

# OVERCONSUMPTION AND THE ROLE OF THE MARKETER

**Abstract** – Consumers value ethical brands and are willing to pay more and repurchase from companies that hold similar values. Specifically, overconsumption initiatives from companies have been shown to benefit brand image and can lead to increased sales due to increased brand loyalty, especially from younger generations, Gen Z and Millennials, due to their preference for CSR and ESG claims. In the study, these initiatives are shown through firm signaling, communicating company values and ethics to reduce information asymmetry. To evaluate the effects, the research was administered to 111 participants to measure repurchase intentions given an impulse purchase from 3 company types: ethical, neutral, and unethical. From the series of questions and conditions conducted, it was shown that participants have a higher intention to repurchase a product from an ethical company, regardless of whether the product succeeded or failed, as compared to neutral and unethical companies.

**Keywords** – *Overconsumption, Ethics, CSR, ESG, Repurchase, Brand positioning*

**Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners:** Brand positioning focused on ethics and sustainable practices can lead to repurchase intention due to increased brand loyalty. This research aims to understand the importance of branding and the role of marketers in business growth. In the ever-growing competitive market, leaders and entrepreneurs must make trade-offs. This paper examines

younger generations, Millennials and Gen Z, the positions that brands may take, and the role of marketers in establishing brand and ethics.

## Introduction

Defined by overconsumption.org (2024), a platform with a mission to educate and inspire change in the challenge of overconsumption, “Overconsumption refers to a consumption level that exceeds what is necessary or beneficial.” Its definition centers on negativity without a contribution to fulfilling the needs of a consumer while being excessive without producing meaningful value. Overconsumption is a problem that can be addressed by putting pressure on individuals and companies. For businesses, they can start with stressing corporate social responsibility (CSR), the responsibility of a company to all its stakeholders, and ESG claims, referring to environmental, social, and governance initiatives to bring responsible products. In a modern age where the environment is at stake, there has also been a growing movement in social media to deinfluence, the dissuasion of product purchase. This movement, driven by both influencers and companies, has caught the attention of consumers and closely aligns with the principles behind CSR and ESG claims.

In a market led by consumer demands and a corporation’s goal to create profit, CSR and ESG claims drive corporate image and thus revenue. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is the responsibility of a company to all its stakeholders in areas such as philanthropic, environmental, ethical, legal, and economic (Gürlek et al., 2017). Consequently, CSR is established through firm signaling, branding, and advertising from marketers. In a questionnaire of 406 respondents published by the scholarly journal *E+M Ekonomie a Management*, the results exhibit that within the areas of CSR mentioned, environmental had the strongest correlation to corporate image. It was also found, “...more than 90% of respondents have a favorable view

of a company that is engaged in CSR” (Streimikiene et al., 2024). With the current devastation of the environment, consumers are becoming conscious of the impact, and they want companies to do the same. CSR explains that corporations have a responsibility, and it requires performance to better society. If companies want to create a favorable corporate image, their morals also need to be backed up with the consciousness to take environmental responsibility in whatever form that may look like.

In the morality of the action of ethical performance, morality can be expressed through the materials used for packaging, the push for product quality, the emphasis on how a product is made, and where materials are sourced. This is described as a customer’s green purchase intention. “...Conceptualized as the probability and willingness of a person to give preference to products having eco-friendly features over other traditional products in their purchase considerations” (Rashid, 2009). In a study published by the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, results demonstrate that a consumer’s moral intensity, correlated with green purchase intention, can trigger consumption if there is a benefit to the environment. Thus, making moral intensity a consideration when consumers make purchase decisions (Tian et al., 2022). As people might be persuaded by product function, they can also be emotionally persuaded, whether that be through guilt or arising from their own ethical standpoint. Through the study, it can be understood that consumers want to help the environment, and this desire has an impact on how people shop and select brands.

In consideration of marketing tactics for businesses, take signaling theory, a theory that explains the need to reduce information asymmetry, the idea that one party has more information than the other (Connelly et al., 2011). In terms of the market and CSR, the theory suggests a positive correlation between firm value and CSR disclosure because communicating CSR information reduces information asymmetry (Nguyen, 2025). That said, from the same publication, it also explains that the quality of communication and the decoding of information from the receiver depends on “the signaler’s behavior, the receiver’s interpretation of the signal and the signaling environment” (Connelly, 2011, as cited in Nguyen, 2025). These studies

explicate the complexities to reduce the difference of knowledge between firm and stakeholder through firm signaling, and while transparency through CSR disclosure increases firm value, the effectiveness of the disclosures depend on the signaler, the receiver, and the environment. In the role of the marketer, this means that consistency within a firm's actions is important and so is the understanding of the target audience to successfully execute the idea of CSR, the responsibilities of a company.

Taking into consideration this idea of consistency and making consumers believe there is truth in CSR disclosures outlined by companies, where do green advertisements fall into this equation? Green advertisements are defined as advertisements that promote the positive impact on the environment by emphasizing environmentally friendly products (Li, 2025). Green advertisements can cause greater intention to purchase. However, from a sustainability standpoint, impulsive purchases are not environmentally friendly because products or services that have those traits typically highlight the preservation of energy, prevention of waste, and responsible practices (Li, 2025). While marketing a product for its environmental claims has value, such as the support of CSR disclosures, these green products should not encourage "green" behaviors through purchase alone. Take this point of view about consumption from associate professor Sabrina Helm, based in Retailing and Consumer Sciences at the University of Arizona: "Reduced consumption has effects on increased well-being and decreased psychological distress, but we don't see that with green consumption" (University of Arizona, 2019). In some instances, consumers might not require a product, but they might impulse purchase a product due to its green claims. By definition, this is still an impulse purchase that fits into the category of overconsumption. Helm's study also concluded that purchasing green alone is not enough to fulfill the desire to help the planet. This goes back to CSR, a responsibility that extends to not only advertising sustainability because it is a trend, but because it is the business's truthful and moral intent to reduce environmental devastation.

## **Literature Review**

## Marketing Strategies

Customers are backing up their ethics with their wallets. ESG claims refer to environmental, social, and governance initiatives to bring responsible products. As explained by Deloitte, “The goal of ESG is to capture all the non-financial risks and opportunities inherent to a company's day to day activities” (Splawski & Lukács, 2022). In other words, business practices are accompanied by other important costs that do not appear directly in the financial statements of a company. In a study conducted by McKinsey & Company and NielsenIQ, companies that incorporated ESG claims experienced greater and faster growth as well as increased sales. It exhibited, “Products making ESG-related claims averaged 28% cumulative growth over the past five-year period, versus 20% for products that made no such claims.” Something interesting found in the study is that products from brands big or small with ESG claims, of all categories studied, on average, showed more than 50% growth rates compared to products without ESG claims. (Frey et al., 2023). Therefore, these claims are extremely relevant to a brand's growth. Whether for a big or small company, the addition of ESG claims has impacts on customer portrayal and spending.

In light of a more positive purchasing ethic, there has also been a rise in deinfluencing. Defined by Collins Dictionaries (n.d.), “Deinfluencing is when someone tells their followers on social media not to buy particular items, or to buy fewer things generally.” For any company, to deinfluence, in face value, is to turn away from opportunity. While there is a plethora of brands that base their story on sustainability, for-profit companies are still in the business of making money. However, one notable brand that made headlines through deinfluencing is American outdoor and recreation clothing brand, Patagonia. Still an extremely relevant case study today, Patagonia launched a “Don’t Buy This Jacket” campaign on Black Friday, 2011. The campaign positioned Patagonia as an anti-consumerist company through the call to action to “not”

purchase their Patagonia jacket. This brand positioning led to an increase of \$543 million in 2012 and then to \$1 billion in sales by 2017 (Sheridan, n.d.). Through this campaign, Patagonia, established in 1973, demonstrated brand activism that accelerated its growth and conveyed authenticity. The company launched an outdoor apparel movement that pushed all industries to focus their branding on the environment, and it showed that responsible consumerism can lead to exponential brand loyalty and engagement. One may think an increase in sales can feel hypocritical of the objective of sustainability and the reason for deinfluencing, but it has a different purpose: to foster the mindset of consumers to rethink. When companies like Patagonia show concern for the planet, it triggers moral intensity and brand loyalty; it becomes a consideration for consumers who want to support companies that follow their beliefs.

## **Consumer Stance**

From a business perspective, obtaining suppliers with the same values as the company is more costly, takes more consideration, and might undermine the affordability and accessibility goals of the company. However, the younger generations of consumers, Millennials and Gen Z, have voiced their opinion: they would rather spend more if it means supporting a company with strong values and ethics. Global market leaders at PwC conducted a survey with 20,000 consumers across 31 countries and territories, and results have found that respondents across the regions are willing to pay 9.7% more for sustainably produced and sourced products (Durand-Hayes et al., 2024). For businesses that are wary of the decrease in profit margin in consideration of more responsible practices, this study shows an intent to purchase at a higher price if companies are taking into consideration the planet. This is because consumers feel a stronger connection to companies that show sustainability initiatives rather than price leaders who trade these important values to minimize cost.

In another example using a marketing simulation published in the International Journal of *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 486 survey respondents were given three hypothetical sport clubs, varying in overall ESG commitment and price, to test their willingness to pay given those traits. The study showed that high ESG clubs with the highest ticket price would capture 72.1% of market share, medium ESG clubs with a moderate ticket price would capture 21.3%, and low ESG clubs offering the lowest ticket price would capture 6.6% of the market (Lyu & Kim, 2025). This study exemplifies consumers' willingness to pay more if it means supporting ESG practices. That is to say, there is market value in creating a story that consumers want to support, and this study, specializing in sports clubs, shows that this value can offset price-minimizing decisions. All things considered, sustainability should not be a marketing gimmick. It should have a story, and it should have the vision of the company's leaders to create sustainable change to generate brand loyalty.

In comparing the different generations, there are also studies supporting the urgency in younger generations to care for the planet more than the older generations. Marketing has a lot to do with this, and so does social media. From the Pew Research Center, through a survey of 13,749 U.S. adults, the center found that of social media users, 69% of Gen Z, 59% of Millennials, 46% of Gen X, and 41% of Baby Boomer and older felt anxious about the future the most recent time they saw content about addressing climate change (Tyson et al., 2021). From this survey, it is established that more than half of the older generations have accepted non-sustainable practices as a way of life, but the younger generations want to change that social quota. Exposed to the good and bad sides of consumerism, CSR is a value that Gen Z and Millennials have historically praised companies for. In a survey published by Harvard Business Review, more than 350,000 U.S. customers generated the results that "When Gen Z and Millennial customers believe a brand cares about its impact on people and the planet, they are 27% more likely to purchase it than older generations are...." Noted by the same review, by the end of this decade, it is forecasted that \$68 trillion in wealth will be transferred from Boomers to Millennials and Gen Z (Reichheld et al., 2023). The marketing landscape is changing, and companies need to change before the new wave of consumers rejects their business

altogether. Nevertheless, the alignment of values between companies and consumers is becoming more important than ever, and so is the role of the marketer to get these values across.

## **Methodology**

### **Study Design and Sample**

A total of 111 participants (74% female,  $M_{\text{age}} = 29$  years) completed a survey in which they were asked to evaluate their impulse purchase given that they purchased from an ethical company, a neutral company, or an unethical company. Participants were recruited using a snowball sampling technique and mostly encompassed people within metro Atlanta, GA. The snowball sampling technique started with the author's personal connections and social media accounts, Instagram and LinkedIn. Each of the 111 participants were put into one of three scenarios through the randomizer in Qualtrics, and they were asked to evaluate the product, the company, and their feelings of overconsumption. However, this study's findings are limited to focusing on the consumer's repurchase intentions in comparison to the different scenarios and how they respond based on a successful product and a failed product. The objective of this focus is to test the effects of ethics as marketed by a company and how it may determine future purchase behavior. The findings concentrate on the following question: "Please rate your level of agreement regarding the company: Would you repurchase?" (5-point Likert scale; 1 = No, 5 = Yes).

**Table 1: Study Respondents by Generations**

Gen A (0-12)	2
Gen Z (13-28)	68
Millennial (29-44)	26
Gen X (45-60)	10
Baby Boomer (61-79)	4
Silent Gen (80-97)	1

Note that Generational Cohorts are based on year-born, not age, so this table is made simply for the convenience of the reader. Generation age ranges are based on 2025.

## Conditions

As mentioned, each responder was randomized into one of three experimental conditions. The condition for the ethical company given was, “You have impulse-bought a product. The company was founded by a philanthropist who dreamed of making products people love. The packaging is from recycled materials, and the company donates a percentage of all sales to charity. The company is big on giving back, and their social media is full of charity work.” The condition for the neutral company given was, “You have impulse-bought a product.” The condition for the unethical company given was, “You have impulse-bought a product. The company is infamous for its scandals and harmful operating practices. The company demonstrates no initiative to minimize its environmental impact, and they have been the source of contamination in the area where they reside.”

Once placed into an experimental condition, respondents were asked the question, “Please rate your level of agreement regarding the company: Would you repurchase?” regarding the purchase of a successful product. After answering, survey-takers could move to the next page, where they were given the same scenario. However, this time they were told, “You find out the product fails to perform. The product was an impulse purchase, and you did not do much prior research.” This description was worded accordingly to

ensure the type of purchase was obvious, making sure respondents may respond appropriately with an understanding of what was asked of them. This constitutes the unique value of this research; it extends current understanding of ethics through branding by considering product performance. This combination of traits aims to replicate a more realistic output of consumer behavior. Overall, this research will pertain to the differences found in repurchase intention based on the experimental conditions and the notable differences in the scenarios of a successful and a failed product.

## Findings

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics of repurchase intention given the scenarios**

		Descriptives							
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
1C Repurchase	1	33	3.36	.822	.143	3.07	3.66	1	5
	2	40	2.65	1.051	.166	2.31	2.99	1	5
	3	37	1.51	.901	.148	1.21	1.81	1	5
	Total	110	2.48	1.194	.114	2.26	2.71	1	5
2C Repurchase	1	33	1.94	1.088	.189	1.55	2.33	1	4
	2	40	1.50	.784	.124	1.25	1.75	1	4
	3	36	1.17	.378	.063	1.04	1.29	1	2
	Total	109	1.52	.845	.081	1.36	1.68	1	4

Dependent Variable: 1C Repurchase (Successful Product), 2C Repurchase (Failed Product)

Coded: 1 (Ethical), 2 (Neutral), 3 (Unethical)

**Table 3: Bonferroni post hoc test of repurchase intention given the scenarios**

**Multiple Comparisons**

Bonferroni

Dependent Variable	(I) Coded	(J) Coded	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1C Repurchase	1	2	.714*	.220	.005	.18	1.25
		3	1.850*	.224	<.001	1.30	2.40
	2	1	-.714*	.220	.005	-1.25	-.18
		3	1.136*	.214	<.001	.62	1.66
	3	1	-1.850*	.224	<.001	-2.40	-1.30
		2	-1.136*	.214	<.001	-1.66	-.62
2C Repurchase	1	2	.439	.187	.062	-.01	.89
		3	.773*	.191	<.001	.31	1.24
	2	1	-.439	.187	.062	-.89	.01
		3	.333	.182	.212	-.11	.78
	3	1	-.773*	.191	<.001	-1.24	-.31
		2	-.333	.182	.212	-.78	.11

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Dependent Variable: 1C Repurchase (Successful Product), 2C Repurchase (Failed Product)

Coded: 1 (Ethical), 2 (Neutral), 3 (Unethical)

A Bonferroni post hoc test was applied to find if there were any significant differences between the three companies and a successful product and a failed product. Respondents were given a Likert scale with the range of numbers 1 to 5, with the extremes being 1 = No and 5 = Yes. Given the data that sig. (significance) < .05, as shown in Table 3, indicates statistical significance, it was found that ethical companies have a higher chance of repurchasing intent from impulse purchases compared to neutral or unethical companies, as evidenced by the ethical company's highest mean score compared to all others from Table 2 and its sig. from Table 3. In the case of the impulse purchase being a failure, while most customers would probably not repurchase from the company, the data reveal that there is a significantly higher purchase intent for people to still buy from an ethical company rather than a normal and unethical one (Table 2's mean for 2C Repurchases: ethical = 1.94, neutral = 1.5, and unethical = 1.17). Given the results from Table 3, the study also shows no reliable difference when purchasing a failed impulse product from a neutral and unethical company (sig. for 2C Repurchases neutral compared to unethical = 0.212). In addition, the repurchase habits

of most people hold that neutral or unethical companies are of similar standing, and only an ethical company would result in a better chance of repurchasing intent of a failed impulse product.

Quality, brand image, sustainable and ethical sourcing, and sustainable consumption are the values that consumers want to see. These values were tested through firm signaling, the communication of companies regarding their values and ethics to reduce information asymmetry, and in the case of the neutral and unethical company, a lack thereof. Given the scenarios and their inclusion of CSR and ESG claims, the study was a test to evaluate the claims' relevance in consumer purchase intent. It was shown that consumers will repurchase from companies that have high ethics, and there is a higher chance that even with the possibility of a failed product, consumers are willing to repurchase from the company as compared to neutral and unethical companies. However, that is not to say actual experience outweighs the experience advertised by a brand. Given Table 2, of the 111 respondents, when a consumer encounters a failed product and an unethical company, the maximum result was a 2, even though the range allowed for 1 = No through 5 = Yes. Even in the event of the successful product and unethical company, respondents gave a maximum of 5, with the mean being higher at 1.51 as compared to 1.17 for the former. This data shows that while people value ethics, they carry more weight on product performance, the action behind the words. While ethics is important to persuade consumers to repurchase, in the event of a failed product, the products also need to be backed by their quality performance and actual customer experience, as supported by earlier research.

## **Discussions**

Given the literature review and the conducted study, with the transfer of wealth from Boomers to younger generations, money is moving. Marketers have the power to firm signal and brand a company through CSR

claims, ESG claims, or deinfluencing tactics to increase repurchase intention and perceived ethics. In the trade-off between quality, ethics, and cost, brand positioning becomes the “why” of the story and the connection to consumers and their values. That said, product performance, in this conversation about ethics, should not be forgotten because words are not equal to action. Overall, this study was a test of brand loyalty, its achievement through activism, sustainability initiatives, and firm signaling, and their effects on customer repurchase intention. These findings aim to clarify the importance of branding and the role of the marketer in customer loyalty, which coincides with long-term business growth and stance.

## **Limitation and Future Research**

In the study conducted, there are about three times more female participants than there are males. The survey is not an adequate representation of the general American population due to the limited sample size. However, given the average age was 29 years old and most respondents fell within Gen Z and Millennials, as shown in Table 1, the paper can be an adequate representation of younger generations and their preferences in terms of ethics. In addition, the scenario-based experiments worked with general and hypothetical products and companies without going into further details on type and reasons. However, it was found, through interaction with participants, that responses may vary depending on consumers’ product involvement in differing situations and product categories. Future research should assess whether product categories that consumers better align with have any impact on the findings of repurchase behaviors in the different experimental conditions of company ethics.

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