS RECICLAVEIS 	These graphic symbols on packaging are universal symbols that communicate that the packaging is recyclable, that is, it can return to the production cycle (Santos, 2021).
SELO IBD 	The Biodynamic Institute (IBD) is a non-profit company that certifies agricultural activities and various other segments in the field of organic cultivation. Serving various segments in addition to cosmetics (Santos, 2021).

Source: Elaborated by authors (2025)

The inclusion of the labels shown in the table above is of utmost importance to show consumers that the company supports sustainable causes and, in addition, it is beneficial for brands because they enhance the company's image and its commitment to socio-environmental movements.

The business administration program and its relationship with sustainability

The integration of sustainability as a topic of study in the education of administrators is an important theme, as it plays a crucial role in resource management, organizational strategies, and decision-making. Furthermore, the study of sustainability allows administrators to make more innovative decisions, since having the necessary knowledge about environmental and social issues enables the development of more creative solutions that can benefit not only the environment, but also the company's profitability and the social environment in which it operates (Menezes et al., 2023; Lourenço et al., 2024).

Sustainability has become a relevant topic in administration in recent times. According to Abdo (2023), the practices of organizational sustainability strategies engaged with the objectives of the 2030 Agenda constitute a complex and relevant topic, related to the set of global goals and objectives defined for



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sustainability by the international community. This concept evolves from the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), requiring firm and coordinated action among organizations, encompassing several dimensions.

According to Martinho (2022), administration is directly related to sustainability, with sustainable management actions for the preservation of the environment and social well-being. Innovation is a growing trend in sustainable administration, new environmentally friendly solutions and products are becoming increasingly popular and attracting new consumers who seek products and services that are less harmful to the environment.

The education of administrators should reflect the growing interest of organizations in the socio-environmental sphere. In the curriculum of the State University of Ceará, several disciplines such as: business logistics, marketing, socio-environmental management, organizational strategy are disciplines of utmost importance for this education because they promote sustainable awareness within the classroom. These disciplines aim to develop more critical thinking in future administrators about decision-making that, in addition to profits, also addresses social and environmental changes. In the classroom, social awareness is encouraged through analyses of real cases, debates, and the study of companies that were innovative in implementing sustainability-oriented strategies in their management, business models, and the creation of business plans that address the sustainability tripod – economic, social, and environmental.

According to Lima et al. (2019), in the 1970s, a type of development aimed at harmony with nature, called eco-development, was sought. After these debates, studies were developed on economic strategies with social focuses. But only two decades later, with the popularization of the term sustainability, the concept of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) actually gained prominence, in the late 1990s. The TBL understands business viability as the interaction between the



economic, social, and environmental dimensions; these three dimensions then form the pillars that support the relationship between sustainability and sustainable development.

By addressing these topics in the classroom, the business administration program educates professionals who, in addition to meeting organizational demands, also meet current socio-environmental demands. Thus, it is evident that awareness and the study of sustainable practices are a market necessity and not merely a differentiating factor.

METHODOLOGY

The research is quantitative and descriptive in nature, which according to Fonseca (2002), is research characterized by objectivity, influenced by positivism and based on the analysis of raw data, obtained through standardized and neutral instruments. It aims to describe the characteristics of a particular event or population, establishing relationships between variables, in addition to having standardized data collection techniques as one of its most significant characteristics Gil (2002).

The research took place from November 26, 2024 to January 15, 2025. A total of 80 validated responses were obtained and tabulated using Microsoft Excel software and then analyzed through descriptive statistics. Based on this, the intention is to understand more objectively how sustainable marketing influences the purchasing decisions of undergraduate business administration students at UECE.

The data were collected through online questionnaires using the Google Forms platform, with the Likert scale used as the quantification method. The questions were adapted from the studies by Oliveira (2023) and Benites (2024). According to Feijó (2020), the Likert scale is the most widely used model for measuring attitudes and preferences. Developed in 1932 by Rensis Likert, this



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type of scale is used to provide a series of responses to a question, generally described in five categories with a certain degree of agreement. Figure 2 below presents the description of the model used.

Figure 2 – Likert scale



Source: Elaborated by authors (2025)

The scores were distributed from 1 to 5, as follows: 1 - strongly disagree; 2 - disagree; 3 - neutral; 4 - agree; and 5 - strongly agree. Through the questionnaire, the aim was to understand how the company's sustainable marketing influences the purchasing behavior of business administration students at the State University of Ceará – UECE.

The compilation of the collected data was carried out with the aid of Google Forms and Microsoft Excel tools, and subsequently analyzed using descriptive statistics, which, according to Silva, Lopes and Junior (2014), is the means by which data are explored, seeking to assess trends and the quality of these data, also using frequency counts and percentages to compile the data into a summary.

Based on the objective of making the research possible, the target population surveyed was delimited: undergraduate Business Administration students at the State University of Ceará, with no preference regarding age group or sex/sexual identification and from all income profiles, based on the justification that this population has access to courses and classes that promote more in-depth sustainable awareness.

The link to respond to the survey was sent remotely, via WhatsApp, along with an explanatory message about the research topic and target audience whose responses would be considered. The questionnaire with 20 questions was divided into two blocks: one block with six questions to identify and indicate the



socioeconomic profile of the participants, with questions about gender, age group, semester attended, place of residence, family income, and monthly spending on cosmetics. In the other block, questions were addressed about sustainability, the role of companies in sustainable production, sustainable marketing, the company's commitment to the environment, and how this affects consumers' purchasing decisions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section will present the data analyses, as well as discussions on the results obtained, with the objective of detailing the data obtained in the research.

Profile of respondents

The socioeconomic profile of the respondents is of utmost importance for understanding the reality of individuals and their relationships. A total of 80 questionnaires were answered, of which 43 (53.8%) were female, 36 (45%) were male, and 1 (1.2%) identified as another gender.

The respondents are distributed among the following age groups: 17 (21%) aged 20 years or younger, 42 (52.5%) between 21 and 25 years old, 15 (18.8%) between 26 and 30 years old, and small percentages in the age groups between 31 and 35 years old, 36 to 40 years old, and 41 years old or older, indicating a predominance of younger respondents in the survey.

The gender distribution in the survey was balanced, with 53% of the participants being female and 45% male. Regarding age group, there was a predominance of individuals between 21 and 25 years old, with more than 50% of the responses, and a concentration of 92.6% of respondents being under 30 years old.

It is possible to observe that the respondents are distributed across various semesters of the Business Administration program. Semesters 1 and 8



have the highest participation, with 21.5% of respondents each, followed by the 9th semester with 17.5% and the 7th semester with 13.8%. The 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th semesters have lower participation rates, ranging between 0% and 10%.

There was a predominance of 65 (81.3%) participants residing in Fortaleza, while 15 (18.8%) resided in other municipalities. In addition, the following distribution of respondents' family income was observed: 43.8% up to 2 minimum wages, 27.5% between 2 and 3 minimum wages, 10% between 3 and 4 minimum wages, and 18.8% above 4 minimum wages. Family income varied considerably among respondents, with a greater concentration of incomes below 3 minimum wages, accounting for approximately 71.3% of the responses.

Regarding monthly spending on cosmetics, as shown in Table 1, it can be observed that there was a predominance of 77.5% of responses with spending of up to R\$ 150.00 per month, 16.2% between R\$ 150.00 and R\$ 300.00, 5% between R\$ 300.00 and R\$ 500.00, and 1.2% with spending above R\$ 500.00 per month.

Table 1 – Socioeconomic profile

SOCIOECONOMIC PROFILE		FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
GENDER	Female	43	53.8%
	Male	36	45%
	Other	1	1,2%
	Total	80	100%
AGE RANGE	20 years or less	17	21,3%
	21 – 25 years	42	52.5%
	26 – 30 years	15	18.8%
	31 – 35 years	1	1.2%
	36 – 40 years	2	2.5%
	41 years or more	3	3.7%
	Total	80	100%

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Table 1 – Socioeconomic profile - continuation

SOCIOECONOMIC PROFILE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
SEMESTERS	1	21.3%
	2	0
	3	3.8%
	4	8.8%
	5	3.7%
	6	10%
	7	13.8%
	8	21.3%
	9	17.5%
	Total	100%
LIVES IN FORTALEZA	Yes	81.3%
	No	18.8%
	Total	100%
FAMILY INCOME	Up to 2 Minimum wages	43.8%
	From 2 to 3 Minimum wages	27.5%
	From 3 to 4 Minimum wages	10%
	More than 4 Minimum wages	18.8%
	Total	100%
GASTO COM COSMÉTICOS	R\$ 150,00 ou menos	77.5%
	R\$ 150,00 a R\$ 300,00	16.2%
	R\$ 300,00 a R\$ 500,00	5%
	R\$ 500,00 ou mais	1.2%
	Total	100%

Source: Elaborated by authors (2025)

The remaining 14 questions of the second block were subdivided into topics in order to analyze the levels of knowledge acquired about the subject during undergraduate studies, what the participants understand as sustainable, and how companies' actions regarding the subject are perceived.

Knowledge acquired at the university

According to Bogdezevicius et al. (2024), the role of higher education is to debate sustainable development, going beyond the teaching-learning relationship and becoming part of the institution's strategic direction.



In Table 2, the results show that 51.3% agree or strongly agree that topics related to sustainability and sustainable awareness are discussed in undergraduate business administration classes, 28.7% were neutral regarding the statement, and 20.1% of the respondents disagree with the statement.

According to the data presented, it can be observed that more than half of the respondents believe that the topics are adequately addressed in business administration classes. Suggesting that UECE has a certain level of emphasis on the subject. However, about one-third of the respondents were neutral regarding the statement, which indicates that although sustainability is mentioned in classes, it may not be addressed consistently, and there may be a lack of clarity regarding the way in which the subject is addressed, or perhaps students do not perceive the connection between sustainability and the content covered. And 20% of the students disagree with the statement, indicating that although the subject is addressed in the classroom, there is room to improve the way this content is integrated into the business administration program, increasing the emphasis and depth of this subject in classes, so that undergraduate students perceive the importance and existence of sustainable issues in a more explicit and consistent manner.

Table 2 – Sustainability-related topics are discussed in classes

STATUS	FREQUENCY	PORCENTAGE
STRONGLY DISAGREE	5	6.3%
DISAGREE	11	13.8%
NEUTRAL	23	28.7%
AGREE	20	25%
STRONGLY AGREE	21	26.3%

Source: Elaborated by authors (2025)

According to Sobrinho et al. (2015), the university has an innovative effect on society, shaping creative citizens who are more active in solving future problems, thus making the politicization of information in these spaces and among young people in general extremely important, as they have the ability to positively impact their social environment.



Students' sustainable consumption practices

In Table 3, the results show that 75% strongly agree that sustainability is an important trend in the current market, 20% agree with the statement, and 5% were neutral, with no disagreement with the statement.

Lourenço et al. (2024) state that sustainability is an important definition in society and that sustainable development is crucial for economic growth, in addition to arguing that this development is essential for the proper development of future generations. As observed in the results, approximately 95% of the respondents agree that sustainability is a trend, proving the theory described previously.

Table 3 – Importance of sustainability today

STATUS	FREQUENCY	PORCENTAGE
STRONGLY DISAGREE	0	0%
DISAGREE	0	0%
NEUTRAL	4	5%
AGREE	16	20%
STRONGLY AGREE	60	75%

Source: Elaborated by authors (2025)

According to Silva and Filho (2022), conscious consumption is a new behavioral pattern among consumers who are increasingly attentive and aware of what they consume, considering environmental and social aspects, in addition to arising as a consequence of a sense of responsibility to improve society and the environment in which they live.

In Table 4, the results were obtained from the compilation of questions 12 and 13 of the questionnaire, where it was asked whether consumers seek to consume products that cause less environmental impact and whether they seek to incorporate them into their daily lives, the following result was obtained: 48% agree or strongly agree, 37% were neutral regarding the statement, and 15% of the respondents do not value the consumption of sustainable products in their daily lives.



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Table 4 – I seek to consume sustainable products and incorporate them into my daily life

STATUS	FREQUENCY	PORCENTAGE
STRONGLY DISAGREE	6	4%
DISAGREE	18	11%
NEUTRAL	60	37%
AGREE	43	27%
STRONGLY AGREE	33	21%

Source: Elaborated by authors (2025)

A total of 23.8% are willing to pay more for a product considered sustainable, 38.8% are neutral, and 37.6% would not pay more for a sustainable product, as shown in Table 5. This shows that despite the growing concern about the environment, the higher prices of products make them less attractive and most respondents are not interested in spending more for this reason. Ferreira (2017) comments that the economic factor may have greater decision-making power than the environmental factor in consumers' purchasing decisions, as demonstrated by the results obtained.

Table 5 – I am willing to pay for a sustainable product

STATUS	FREQUENCY	PORCENTAGE
DISCORDO COMPLETAMENTE	13	16.3%
DISCORDO	17	21.3%
NEUTRO	31	38.8%
CONCORDO	15	18.8%
CONCORDO TOTALMENTE	4	5%

Source: Elaborated by authors (2025)

In Table 6, the results were obtained from the compilation of questions 17 and 20 of the questionnaire, where consumers were asked about the way their preferred brands handle their pollutants and sustainable brands, the following result was obtained: 64% agree or strongly agree, 25% were neutral regarding the statement, and 11% of the respondents are not concerned about the treatment of pollutants by their preferred brands and would not switch to sustainable brands.



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Table 6 – Purchase choice between my preferred brand and a sustainable brand

STATUS	FREQUENCY	PORCENTAGE
STRONGLY DISAGREE	5	3%
DISAGREE	13	8%
NEUTRAL	40	25%
AGREE	52	33%
STRONGLY AGREE	50	31%

Source: Elaborated by authors (2025)

According to the data presented in Table 7, it is possible to observe that 67.5% of the respondents believe that their individual behavior directly impacts the sustainable development of the planet and the well-being of future generations, 20% consider themselves neutral regarding the statement, and 12.6% disagree.

Table 7 – Individual behavior impacts sustainable development and the well-being of future generations

STATUS	FREQUENCY	PORCENTAGE
STRONGLY DISAGREE	3	3.8%
DISAGREE	7	8.8%
NEUTRAL	16	20%
AGREE	22	27.5%
STRONGLY AGREE	32	40%

Source: Elaborated by authors (2025)

According to the results detailed in Tables 5 and 7, only 23.8% of the respondents are willing to pay more for a sustainable product, while 76.2% were neutral or unwilling; on the other hand, 67.5% of the respondents believe that their individual behavior impacts the sustainable development of the planet.

Silva and Filho (2022) comment that this contradiction between the intention to purchase and the actual purchase is mainly related to consumers' purchasing power, where the price of an ecological product is often beyond the consumer's purchasing capacity.

Perception of the relationship between brands and sustainability

When considering the purchasing profile of university consumers, with regard to sustainability, there is a tendency to value responsible production practices, characteristics such as environmental responsibility, transparency in



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the disclosure of information, and ethics in production are determining factors in the purchasing decision of this specific audience (Benevides; Silva, 2024).

The data presented in Table 8 were obtained through the compilation of the responses to questions 9 and 19, where it was stated that companies should contribute to building a more sustainable world and ensure production that has less impact on the environment. 93% agree or strongly agree with the statements, 6% were neutral regarding the statement, and only 1% of the respondents disagree. This result shows that a large proportion of the respondents believe that companies play an extremely important role in building a more sustainable world and reducing the environmental impact of their production processes, revealing that sustainability has become a relevant topic and that companies must increasingly align their practices.

Table 8 – Companies' contribution to a sustainable world and clean production

STATUS	FREQUENCY	PORCENTAGE
STRONGLY DISAGREE	0.5	1%
DISAGREE	0	0%
NEUTRAL	5	6%
AGREE	15.5	19%
STRONGLY AGREE	59	74%

Source: Elaborated by authors (2025)

According to the data presented in Table 9, it is possible to observe that 95% of the respondents consider that companies concerned with sustainable production convey greater credibility, 3.8% consider themselves neutral regarding the statement, and only 1.3% disagree. This result shows us that there is a predominance of respondents who believe that cosmetics companies are seen as agents of change that should actively contribute to sustainability and reduce the environmental impact of their operations. Nowadays, the vast majority of conscious consumers seek to learn about the goods and services they consume, as well as the brands involved in the production chain (Ferreira, 2017).



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Table 9 – Sustainable production and credibility

STATUS	FREQUENCY	PORCENTAGE
STRONGLY DISAGREE	0	0%
DISAGREE	1	1,3%
NEUTRAL	3	3,8%
AGREE	22	27,5%
STRONGLY AGREE	54	67,5%

Source: Elaborated by authors (2025)

In Table 10, the results were obtained from the compilation of questions 11 and 16, where it was stated that awareness of a good reputation in the treatment of pollutants encourages them to buy their products and that companies' transparency regarding them increases their trust in the brand, the following result was obtained: 80% agree or strongly agree, 17% were neutral regarding the statements, and 3% of the respondents are not concerned about how companies treat their pollutants or how this is communicated to consumers.

Table 10 – Relationship between consumption and brand trust X company transparency regarding its pollutants

STATUS	FREQUENCY	PORCENTAGE
STRONGLY DISAGREE	0.5	1%
DISAGREE	2	2%
NEUTRAL	13.5	17%
AGREE	24.5	31%
STRONGLY AGREE	39.5	49%

Source: Elaborated by authors (2025)

It can be observed that there was a high degree of “agree” or “strongly agree” responses to the questions regarding respondents' perceptions of the relationship between brands and sustainability, with an average of almost 90% of the responses for each question. These results demonstrate that most respondents value responsible and sustainable practices, especially with regard to the treatment of pollutants and transparency in reporting these practices. Benites (2024) reinforces that in terms of sustainability, companies need to reduce negative impacts, in addition to contributing to the proper social development of communities and adopting strategies that integrate sustainability into all their areas of activity.



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FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study aimed to identify the influence of sustainable marketing on university students' decisions to purchase cosmetics. According to the data obtained from the questionnaires, it can be concluded that sustainability is a growing topic and is increasingly becoming a factor in consumers' choices, which, in turn, forces the market to adapt and adopt more transparent and responsible practices.

As shown, it was identified that the vast majority of respondents were young, with approximately 92% aged 30 years or younger, the gender of the respondents was well balanced, residing in Fortaleza (81.3%) and attending a wide variety of semesters in the undergraduate program. Regarding the economic profile, there was a concentration of income below 3 minimum wages, with approximately 71.3% of the responses and approximately 77.5% of the respondents spending up to R\$ 150.00 per month on cosmetics.

Most respondents (51.3%) agree that classes in UECE's business administration program include content and topics on sustainability. In addition, 95% agree that sustainability is an important trend in the market, and 48% seek to consume products that cause less environmental impact and seek to incorporate them into their daily lives.

The results also demonstrated how the industry is affected by consumers' purchasing decisions and how this influences companies to constantly seek new ways to innovate and be more transparent and sustainable. Approximately 93% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that companies should contribute to building a more sustainable world and ensure production that has less impact on the environment, 95% consider that companies concerned with sustainable production convey greater credibility, and 80% agree with the statement that



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awareness of a company's good reputation in the treatment of its pollutants encourages them to purchase its products.

Although the proposed objective was achieved, it is worth emphasizing that the current study cannot be generalized to different demographic groups or another context, due to the limitation of the population surveyed, since the research was conducted only with a population of university students from a public institution of in-person higher education. On the other hand, an advantage is the fact that the curricula of higher education business administration programs generally have many subjects in common and sustainability/environmental management is a cross-cutting theme in most of them; therefore, students will always have some level of contact with the topic.

The topic proves to be relevant because the research contributes to the growth of academic knowledge about consumer behavior in specific regional contexts, in addition to providing important information for local companies about consumers' positions regarding sustainable actions practiced in organizations. Through the analysis and discussion of the research, the influence of sustainable marketing on the purchasing decisions of the defined target audience was understood.



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