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The Label as a Value Instrument: Consumers' Perception of Social and Environmental Certifications in Purchase Decisions

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Abstract: This paper investigates the role of social and environmental labels as value-oriented instruments that shape consumer purchasing decisions in the context of responsible and sustainable consumption. **The objectives** of the study examine how such labels function as value carriers within the consumer decision-making process. The purpose is to highlight the ways in which certifications that communicate social responsibility and sustainability influence consumer perceptions, trust, and buying behavior. **Previous research:** The study builds on recent contributions in the fields of ethical marketing and sustainable consumer behavior. Prior studies have demonstrated that labels can serve as trust signals, reducing uncertainty and enhancing the perceived value of products. **Methodology:** A quantitative approach was employed, using a structured questionnaire administered to a sample of consumers, in order to assess the level of awareness and the importance attributed to social and ecological certifications. **Results:** The findings indicate a positive correlation between the perceived credibility of certifications and purchase intention. Consumers associate labels with ethics, transparency, and product quality. **Implications:** The research provides useful insights for marketers, regulatory bodies, and certification organizations, emphasizing the need for greater clarity and consumer education regarding the meaning and relevance of labels. **Value of the study:** This work contributes by offering an integrated perspective on social and environmental certifications as key determinants of consumer decision-making, and by proposing an updated understanding of the responsibility of the modern consumer.

Keywords: Social certifications; Eco-labels; Consumer behavior; Social responsibility

JEL Classification: M31, Q56

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1. Introduction

The social, economic, and technological transformations of recent years have led to the emergence of new criteria for evaluating products and services. Today's consumer is no longer concerned solely with price and quality, but also with the impact that the goods they purchase have on the environment and on the community. In this context, the product label no longer serves merely as a source of information; it becomes a marker of social, moral, and environmental values, capable of influencing the way people think and behave.

Social and environmental certifications such as Fairtrade, EU Ecolabel, FSC, Rainforest Alliance, and “organic” or “eco” labels have emerged in response to the increasing consumer demand for transparency and responsibility within supply chains. These labels inform buyers that the product meets specific standards related to sustainability, ethics, and respect for workers' rights. Moreover, they help build trust between producers and consumers, functioning as a channel of communication between personal values and shared social responsibilities.

However, the scholarly literature and empirical studies indicate a certain ambivalence in the way consumers perceive these aspects. On the one hand, many consumers express support for ecological and social values; on the other hand, the level of trust and recognition regarding existing certifications remains relatively low. In some cases, labels are viewed with skepticism and are often associated with marketing tactics or the phenomenon of *greenwashing*. Aschemann-Witzel and Zielke (2017) highlight that ecological and organic labels increase consumers' willingness to pay a premium price, confirming that symbols and certifications possess not only informational value, but also economic and psychological significance.

Thus, analyzing the label as a value-bearing mechanism is essential for understanding how consumers make purchasing decisions. In a globalized economy, where it is increasingly difficult to differentiate products, social and environmental certifications can serve not only as a competitive advantage for companies but also as a means of promoting responsible consumption and supporting sustainable development. Furthermore, Dangelico and Vocalelli (2017) emphasize that ecological labels are perceived as key instruments of green marketing, contributing to the sustainable positioning of brands.

The purpose of this article is to analyze how consumers perceive social and environmental certifications and to highlight the role of labeling as a reflection of ethical and ecological values in the purchasing decision-making process. The study aims to address several key questions:

- How do consumers interpret the symbols and certifications displayed on product labels?

- To what extent do these certifications influence brand preferences and loyalty?
- Which factors contribute to consumer trust and to their willingness to pay a higher price for certified products?

By addressing these aspects, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between marketing, social responsibility, and consumer behavior, highlighting the role of labeling as a medium for communicating values in a society moving toward sustainability.

It is essential to understand the extent to which consumers attach importance to social and environmental labels and certifications when purchasing a product. The present research aims to verify several hypotheses regarding the actual impact that certifications have on purchasing behavior.

In this regard, the following research hypotheses have been formulated:

H1. Consumers demonstrate varying willingness to pay for socially and environmentally certified products, depending on their social and demographic characteristics.

H2. Ecological symbols and certifications have a stronger influence on the perceived quality of a product than those of a social nature.

H3. The level of knowledge regarding the meaning of certifications determines the extent to which the label influences the purchasing decision.

The research employed a quantitative approach based on a questionnaire administered to a sample of 315 individuals, selected using a balanced distribution according to socio-demographic criteria such as age, gender, income, and level of education, from both urban and rural areas. The questionnaire includes 19 questions, most of which are closed-ended, along with several mixed-format questions. These address three essential dimensions: the level of awareness regarding social and environmental certifications; the perception of and degree of trust in such labels; and the extent to which these labels influence purchasing behavior and consumers' willingness to pay a higher price for certified products.

2. Literature Review

Over the past two decades, research on how consumers perceive social and environmental certifications has shown a continuous increase in interest toward ecological labels, alongside a number of issues related to trust and effectiveness. A study conducted across Europe indicates that the majority of consumers (67%) would support the idea of a single ecological label; however, trust in government legislation regarding these labels remains limited (EIT Food, 2023).

Ecological labels and sustainability certifications are important tools that help consumers adopt responsible purchasing behavior. Research indicates that the presence of an ecological label significantly influences consumers' decisions to pay a higher price for products considered sustainable. For example, a meta-analysis based on discrete choice studies showed that organic labels have the greatest impact on consumers' willingness to pay a premium compared to other types of ecological labels (Bastounis et al., 2021).

In Japan, research on recycled plastic products has demonstrated that the Eco Mark logo and the label "made of recycled plastic" significantly increase consumers' willingness to pay, particularly among those with higher environmental awareness (Kojima et al., 2024).

A study from Sweden indicates that attitudes, subjective norms, and values related to health and the environment influence how frequently consumers choose products with ecological labels. The finding that education and awareness are linked to these choices supports the notion that the level of knowledge is an important factor (Grankvist & Biel, 2007).

Despite the growing use of ecological labels, key information is often lacking, and concerns regarding their reliability persist. Various organizations issue certifications, but their effectiveness depends on consumer trust. Existing research highlights that a positive attitude toward ecological labels influences purchasing decisions, reflecting awareness of environmental impact and ethical considerations (Aminravan et al., 2025).

Social and ecological labeling can have a direct impact on citizens' economic security by enhancing trust and directing the market toward sustainable products. However, the outcomes depend on multiple factors – ranging from the consumer's level of education and income to the credibility of the institutions issuing certifications and the overall economic situation.

3. Results and Discussions

In a context characterized by increasing social responsibility and environmental awareness, social and environmental certifications are essential in influencing consumers' product choices. Social certifications focus on respecting employees' rights, ensuring fair working conditions, and promoting ethical responsibility. Environmental certifications, on the other hand, emphasize the protection of natural resources, the reduction of environmental impact, and the support of eco-friendly production practices. An increasing number of consumers seek to choose products that combine both social and environmental aspects, perceiving them as more transparent and credible.

Table 1. The Interdependence of Social and Environmental Certifications in the Purchasing Decision-Making Process

Aspect	Social Certifications	Environmental Certifications	Interdependence in the Purchasing Decision
Objective	Protecting workers' rights, fairness, ethical conditions	Protecting the environment, reducing pollution, sustainability	Consumers seek products that respect both people and nature
Consumer Benefits	Moral trust, sense of social support	Assurance that the product is environmentally friendly	Ethical and ecological motives drive product choice even if it is more expensive
Brand Impact	Ethical reputation, social loyalty	Green image, ecological responsibility	The brand is perceived as fully responsible (social + eco)
Purchasing Decision	Attracting customers concerned with social justice	Attracting customers concerned with the environment	The greatest influence occurs when the product has both certifications

Source: Author's elaboration

The analysis presented in Table 1 highlights that social and environmental certifications not only coexist but also reinforce each other in the purchasing decision-making process. Social certifications provide consumers with assurance that workers' rights are respected and that fair business practices are upheld, while environmental certifications ensure that the product is produced sustainably, minimizing its environmental impact. Together, these certifications create a framework of trust and legitimacy, contributing to an increase in the perceived value of the product.

Therefore, products that obtain both social and environmental certifications enjoy a clear competitive advantage: they are perceived as "fully responsible," addressing both consumers' ethical and ecological concerns. This connection between the two dimensions positively influences buyers' attitudes, making them more willing to pay a higher price, remain loyal to the brand, and recommend the product within their communities. Consequently, certifications that combine social and environmental aspects are no longer merely a means of compliance but have become a key strategy for market differentiation.

To analyze how these certifications influence the purchasing decision-making process, a questionnaire was administered to a sample of 315 individuals. The objective of the study was to identify consumers' perceptions regarding the role of social certifications (e.g., Fairtrade) as well as environmental certifications, such as FSC, in product choice. The results provide insight into the level of awareness of

these certifications, the degree of trust consumers place in them, and their willingness to pay a higher price for products bearing responsible labels.

The distribution of respondents by gender indicates a relatively balanced representation between the two main categories. Of the 315 individuals surveyed, 52.1% were female and 47.3% were male, while a very small percentage (0.6%) preferred not to disclose this information. This structure suggests that the sample reflects the opinions of both genders in nearly equal proportion, enhancing the representativeness of the results. The sample structure also highlights a predominant presence of young and early-adult respondents. The 18–24 age group accounted for the largest share (38.7%), followed by the 25–34 age group (22.9%) and the 35–44 age group (20%). Together, these three categories constitute over 80% of the total respondents, indicating that opinions regarding social and environmental certifications mainly come from the active population, who are in the early or ongoing stages of professional activity and consumption.

The data show that the majority of respondents have a high educational level. More than 73% of participants hold higher education or postgraduate degrees, suggesting a solid knowledge base and a higher likelihood of being receptive to complex information, such as social and environmental certifications. Respondents with secondary education (22.2%) represent a significant portion of the sample, ensuring diversity and allowing for the capture of varying perceptions according to educational level. The small proportion of respondents with lower secondary education (4.4%) indicates limited participation from individuals with lower educational attainment, which may influence the overall level of understanding of labels and certifications.

The results indicate that the majority of individuals in the sample are professionally active, either employed or self-employed, representing over 60% of the total. This suggests that the opinions expressed in the study primarily reflect the perspective of individuals engaged in economic activity, who typically have practical experience, financial stability, and direct contact with market dynamics. The presence of pupils and students, accounting for 37.1% of the sample, highlights the involvement of young people in the research process. Their participation is significant, as they represent future consumers and decision-makers who tend to be more sensitive to social and environmental issues and more open to adopting responsible consumption behaviors. Self-employed individuals, constituting 21.3% of the sample, contribute to the diversity of the groups studied, being characterized by autonomy, initiative, and heightened attention to the value of certifications and brand reputation. A small number of unemployed participants (~2%) and the absence of retirees in the sample can be considered limitations, as they do not provide sufficient representation of vulnerable groups and individuals with fixed incomes.

A slight predominance of respondents from urban areas is observed, indicating that the opinions expressed largely come from individuals who have easier access to information, certified products, and educational campaigns on social and environmental responsibility. However, the significant participation of respondents from rural areas (42.5%) ensures a balanced representation between the two categories, allowing for the identification of differences in perceptions and behaviors between urban and rural consumers.

Regarding the question on *the types of products for which consumers typically check labels*, the responses indicate a strong focus on staple goods and products that have a direct impact on health and lifestyle. Specifically, 96.5% of participants—304 individuals—check food product labels, confirming a heightened concern for food safety and nutritional quality. Personal care products, followed by clothing, rank second, with 54% of respondents, reflecting interest in ingredients, materials, potential social or environmental certifications, as well as labels such as “cruelty-free” or eco-friendly textiles. At the same time, a significant portion of participants examine labels for household and cleaning products (41.6%) and for household appliances (36.2%), demonstrating that attention to labels is not limited to food, but extends to other product categories relevant to comfort and safety. The “Other” category (0.6%) is negligible, indicating that nearly all participants fall within the established categories. The results highlight that labeling of food products remains the primary priority for consumers, while a clear trend is observed toward extending attention to other product categories, particularly those related to health, personal care, and environmental impact.

In response to the question, “*Which information do you consider essential on a label?*”, respondents answered in a way that reflects their primary concerns when choosing products. The results show that the expiration date is considered the most important information, mentioned by 90.8% of respondents, highlighting a significant concern for consumption safety. Second in importance is information about ingredients or product composition, cited by 71.7%, indicating that people want to know exactly what the product contains, either for health reasons or to avoid certain substances. Allergens were mentioned by 42.2% of respondents, emphasizing the importance of informing individuals with sensitivities or allergies. Other relevant information includes: country of origin – 35.2%; nutritional labels – 28.6%; production method (e.g., cruelty-free) – 25.7%; environmental certifications – 20.6%; and social certifications – 17.5%. These percentages indicate that, in addition to product safety and composition, consumers are increasingly attentive to issues related to ethics, sustainability, and social responsibility.

In response to the question, “*On a scale from 1 to 5, how much attention do you pay to labels?*”, the results indicate a clear tendency toward informed and responsible purchasing. The largest group, 44.4%, selected level 4 – indicating high attention,

meaning that nearly half of the participants carefully examine labels before deciding to buy. These consumers are likely those who frequently check information such as ingredients, expiration dates, product origin, or certifications. Another significant group, 27.6%, pays moderate attention (level 3), showing that while they are not as rigorous, they are still aware of the importance of labels and consult them in certain cases depending on the product type or context. Interestingly, 24.1% of respondents chose level 5 – very high attention – representing a group of highly attentive and demanding consumers who likely scrutinize every detail on the label, concerned with health, ethics, the environment, or other personal criteria. In contrast, a very small number of participants pay little or no attention to labels (levels 1 and 2). This minority may consist of individuals who choose products based on other criteria, such as brand, price, or recommendations.

Regarding the question on *the level of understanding of social and environmental certifications (evaluated on a scale from 1 = “Do not know at all” to 5 = “Know very well”)*, the results highlight notable differences between the types of certifications analyzed:

- *Fair Trade* – Most respondents selected levels 1 and 2, indicating a low degree of familiarity with this certification. Only a small percentage claimed to have a thorough understanding of its meaning, suggesting limited exposure to messages related to fairness and ethical working conditions.
- *EU Organic / Bio* – This is the certification with the highest level of recognition. The majority of respondents marked levels 4 and 5, confirming that organic products are widely known and more frequently encountered on the market. This also indicates that consumers tend to prioritize health and food quality when making purchasing decisions.
- *FSC (Forest Stewardship Council)* – The level of knowledge is moderate, with responses concentrated around levels 2 and 3. This suggests that while some respondents have heard of the certification, they lack a deep understanding of the standards related to forest protection and sustainable resource management.
- *Rainforest Alliance* – This is one of the least known certifications. Most responses were at levels 1 and 2, indicating a low level of awareness regarding the environmental and socio-economic impacts associated with tropical supply chains.
- *Cruelty Free* – The level of understanding is also relatively low, though slightly higher than for Rainforest Alliance. Respondents primarily selected levels 1–3, suggesting that although the symbol is relatively visible on cosmetic products, its full meaning is not widely understood.

Overall, the results indicate that EU Organic/Bio is the certification best understood and recognized by consumers, whereas Rainforest Alliance and Fair Trade remain significantly less familiar. This difference may be explained by varying exposure to awareness campaigns, the market availability of certified products, and brand communication priorities. It is relevant to note that these findings contrast with trends reported at the international level, where Fair Trade and similar social certifications have maintained their relevance even during economically challenging periods, while demand for organic products has shown a decline. This discrepancy highlights an important aspect: the moral value associated with social certifications can influence consumer preferences in different economic contexts. However, in the market studied, the preference remains more strongly oriented toward environmental certifications, which are perceived as having a direct impact on personal health and quality of life. (Fairtrade Foundation, 2024).

In response to the question “*Have you ever intentionally sought out products with ethical or environmental certifications?*”, the results show an almost balanced distribution. 39% of respondents reported that they have intentionally searched for certified products, indicating the presence of a consumer segment that is conscious and concerned about the social and environmental impact of their purchases. Meanwhile, 39.7% stated that they do not clearly recall doing so, which may suggest either limited attention to certifications during the purchasing process or insufficient visibility of such labels on the market. Additionally, 21.3% reported that they do not seek out certified products, which may reflect a lack of interest, low awareness, or the perception that certifications are not relevant to purchasing decisions. Overall, the findings show that nearly two-fifths of consumers are actively oriented toward certified products, while a similar proportion lacks a clearly defined position—highlighting the potential for increased consumer education and awareness efforts. Furthermore, the relatively small share of respondents who explicitly reject certified products suggests opportunities to expand interest through targeted information campaigns and marketing initiatives.

In response to the question “*How did you form your opinion about these certifications?*”, the distribution of answers highlights the main sources that influenced consumers' understanding and awareness:

- *Social media (28.6%)* is the primary source of opinion formation, confirming its major role in disseminating information and shaping public perceptions.
- *Personal experience (25.1%)* ranks second, indicating that many consumers develop their views through direct interaction with products and their labels.

- *Mass media (17.1%) and recommendations from friends or family (16.5%)* have a relatively similar impact, showing that both traditional information channels and social networks play a significant role.
- *Educational campaigns (12.4%)* were mentioned by a smaller share of respondents, suggesting that such initiatives have a more limited presence compared to digital environments or personal experience.

Consumers' opinions regarding social and environmental certifications are thus strongly influenced by the online environment (social networks and mass media), as well as by their own experiences. However, the relatively low influence of educational campaigns highlights the need for more intensive and structured consumer information programs, so that individuals can build a well-founded understanding beyond subjective or commercially driven influences.

Analyzing the question "*Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements*", the responses reveal a complex and, at times, contradictory perception regarding ecological and social certifications:

1. *Products with ecological certification are of superior quality* – the majority of respondents express agreement (with values 4 and 5 being most frequent), indicating that ecological labels are perceived as indicators of higher value and better quality.
2. *"Green" labels are just marketing, not a real sign of quality* – responses are divided: many respondents strongly agree (values 4 and 5), showing skepticism and distrust. This suggests that, although consumers acknowledge the existence of certifications, they also suspect that these could be used in a manipulative or superficial way.
3. *The higher price of certified products is justified* – opinions are balanced, but a significant portion of respondents (level 4) accept the idea that the higher price is justified, indicating an openness toward the additional costs associated with certification.
4. *I have more trust in brands that use certifications* – most respondents express agreement (values 4 and 5), confirming that certifications contribute to increasing consumer trust.
5. *I purchase certified products to support responsible behavior* – a predominant agreement (values 4 and 5) suggests that many consumers view purchasing such products as a moral and responsible action, beyond just material quality.

The results reveal a dual attitude among consumers:

- *Positive* – certifications increase trust, partly justify higher prices, and are associated with social responsibility.
- *Critical* – consumers also harbor suspicion that “green” labels may serve primarily as marketing tools without real value.

This ambivalence indicates that, although certifications have a positive impact on purchasing decisions and quality perception, greater transparency and consumer education are needed to reduce skepticism and strengthen trust in their real value.

The responses to the question “*What are the main benefits of certified products (in your opinion)?*” highlight several major trends. *They protect consumer health* – this is the most significant perceived benefit (86.3%). This confirms that people associate certifications with product safety and quality, aspects directly linked to personal well-being. *They respect the environment* – more than half of respondents (51.4%) believe that certified products bring benefits by reducing their environmental impact, which underscores the ecological dimension of certifications. *They respect workers’ rights* – 44.8% of participants mentioned this aspect, indicating that there is awareness of the social and ethical dimension of certifications, not only the health and environmental aspects. *They improve the company’s image* – at a similar level (45.4%), respondents recognize branding advantages as well, suggesting that certifications are seen as a valuable marketing tool that strengthens corporate reputation. *There are no real benefits* – only 1.3% of respondents hold this view, indicating that skepticism exists but remains marginal.

The results show that certified products are primarily associated with direct benefits for consumers (health) and collective benefits (environmental protection and respect for workers’ rights). At the same time, consumers are aware that certifications also contribute to enhancing the brand image of companies. Thus, certifications are perceived as a point of intersection between social ethics, ecological responsibility, and the competitive advantage of brands.

Regarding the question “*Would you be willing to pay more for a certified product?*”, the results indicate a clear trend among consumers:

- *Yes, up to 5%* – 60.3% of respondents are willing to accept a moderate price increase, suggesting a certain openness to supporting certified products, but only within reasonable limits.
- *Yes, 5–10%* – 21.9% of participants are willing to pay a higher price difference, showing that there is a segment of consumers more convinced of the value provided by certifications.
- *Yes, more than 10%* – only 1.3% of respondents would be willing to pay significantly more, indicating that loyalty based on certifications remains limited.

- *No* – 16.5% of respondents are not willing to pay extra, suggesting that for a certain group of consumers, price remains the primary criterion, outweighing ethical or environmental benefits.

These results confirm that consumers recognize the value of certifications, but the willingness to pay more has a clear limit. The majority accept only a modest price difference (up to 5%), which can serve as a useful indicator for pricing strategies adopted by companies offering certified products.

Analyzing the question “*What influences your decision to purchase certified products?*”, the responses show that participants identified several key criteria governing their purchasing behavior. *Product price* – 208 respondents (66%) considered it an essential factor, confirming that economic aspects remain among the most important in purchase decisions. *Availability in stores* – 159 responses (50.5%) highlighted the importance of the accessibility of certified products, indicating that any difficulty in finding them can lead to decreased purchasing. *Clarity of label information* – 148 respondents (47%) stated that transparency and understanding of label information play a major role in choosing certified products. *Recommendations from others* – 126 responses (40%) showed that the opinions of friends, acquaintances, or family have a significant impact, emphasizing the role of social networks and word-of-mouth in shaping consumer behavior. *Brand image* – 106 respondents (33.7%) value the reputation of the company, suggesting a link between brand perception, trust, and purchasing decisions. *Advertising and social campaigns* – only 92 responses (29.2%) mentioned this criterion, suggesting that traditional advertising has a relatively limited influence on decision-making. *Personal responsibility toward the environment and society* – 78 respondents (24.8%) indicated that their decision is influenced by ethical beliefs, although these motivations appear weaker when compared to economic and practical considerations.

In conclusion, purchasing behavior is largely influenced by practical factors such as price, product availability, and clarity of information, while aspects related to personal responsibility and social or environmental campaigns have a more limited impact.

Regarding the question “*Does social pressure (trends, peer groups, etc.) influence your choice of certified products?*”, the responses indicate the following:

- 45.1% of respondents stated that they are *partially influenced*, suggesting that trends and social opinions have a moderate, but not decisive, impact on their purchasing choices.
- 26.3% of participants admitted that they are *directly influenced* by social pressure, highlighting the role of conformity and group belonging in the decision-making process.

- 28.6% of respondents reported that they are *not influenced*, reflecting a group of more autonomous consumers who make decisions based on personal criteria and individual beliefs.

In conclusion, social factors play a significant but not determining role in the purchase of certified products. More than half of consumers experience an indirect or partial influence, meaning that trends, recommendations from friends, or social norms may affect the consideration of certified products, but are not sufficient on their own to drive the purchase decision.

The responses to the question “*What does a responsible consumer mean to you?*” highlight the idea that a responsible consumer is an attentive, informed, and educated individual who makes purchasing decisions consciously and rationally. A responsible consumer carefully analyzes labels, ingredients, brands, and product quality, avoids impulsive purchases, and does not buy more than necessary, thereby reducing waste. Such a consumer is concerned not only with personal health and well-being, but also with environmental protection, the future of upcoming generations, and the broader social and economic impact of products. Additionally, a responsible consumer supports local producers, chooses sustainable and ethical products, and respects the production process and the resources used, demonstrating responsibility not only toward oneself, but also toward the community and nature. Thus, the responsible consumer represents a balance between personal needs, respect for resources, and care for the environment.

In response to the question “*How would you describe the role of ecological and social labels in sustainable development?*”, the majority of respondents emphasized their fundamental importance, considering them as tools for information, transparency, and accountability for both consumers and producers. The labels are perceived as essential for educating society, guiding individuals toward environmentally friendly products that respect social rights, and reducing negative environmental impact. Many participants mentioned that these labels directly contribute to environmental protection, consumer health, and the promotion of sustainable practices, encouraging companies to adopt ethical and ecological standards. Moreover, ecological and social labels are seen as a means of increasing awareness regarding sustainable development, being viewed as “a primary role,” “crucial today,” and “a direct link between producers and consumers.” However, some respondents expressed reservations, suggesting that these labels can sometimes function mainly as marketing tools; yet, even in such cases, they still succeed in drawing attention to sustainability issues. Overall, the perspectives indicate that ecological and social labels play a positive and significant role in sustainable development by informing, educating, and encouraging responsible consumption.

The question “*Do you have suggestions for increasing trust in product certifications?*” generated diverse responses, but several clear directions emerged.

Respondents expressed the need for greater transparency in the certification process, as well as independent verification carried out by neutral bodies at both national and international levels. Another theme that stood out was consumer information and education, through promotional campaigns, clear explanations of certification criteria, specific events, and the use of easily accessible tools such as QR codes or online platforms to verify the authenticity of certificates. Additionally, the importance of sanctioning companies that use false labels or engage in “greenwashing” practices was emphasized, along with the need for simpler and more visible communication on packaging. Some participants also suggested promoting certifications through influencers and real consumer experiences in order to build trust. Overall, respondents believe that trust can be strengthened through transparency, independent verification, clear information campaigns, and the active involvement of companies in presenting the benefits of certifications.

The general conclusions of the questionnaire indicate that respondents demonstrate an increasing level of awareness regarding responsible consumption, showing concern for the impact of their purchasing decisions on their own health, the environment, and society. Most respondents believe that a responsible consumer is informed, educated, and attentive to product labels, choosing items based on quality, origin, and their effects on the environment or animal welfare.

At the same time, a moderate level of trust in existing certifications was observed, with this trust being conditioned by transparency, independent verification, and clear communication from companies. Respondents emphasized the need for education and information campaigns, as well as firm measures against misleading practices or false labeling.

Overall, the analysis reveals a significant openness among consumers toward ethical and sustainable behaviors, but this trend needs to be supported through education, clear regulations, and the promotion of positive examples by producers and institutions.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of the obtained data broadly confirms the hypotheses formulated in the introduction. Regarding H1, the results show that consumers’ willingness to pay for socially and environmentally certified products varies significantly depending on socio-demographic characteristics, particularly educational level and age, which highlights the importance of market segmentation in promoting sustainable products.

In the case of H2, the findings reveal a clear tendency to place greater trust in environmental certifications than in social ones, the latter being less well-known and therefore less valued in perceptions of product quality. Thus, the ecological

dimension remains a determining factor in shaping the product's image, which confirms the validity of the hypothesis.

With regard to H3, the research shows that the level of knowledge about the meaning of certifications has a direct impact on the extent to which the label influences the purchasing decision. Informed and educated consumers tend to use the label as a value indicator and a guarantee of the producer's responsibility.

From a theoretical perspective, this study adds value to the existing literature by emphasizing the relationship between consumer responsibility, the perception of certifications, and their effect on purchasing behavior. It shows that symbols and labels are not only tools for providing information, but also instruments that contribute to shaping values and supporting trust within a responsible market.

From a practical standpoint, the research results indicate the need to strengthen efforts related to consumer information and education campaigns, as well as the transparent promotion of certifications.

Furthermore, it is important for regulatory institutions and economic actors to place greater emphasis on social certifications, by offering clear explanations regarding their benefits and implementing independent verification mechanisms. Through such measures, certifications can become an efficient means of guiding consumption toward sustainable products, contributing both to environmental protection and to the enhancement of socio-economic well-being.

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