

Young consumers sustainable consumption behavior: A multi-country analysis between Germany and Colombia

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the Sustainable Consumption Behaviors (SCB) of young consumers in two contrasting countries: Germany and Colombia. A quantitative research design was employed to gather data from 326 young undergraduate students. Using a self-report scale based on Quoquab et al. (2019) scale. The findings reveal that consumers in Colombia demonstrate a higher concern for quality of life, environmental well-being, and the well-being of future generations compared to their German counterparts. This research shows that emerging market companies should promote sustainable products to build on existing positive attitudes. In contrast, in developed countries, companies need to invest more in education and awareness efforts to emphasize the importance of sustainability.

Keywords: Sustainable Consumption Behavior, Young Consumers, Consumer Behavior, Cross-Cultural Analysis, Relative Deprivation Theory

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Introduction

The increasing focus on Sustainable Consumption Behavior (SCB) underscores the urgent need to address global environmental challenges intensified by overconsumption and unsustainable practices. Sustainable consumption is regarded as a critical catalyst for advancing sustainable development, as the unprecedented growth in consumption has led to the

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overuse and misuse of environmental resources, resulting in their rapid depletion (Alisat & Riemer, 2015; Bogueva et al., 2017; Quoquab et al., 2019). Current consumption patterns, as highlighted by the Global Footprint Network, (2024), require the resources of 1.75 Earths to sustain existing consumption levels, demonstrating that sustainability is indispensable for both the present and the future generations. To mitigate the resulting damage to global environmental systems, sustainable consumption practices prioritize the responsible use of resources that lie at the core of many environmental challenges (Warde, 2017).

Sustainability encompasses three interconnected dimensions: environmental, economic, and social sustainability (Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). Environmentally, sustainable consumption promotes the conservation of natural resources, reduction of pollution, and minimization of waste (Kazmierczak-Piwko et al., 2022). Socially, it can enhance public health, improve quality of life, and ensure the well-being for current and future generations (Fesenfeld et al., 2021; Jiang & Pu, 2021). Economically, it drives innovation, creates new business opportunities, and fosters sustainable products and services (Osuji & Amajuoyi, 2019; Pérez-Franco et al., 2022). While these benefits are well-documented, most of the existing research has primarily focused on sustainability from macroeconomic perspectives, often overlooking the critical role of individual consumer behavior (Zhao & Schroeder, 2010). However, as Quoquab et al. (2019) argue, while government policies and social marketing campaigns can encourage sustainable consumption, individual consumers ultimately determine whether such practices are adopted in their daily lives. Interestingly, young consumers emerge as a crucial demographic whose consumption behaviors could significantly influence sustainable development efforts.

Research on young consumers' behavior highlights a notable contradiction, that is, while some studies suggest they display a low level of environmental concern and awareness (Witek & Kuźniar, 2021), other studies indicate that they are more environmentally conscious and mindful of the impact of their consumption choices (Sheoran & Kumar, 2022).

Furthermore, young consumers as a key target group for companies become crucial to understand the drivers, barriers, and cultural differences in their SCB (Joshi et al., 2019; Tran et al., 2022). Young consumers represent a growing market for green products and play an essential role in shaping environmentally conscious societies, making them a critical focus for marketers and policymakers (Tran et al., 2022). Despite their potential role as agents for change, research on young consumers' preferences is limited, particularly in emerging countries (Quoquab et al., 2019). Most existing research has predominantly focused on developed regions, such as Europe

and North America, while emerging markets, like those in Latin America, have received comparatively less attention (Jiang & Pu, 2021). Given the socio-cultural and economic differences between these regions, further studies are needed to understand sustainable consumption behaviors in diverse settings.

By integrating insights from the Relative Deprivation Theory (RDT) with sustainable consumption, the study seeks to explore how perceptions of inequality and socio-economic contexts influence SCB across these different cultural and economic settings. RDT provides a framework for understanding how feelings of deprivation can drive consumer choices toward either unsustainable or sustainable practices, making it particularly relevant in contrasting contexts like Germany and Colombia (Bernstein & Crosby, 1980; Smith & Pettigrew, 2015)

The research questions guiding this study are: (1) To what extent do young consumers in Germany and Colombia engage in sustainable consumption behaviors, such as reducing waste, conserving resources, and avoiding overconsumption?, (2) What are the significant differences and similarities in sustainable consumption behaviors, including quality of life, care for environmental well-being, and consideration for future generations, among young consumers in Germany and Colombia?

The results of this study provide new insights into the sustainable consumption practices of young consumers, revealing significant differences between Germany and Colombia across three key variables: quality of life, care for environmental well-being, and consideration for future generations. Furthermore, these findings offer valuable contributions to academic literature and practical applications in marketing. First, they enrich the understanding of sustainable consumption from an individual consumer perspective, addressing a significant gap in current marketing research (Quoquab et al., 2019). Second, they highlight the behaviors and preferences of young consumers, a demographic that plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable consumption (Kazmierczak-Piwko et al., 2022). Third, by providing empirical evidence from two distinct countries, developed and emerging markets, the study enhances our understanding of how socio-cultural and institutional contexts shape sustainable consumption behaviors. Finally, the research validates and extends existing measurement tools by incorporating dimensions such as quality of life, environmental well-being, and consideration for future generations, providing a more comprehensive analysis of young consumers' sustainable consumption behaviors.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows: We first present the literature review, followed by the methodological section, which includes a discussion on the instrumentation and sampling techniques employed.

Subsequently, we present our study's findings and conclude with a discussion on the implications and limitations of our study alongside potential directions for future research.

Literature Review

Sustainable Consumption (SC) and Sustainable Consumption Behavior (SCB)

Sustainable Consumption (SC) is a multifaceted and integral concept aligned with global sustainable development goals, aimed at aligning consumption patterns with the planet's ability to provide resources for human needs in a manner that ensures safe and quality sustenance (Ermolaeva, 2019). SC goes beyond merely purchasing environmentally friendly products; it represents a comprehensive lifestyle change that involves reducing hyper-consumption, fostering a future orientation, and taking responsibility for the well-being of future generations (Dimitrova et al., 2022). Moreover, SC is not limited to individual actions but also includes broader considerations such as economic factors, behavioral, and policy considerations at both personal and national levels (Vergura et al., 2023).

Academic perspectives on SC vary. Importantly, SC is not merely an act of simplicity or anti-consumption; rather, it aims to minimize negative impacts on the environment, society, and the economy caused by irresponsible purchasing, use, and disposal of products and services (Joshi et al., 2019).

Although SC and SCB are closely related and often discussed together, they differ in scope and focus. SC is a broader framework encompassing cognitive, attitudinal, psychosocial factors, contextual factors, social norms, and perceived responsibility (Čapienė et al., 2021). In contrast, SCB specifically refers to the actions and behaviors of individuals that support these broader goals (Sargin & Dursun, 2023). SCB is a dynamic, multi-faceted concept defined as a three-stage process involving the acquisition, use, and disposal of goods and services (Piligrimiene et al., 2021), aligning with the lifecycle approach to consumption behavior, as proposed by Geiger et al., (2018)

Research on SCB has been extensively studied identifying various factors influencing individual behaviors including psychological, social, and economic determinants (Hosta & Zabkar, 2021; Kadic-Maglajlic et al., 2019; Liobikiene & Poškus, 2019; Piwowar-Sulej, 2020). SCB is characterized by three key dimensions: environmental, social, and economic. The

environmental dimension focuses on the ecological implications of consumer choices emphasizing the need to reduce negative impacts on natural resources (Chang et al., 2020). The social dimension centers on the societal impacts of individual decisions including considerations of social equity and justice (Hosta & Zabkar, 2021). Finally, the economic dimension addresses the financial implications of individual consumption patterns highlighting the importance of balancing economic efficiency with responsible consumption (Hütter & Sweldens, 2018).

Determinants of SCB

SCB is shaped by various cultural and demographic factors. Cultural drivers, such as the perceived association between an eco-friendly lifestyle and an enhanced quality of life, long-term economic expectations, and a desire to decelerate modern life's pace, play a vital role in the adoption of new sustainable habits. These cultural drivers are particularly relevant in major consumer segments like food, household chemicals, beauty products, and clothing (Ermolaeva, 2019). Demographic factors, including age, gender, income, and rurality, are also key determinants of SCB (Gifford & Sussman, 2012). Age is a significant factor influencing environmental attitudes and behaviors, with studies suggesting that younger individuals may have different environmental perspectives compared to older groups (Collado Salas & Corraliza, 2016). Moreover, gender plays a significant role in shaping sustainable behaviors (El Ghouli et al., 2017). While Hunter et al. (2004) found that women were more likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviors, such as recycling. Other studies urge caution in generalizing gender differences in local environmental behaviors (Larson et al., 2010).

Furthermore, environmental concerns play a role in shaping SCB. According to Restall & Conrad (2015), consumers who feel a sense of association with nature protection believe in their exclusive contribution towards ecological security through the adoption of environmentally favorable practices. This intrinsic care for the planet's well-being motivates individuals to engage in genuine efforts to protect nature, embracing sustainable activities that support environmental conservation (Bauri & Kumar, 2018). Further studies suggest that individuals with a sensitive environmental attitude are more likely to engage in sustainable consumption practices, including the preference for green products (Jiang & Pu, 2021). Moreover, the acquisition of environmental knowledge in educational settings positively contributes to promoting sustainable consumption among students (Jiang & Pu, 2021),

Likewise, empirical evidence supports the notion that environmentally conscious consumers exhibit distinct purchasing behavior. For instance, Kim & Choi (2005) reveal that consumers who prioritize environmental concerns are more inclined to choose green products over conventional alternatives. Importantly, this preference is not merely theoretical; environmentally conscious consumers are willing to allocate more financial resources to support sustainable choices, as demonstrated by the willingness to spend more money on green products compared to their less environmentally concerned counterparts (Wei et al., 2018).

SCB and Young Consumers

Young consumers, despite encountering certain legal and formal restrictions due to their age, play a pivotal role in the modern consumer market. Companies often target this demographic, manufacturing products specifically tailored to their preferences, (Kazmierczak-Piwko et al., 2022). Their role extends beyond mere consumption; young consumers are seen as vital agents in promoting sustainable development. This demographic is crucial for shaping future markets, making the study of their behavior essential to understanding how sustainable consumption patterns can be cultivated and sustained (Wyrwa et al., 2023).

The integration of sustainable consumption behaviors among young consumers relies heavily on educating this group about ecological and economic principles. The goal is to foster a generation of market-aware consumers capable of making sustainable decisions in the future (Kazmierczak-Piwko et al., 2022).

Studies reveal a divergence in environmental attitudes between younger and older consumers. While some findings suggest that young consumers exhibit lower environmental concern and knowledge compared to older counterparts (Dhir et al., 2021). Other findings contend that they are more environmentally concerned in considering the environmental impact of their consumption choices (Sheoran & Kumar, 2022).

The academic community increasingly recognizes the importance of studying young and educated consumers in sustainable consumption behavior. This demographic is considered crucial for bringing about preferred changes in consumption patterns, yet it has been understudied in the past (Kanchanapibul et al., 2014). Studying sustainable consumption behavior in young consumers is vital because it helps establish long-term habits that can shape future markets, societal norms, and environmental outcomes. As trendsetters and future decision-makers, young consumers have a significant influence on demand for sustainable products and ethical

practices, making them a crucial market segment. Lastly, there is a recognized gap in understanding the slow adoption of sustainable consumption practices in emerging markets (Quoquab & Sukari, 2017).

SCB in Developed as well as Emerging Markets

Studies on SCB have emanated from developed countries, revealing an asymmetry in research focus and an inherent need for more inclusive global studies. Ukenna et al. (2019) stress the urgency for coordinated action from both rich and poor consumers and across developed as well as emerging markets. Addressing this asymmetry is essential for tackling the interconnected challenges posed by unsustainable consumption.

Emerging markets are increasingly acknowledging the significance of SCB. Efforts in emerging markets have typically concentrated on economic priorities, often overlooking sustainability concerns. This “grow first, clean up later” approach has been particularly notable in emerging markets (Wang et al., 2019). In contrast, developed economies, with mature production technologies, have prioritized altering over-consumption patterns (Wang et al., 2019). These efforts aim to reduce material and energy intensity by addressing both the supply and demand sides of consumption. Despite such initiatives, most developed countries continue to grapple with high ecological footprints, reflecting their heavy ecological debts (Ukenna et al., 2019).

Recent studies emphasize the growing importance of sustainable consumption in emerging markets. Consumers in these countries are becoming more aware of the ecological consequences of their consumption choices and are showing greater engagement with conscious behaviors (Arli et al., 2018). As awareness grows, so too does the adoption of sustainable consumption behaviors, despite institutional challenges and policy voids (Osuji & Amajuoyi, 2019).

A critical gap in the literature, however, is the lack of a holistic view of the role of consumer behavior in pursuing sustainability objectives (Quoquab et al., 2019). Despite the urgency of addressing sustainability challenges, few studies offer a comprehensive analysis of the factors and barriers influencing sustainable consumption (Quoquab et al., 2019). This gap highlights the need for more focused research into consumer attitudes, motivations, and behaviors related to environmental sustainability, particularly as consumers are central to driving sustainable practices.

While sustainability has become an important consideration, it has been less studied from a consumer’s (Hwang & Kim, 2018). This calls for more

targeted investigations into how consumers perceive and engage with sustainability considerations in their consumption decisions.

To better understand the underexplored area of consumer perspectives on sustainability, particularly among young consumers, it is essential to employ relevant theoretical frameworks that can illuminate the motivations and behaviors driving sustainable consumption. One such framework is Relative Deprivation Theory (RDT), which provides valuable insights into how perceived inequalities may influence consumer choices and behaviors toward sustainable consumption.

Theoretical background and hypothesis development

Relative Deprivation Theory (RDT)

Relative Deprivation Theory (RDT) is a concept rooted in social psychology that has received significant scholarly attention since its development in the 1950s. The theory explains how individuals or groups perceive themselves as disadvantaged compared to others, leading to feelings of anger, resentment, and dissatisfaction (Bernstein & Crosby, 1980). This perceived deprivation is not based on an absolute lack of resources or opportunities but on subjective assessments of inequality relative to others. Consequently, RDT has been used to understand a wide range of social, economic, and political phenomena, including social movements, collective actions, and individual behaviors (Smith et al., 2012)

RDT affirms that perceptions of inequality arise from comparisons individuals or groups make between their circumstances and those of others (Rios & Mackey, 2020). Gurr (1968) expanded on this by introducing the concepts of value expectations (the goods and life conditions individuals believe they should have) and value capabilities (what they can achieve). A significant gap between these expectations and capabilities results in feelings of relative deprivation.

This theory also explores different forms of deprivation, as discussed by Townsend (1987) and elaborated by Alcock (1997), which include lacking access to basic needs such as food and clothing or falling below a socially accepted standard of living. Townsend (1987) emphasizes that these deprivations impact people's standards of living, focusing on the services and resources deemed necessary to maintain an adequate quality of life. Relative deprivation can also manifest in efforts to establish new standards that may not align with current societal norms but are increasingly adopted, particularly in emerging markets.

In marketing, RDT helps to understand consumer behavior and develop strategies that promote sustainable consumption (Chipp et al., 2011). By examining how individuals assess their consumption relative to others, marketers can gain insights into the motivations behind purchasing decisions (Haider et al., 2022).

Moreover, studies conducted in different contexts have demonstrated that relative deprivation significantly impacts consumption patterns, underscoring the need to consider relative status across different cultural contexts when analyzing consumer behavior (Smith & Pettigrew, 2015). This cross-cultural approach highlights how relative consumption can vary depending on societal norms and values, suggesting that marketing strategies must be tailored to specific cultural environments to be effective.

Hypotheses Development

RDT provides a powerful framework for understanding how perceived disparities between one's current situation and that of others can drive behavioral and attitudinal responses, particularly in the context of sustainable consumption. RDT posits that individuals or groups perceive experience feelings of deprivation due to unfavorable comparisons with others or with their own expectations of what they believe they should have or achieve (Gurr, 1968). These feelings of deprivation can generate emotions such as frustration, resentment, and a desire for change, which can, in turn, influence consumer attitudes and behaviors (Bernstein & Crosby, 1980). In emerging markets, where rapid economic growth and societal changes are often accompanied by strong socio-economic inequalities, the psychological mechanisms of RDT are particularly relevant.

Individuals in these contexts may frequently compare their quality of life, environmental conditions, and prospects for the future with those in more developed nations. Specifically, individuals in emerging markets may perceive a greater gap between their current quality of life and the standards they aspire to those aspirations based on comparisons with developed countries. This perceived gap can heighten concerns about the quality of life, as individuals strive to achieve not just material comfort but also access to clean air, water, and healthier living environments, which are often seen as markers of a good life (Ermolaeva, 2019; Quoquab et al., 2019). This concern stems from the desire to reduce perceived deprivation by improving their living conditions and achieving a standard of life they consider equitable or desirable. Thus, we propose:

H1: Consumers from emerging markets have a higher concern for quality of life than their counterparts in developed markets.

In emerging markets, environmental deterioration is often more visible and directly impacts daily life, which can intensify feelings of relative deprivation (Bronfman et al., 2015). When individuals in these markets perceive that their environmental conditions are significantly worse than those in developed countries, they may experience a heightened sense of environmental concern as they seek to close the perceived gap (Gifford & Sussman, 2012). Additionally, as these consumers become more aware of global environmental challenges and the benefits of sustainable practices, their concern for the environment grows, driven by a desire to achieve parity with the environmental standards of more developed regions (Collado Salas & Corraliza, 2016). Driven by the psychological need to address perceived environmental inequalities and enhance their quality of life, we suggest:

H2: Consumers from emerging markets have a higher concern for the environment than their counterparts in developed markets.

RDT also helps explain why consumers in emerging markets may have heightened concern for future generations. In contexts where there is significant socio-economic uncertainty, consumers might feel a stronger sense of responsibility toward future generations, seeing sustainable practices as essential to ensuring long-term well-being and (Hwang & Kim, 2018). The perceived deprivation relative to developed countries – where prospects are often more secure – may prompt individuals in emerging markets to adopt a forward-looking perspective, seeking to secure a better future for themselves and their society (Quoquab et al., 2019). This reflects a psychological mechanism where concern for future generations serves to mitigate perceived current disadvantages and create a sense of hope and agency in shaping a more equitable future (Haider et al., 2022). Thus, we propose:

H3: Consumers from emerging markets have a higher concern for the care of the future than their counterparts in developed markets.

Overall, these hypotheses are grounded in the psychological mechanisms outlined by RDT, which suggest that perceptions of relative deprivation drive stronger concerns for quality of life, environmental conditions, and future generations among consumers in emerging markets. By addressing these

concerns, individuals in these markets may aim to reduce perceived inequalities and improve their overall well-being, both now and in the future.

Materials and methods

Research Design and Data Collection

To better understand how sustainable consumption practices take place in different social, cultural, and institutional contexts, the study follows a quantitative research approach. Specifically, the study uses a self-report scale developed by Quoquab et al. (2019) to analyze the sustainable consumption behavior of young consumers from both a developed market and an emerging market. This scale assesses three factors – quality of life, environmental care, and resources for future generations – using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree’) to 5 (totally agree’). The measurement items are listed in Table 1.

Table 1 - Variables in the questionnaire

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Measurement scale</i>	<i>Item description</i>
Quality of Life <i>(Quoquab et al., 2019)</i>	Item 1	Likert Scale Rating (1-5)	Indicate the level of agreement or disagreement: I don't like to waste food or beverages.
	Item 2	Likert Scale Rating (1-5)	Indicate the level of agreement or disagreement: I always try hard to reduce misuse of goods and services (e.g., I switch off lights and fans when not in use).
	Item 3	Likert Scale Rating (1-5)	Indicate the level of agreement or disagreement: I avoid overuse/consumption of goods and services (e.g., take print only when needed).
	Item 4	Likert Scale Rating (1-5)	Indicate the level of agreement or disagreement: I avoid being extravagant in my purchases.

Care for the Environmental Well-being <i>(Quoquab et al., 2019)</i>	Item 1	Likert Scale Rating (1-5)	Indicate the level of agreement or disagreement: I recycle daily newspaper (e.g., use as a pet's litter box, etc.).
	Item 2	Likert Scale Rating (1-5)	Indicate the level of agreement or disagreement: I purchase and use products that are environmentally friendly.
	Item 3	Likert Scale Rating (1-5)	Indicate the level of agreement or disagreement: I often pay extra to purchase environmentally friendly products (e.g., organic food).
	Item 4	Likert Scale Rating (1-5)	Indicate the level of agreement or disagreement: I use eco-friendly products and services.
Variables	Item	Measurement scale	Item description
Care for Future Generations <i>(Quoquab et al., 2019)</i>	Item 1	Likert Scale Rating (1-5)	Indicate the level of agreement or disagreement: I always remember that my excess consumption can create hindrance for future generations to meet their basic needs.
	Item 2	Likert Scale Rating (1-5)	Indicate the level of agreement or disagreement: I often think about future generations' quality of life.
	Item 3	Likert Scale Rating (1-5)	Indicate the level of agreement or disagreement: It is my responsibility to control my desire for excessive purchases for the sake of future generations.

	Item 4	Likert Scale Rating (1-5)	Indicate the level of agreement or disagreement: I am concerned about the future generation.
	Item 5	Likert Scale Rating (1-5)	Indicate the level of agreement or disagreement: I try to minimize excess consumption to preserve environmental resources for future generations.
Age			Write your age
Residence			Select your country of residence
Gender			Select your gender

The data was collected via a survey with fixed choice questions. As self-reported data may increase the risk of common method bias (CMB), which affects the validity and reliability of parameter estimates (Jarvis et al., 2003), the study followed an ex-ante approach to mitigate this issue. To reduce CMB, we implemented the following strategies. First, the questionnaire was translated from English into Spanish to ensure linguistic and cultural appropriateness for the survey conducted in Colombia. This translation was carefully proofread by two native Spanish speakers. Second, a pilot test was conducted with three academics and 25 students to assess the clarity and quality of the draft. Finally, participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality to reduce social desirability bias (Jarvis et al., 2003).

The respondents selected for this study were young, educated undergraduate students of international business and management from Germany and Colombia. This specific group was chosen for several reasons: First, young consumers, particularly those in higher education, have been relatively underrepresented in research on sustainable consumption behavior (Kanchanapibul et al., 2014).

Examining this demographic is crucial, as they represent a generation that will increasingly influence consumption patterns and sustainability practices in the future (Pérez-Franco et al., 2022). Second, selecting young, educated students from both countries enhances the comparability of the sample, as these individuals share a similar level of education and exposure to global sustainability discourses. This comparability minimizes variations that could arise from differences in educational background, enabling a more accurate analysis of attitudes and behaviors toward sustainability (Abbas & Singh, 2012; Bauri & Kumar, 2018). Moreover, university students are considered vital for achieving long-term environmental sustainability, as they are more likely to be aware of environmental issues and engaged in sustainable

practices (Gwekwerere, 2014; Pe'er et al., 2007). Their educational environment fosters critical thinking and awareness of global challenges, making them a key target for fostering sustainable consumption behaviors that can shape future market trends. By focusing on this group, the study aims to contribute to a better understanding of the behaviors of a demographic that will play a significant role in shaping future consumption patterns and sustainability efforts.

Surveys were distributed in classroom settings to ensure a controlled environment and to maximize the reliability of the responses. This in-person approach provided an opportunity for participants to seek clarification if needed, reducing potential misunderstandings and improving data quality. The decision to administer the survey in class also increased the response rate, minimizing nonresponse bias, which can occur when participants are required to complete surveys independently. As such, a total of 326 undergraduate participants, with 176 residing in Germany and 128 in Colombia were finally collected. The mean age of the participants was 22.08 years, with a standard deviation of 2.73 years. Females accounted for 60.9% of the respondents.

To investigate the differences between a developed and an emerging market regarding the variables of interest—specifically, quality of life, concern for environmental well-being, and care for future generations—we selected Germany as a representative of a developed country and Colombia as a representative of an emerging market (see International Monetary Fund 2024). These countries provide an ideal contrast due to their distinct economic, social, and environmental contexts. Germany, with its highly industrialized economy, strong environmental regulations, and high standard of living, offers valuable insights into attitudes and behaviors within a mature market. Conversely, Colombia, as an emerging market with unique developmental challenges allows for the examination of these variables within a different socioeconomic framework. This selection facilitates a comprehensive analysis of how these factors manifest across diverse economic environments.

To evaluate the reliability and validity of our measurements, we first conducted a confirmatory factor analysis using established procedures (Diamantopoulos & Winklhofer, 2001). The results showed that our scales met the recommended standards for composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE; Bagozzi and Yi 1988; Fornell and Larcker 1981). Furthermore, the squared correlations between the latent constructs were found to be lower than the average variance extracted for each construct, providing evidence of discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker 1981). We then assessed the internal consistency of our scales using Cronbach's alpha.

All scales exhibited Cronbach's alpha values above the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally 1978; see Table 2 for detailed values), indicating adequate reliability. Overall, these results suggest that our measurement scales possess both convergent and discriminant validity, along with satisfactory reliability. The mean values for variables quality of life, concern for environmental well-being, and care for future generations were derived from the average scores of their corresponding items.

Table 2 - Descriptive statistics and correlations

<i>Variable</i>	<i>V1</i>	<i>V2</i>	<i>V3</i>
V1: Care for the environmental well-being			
V2: Quality of life	.497*		
V3: Care for the future generations	.604*	.567*	
M	3.44	4.10	3.75
SD	.89	.67	.74
α	.811	.714	.836
AVE	.64	.55	.61
CR	.88	.83	.88

Note: M = mean; SD = standard deviation; α = Cronbach's alpha; AVE = average variance extracted; CR = composite reliability. *p < .001 (two-tailed).

Results

The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 29, an invaluable tool for professionals and researchers who require robust statistical analysis and data management capabilities. To examine the significance of mean differences, t-tests were conducted, utilizing SPSS's advanced statistical functions. A t-test is particularly effective in determining whether there are statistically significant differences between the means of two groups, providing a rigorous method to support or refute research hypotheses. The results of the study provide compelling evidence of significant differences in sustainable consumption concerns between young

consumers in Germany and Colombia. Firstly, the data reveals a notable difference in the mean values concerning the quality of life between the two groups ($M_{\text{Colombia/quality of life}} = 4.29$; $M_{\text{Germany/quality of life}} = 3.96$; $t(302) = 4.24$; $p < 0.001$, two-tailed). See table 3. This finding supports Hypothesis H1, which proposed that consumers from emerging markets exhibit a higher concern for quality of life compared to those from developed countries.

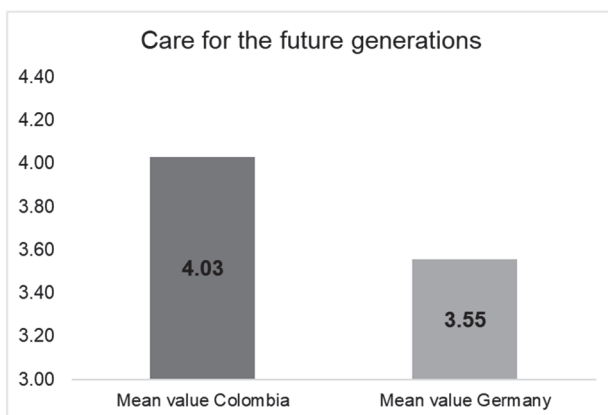
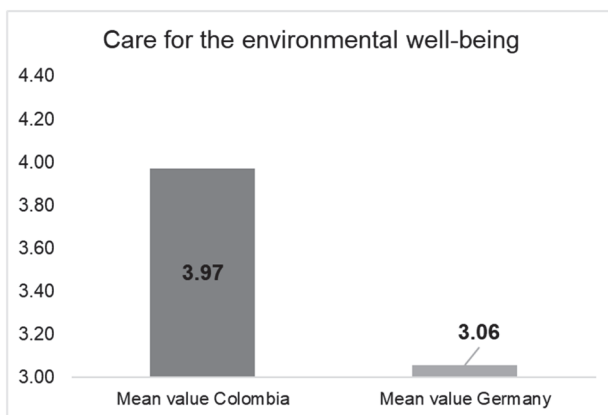
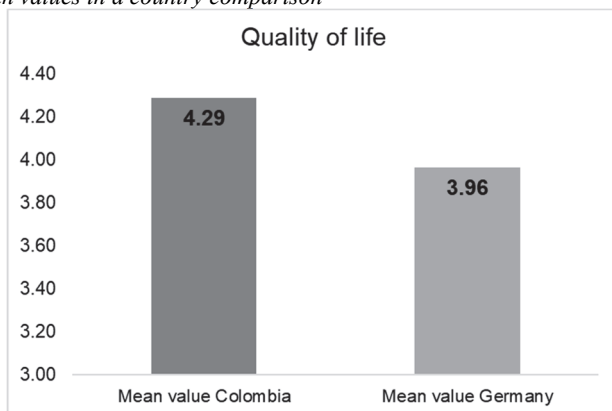
Additionally, the analysis shows a significant difference in the mean values for environmental well-being between the two groups ($M_{\text{Colombia/care for the environmental well-being}} = 3.97$; $M_{\text{Germany/care for the environmental well-being}} = 3.06$; $t(302) = 10.22$; $p < 0.001$, two-tailed). The higher mean value among Colombian respondents suggests a greater concern for environmental well-being, thus confirming Hypothesis H2, which posited that consumers from emerging markets have a stronger environmental concern than their counterparts in developed nations.

Similarly, the results demonstrate a significant difference in the mean values concerning the care for future generations ($M_{\text{Colombia/care for the future generations}} = 4.03$; $M_{\text{Germany/care for the future generations}} = 3.55$; $t(302) = 5.76$; $p < 0.001$, two-tailed). This supports Hypothesis H3, which proposed that consumers from emerging markets show a higher level of concern for future generations compared to those from developed countries.

The findings suggest that young consumers in Colombia prioritize sustainable consumption practices that align with a higher quality of life, environmental stewardship, and intergenerational equity more than their German counterparts. These results align with the hypothesis derivations, which argue that consumers in emerging markets may have a heightened awareness and greater motivation to engage in sustainable consumption due to direct exposure to the adverse effects of environmental degradation, as well as cultural and socio-economic factors that shape their attitudes towards sustainability.

Overall, the results provide robust evidence supporting the hypotheses and highlight the significant role of socio-cultural context in shaping sustainable consumption behaviors among young consumers. The insights gained from this study contribute to a better understanding of how consumers from different economic settings prioritize sustainability and suggest that future research should continue to explore these dynamics in diverse cultural contexts.

Table 3 - Mean values in a country comparison



Discussion

Implications for research

First, our study enriches the current body of research by providing empirical evidence SCB across developed and emerging markets. This comparison deepens the understanding of how socio-economic contexts and cultural factors influence sustainable behaviors, a perspective often underexplored in existing literature (Fuchs & Lorek, 2005; Griskevicius et al., 2012). Further, our study expands the understanding of sustainable consumption by incorporating dimensions such as quality of life and intergenerational responsibility, moving beyond the traditional focus on environmental impact. This broader conceptualization adds depth to the literature and encourages future research to explore other factors influencing sustainable consumption behaviors (Quoquab et al., 2019). Second, by applying RDT to analyze sustainable consumption behaviors, our study supports the theoretical approach to understanding how perceptions of inequality and deprivation influence consumer choices in both developed and emerging markets (Chipp et al., 2011; Smith & Pettigrew, 2015). Third, the study emphasizes young consumers as a critical demographic for future sustainable consumption research, given that the younger generation will play a pivotal role in shaping the future of sustainability (Pérez-Franco et al., 2022). Our results provide valuable insights into their attitudes and behaviors toward sustainability, which is crucial for developing long-term strategies aimed at fostering sustainable habits and influencing future market trends.

This study provides critical insights into the field of sustainable consumption and consumer behavior, offering new dimensions to the current theoretical understanding of how young consumers engage with sustainability across different socio-economic contexts. First, the research expands the traditional view of sustainable consumption by demonstrating that consumer behavior is not merely influenced by product availability or environmental education but also by cultural and socio-economic factors that vary between developed and emerging markets. The finding that young consumers in emerging markets show a higher commitment to sustainable behaviors shifts the theoretical narrative, suggesting that direct exposure to environmental degradation and socio-economic inequalities might fuel stronger pro-environmental behaviors in emerging markets.

For the marketing discipline, this implies that cultural and contextual factors need to be incorporated into models of consumer behavior. Sustainable marketing strategies should not assume homogeneity across regions but instead recognize that young consumers in emerging economies

may prioritize sustainability more due to the immediacy of environmental challenges. Future models must consider how regional differences in consumer psychology – particularly in how consumers perceive their role in addressing environmental issues – affect sustainable consumption patterns.

Furthermore, this study makes a significant contribution to RDT by applying it to the domain of sustainable consumption within a cross-cultural context. Traditionally, RDT has been used to explain social movements, political behavior, and collective action, often emphasizing how perceptions of inequality trigger dissatisfaction and drive action to improve one's status. By introducing RDT to the context of sustainability, this research reveals how feelings of deprivation in emerging markets can catalyze more responsible consumption behaviors aimed at closing perceived gaps in environmental quality and living standards between their region and more developed nations.

Our study suggests that relative deprivation extends beyond economics, encompassing environmental and social dimensions as well. In emerging markets, young consumers may perceive that their environmental conditions – pollution, resource scarcity, and long-term sustainability – are inferior compared to developed countries. This environmental deprivation appears to be a key motivator for adopting more sustainable behaviors, driven by the desire to achieve parity in terms of quality of life and ecological well-being. The integration of RDT in this context expands the theory's application field as it demonstrates that perceived environmental inequalities and concern for future generations can drive sustainable consumption as much as traditional economic or social deprivation.

The study also introduces the notion that intergenerational responsibility can be seen as an extension of RDT, where young consumers in emerging markets feel a sense of deprivation not only for themselves but for future generations. This extension of RDT highlights how psychological mechanisms of deprivation can influence sustainability behaviors across different cultural contexts. It also suggests that future applications of RDT in consumer behavior should include environmental and social dimensions of deprivation to more fully capture the range of factors influencing consumer decision-making in both emerging and developed markets.

Managerial implications

The study's findings have significant implications for marketing practitioners, companies, and consumers.

First, marketing professionals operating in emerging markets should capitalize on environmental awareness and concern for future generations

among young consumers. Given their stronger inclination towards sustainability, marketing strategies in these regions should emphasize the alignment of products and services with sustainable values. Messaging that highlights eco-friendly attributes, ethical production processes, and long-term environmental benefits will likely resonate more with this demographic. Additionally, campaigns that foster a sense of intergenerational responsibility can further strengthen the emotional connection between consumers and sustainable brands.

Moreover, in developed markets, where young consumers exhibit comparatively lower levels of environmental concern, marketers should prioritize awareness-building initiatives. Investments in education campaigns and sustainability advocacy can help bridge the knowledge gap and foster a deeper understanding of the personal and societal benefits of sustainable consumption. By focusing on long-term health, economic, and environmental advantages, companies can help shift perceptions and attitudes, potentially stimulating demand for sustainable products.

Second, since young consumers in emerging markets are more likely to prioritize sustainability, businesses can focus on green innovation, eco-friendly product design, and transparent communication about their environmental efforts. By embedding sustainability into their core values, companies can tap into a growing market of conscientious consumers, strengthen brand loyalty, and position themselves as leaders in corporate responsibility.

Third, these results show policymakers in emerging markets that they should build on the existing sustainability awareness by implementing policies that further incentivize and support sustainable consumption. This could include offering subsidies for green products, tax breaks for companies producing eco-friendly goods, and regulations that promote sustainable business practices. Given that young consumers in these regions already prioritize sustainability, policies that reinforce and reward responsible consumption behaviors can accelerate the transition to more sustainable economies. In developed countries, where the study suggests lower levels of concern for sustainability among young consumers, policymakers should prioritize awareness-building initiatives. This could involve launching nationwide campaigns that emphasize the long-term benefits of sustainable consumption, both environmentally and economically. These campaigns should highlight the direct impact of individual actions on global environmental outcomes, stressing the urgency of adopting more responsible consumption patterns. Policymakers in developed markets should also explore regulatory mechanisms that encourage businesses to provide clearer and more transparent information about the environmental impact of their

products. For instance, strengthening eco-labeling standards and ensuring they are prominently displayed could help consumers make more informed decisions. Additionally, incentives for sustainable practices, such as subsidies for eco-friendly products or penalties for wasteful consumption, could nudge consumers toward more responsible behaviors.

The authors report that there are no competing interests to declare

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