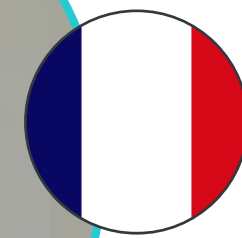


Sustainability status quo: headlines from our partners research across the world



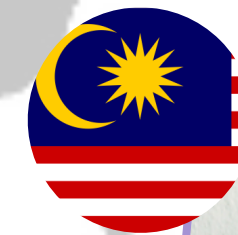
Stephane Lavelle
France



Maren Clausen
Germany



Piyul Mukherjee
India



Sophie Cox
Malaysia



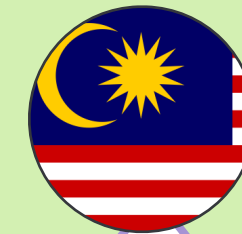
We caught up with a few of our partners who are doing research around the world, to get their topline thoughts on current consumer attitudes, barriers and predictions for the future

How would you describe current consumer attitudes towards sustainability in your market?



It's an issue which is **broadly discussed and perceivable in everyday life**: more sustainable products are available in 'normal' supermarkets (vs. only in specialist/organic shops before) and consumers are more aware of the issue. Initiatives like 'Friday for Future' and 'Letze Generation' are in the news often, and are being discussed – both positively and negatively!

Many consumers have already started to make more sustainable decisions. But for others, it is hard to take action as it means getting out of their comfort zone, which some are not willing to do still. Most would act more sustainably when it is a 'good' alternative – when it is easy to realise or when it is not too expensive.



Overall, I'd say the **conversations are starting but behaviour is not changing very much**. For example, there is a 20c tax on plastic carrier bags, but this has failed to change behaviour, most people pay the extra rather than carry their own bags.

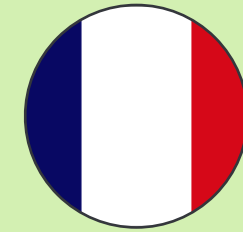
But it's my feeling that sustainable behaviour is actually not that far from us, culturally. The grandparents' generation were already enacting what would now be considered 'sustainable' behaviour – carrying tiffin lunchboxes, not wasting food, reusing and repurposing etc.

But Malaysia has needed to move away from this to prove itself a modern and developed country – Malaysians have bought into a fast paced lifestyle, the ubiquity of plastic, urban planning dominated by cars & the convenience of take out food without having to think about the impact of their actions.



In general, people in India are **open to doing more, but don't know where to start**. Of course there is always a smaller segment who are more educated and live in bigger cities, for whom it's more a part of day to day life.

It's worth pointing out, while a lot of English words have entered our vocabulary, **'sustainability' has not entered our lexicon yet but 'climate change' has**. So when brands talk about 'sustainability,' you might find people being puzzled. But mention climate change, and you'll get a resounding response from everyone. Because there is high awareness of the issue as on the subcontinent as we experience crazy extremes in terms of weather first hand. A landslide in the Himalayas, crazy floods in Kerala, hottest February on record - it can always be traced back to changing climate or too much development.



I think it's central for everyone, it's now becoming a **real focus people have in mind**. 10 years ago people would make changes because they would say they were interested in sustainability, but it was for their egos, their own benefit - buying organic strawberries in winter as it benefitted their health, changing to low energy lightbulbs because it saves them money. Now, I think people have it more in mind to not only be good for them, but good for the planet too. And this is because we can see the effects of it more clearly - lack of snow in the mountains, the drought really affecting the farmers and the president just announcing a water conservation crisis plan. Now when weather is nice outside on TV they will not say 'Il fait beau' (it's a beautiful day).

What does it mean to consumers in your market – what issues are top of mind?



Sustainability is quite a large concept, and awareness here may be higher for some things than others.

Plastic waste, for example, has higher awareness. Since food is a favourite topic in Malaysia, and it's often cheaper to eat out than to cook at home, there's some discussion around **food waste and food containers/packaging**, with recent legislation to ban certain types of containers (polystyrene)... but we've not seen a lot of action on this from consumers yet.

We do feel the impacts of **environmental distress** – in the last 12 months we've had very bad flooding, for example, and air pollution caused by open burning across the region (which also results in deforestation) is a perennial problem. These tend to be very prominent in the media at the time, but then drift out of the nation's attention once the crisis is over.



A lot of people are becoming more aware of **plastic waste**. Bisleri is our biggest brand of safe water – they sell in plastic bottles and tell us to dispose sustainably, at local railways stations they have a place you can throw bottles for recycling.

There is also a drive by the government, with a new mandate that requires big corporations to spend 2% of profits on CSR.

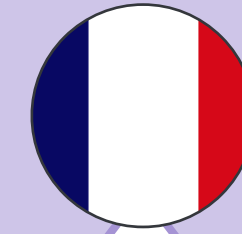
Agriculture and the impact of weather extremes are also top of mind. 60% of the population work in agriculture so we feel the immediate knock on effect of extreme weather. For example, now the topic of discussion is mangoes – we had unseasonal rains which destroyed a lot of crop. So the average person can no longer afford their favourite mango dish as the mangoes on the market are 3x more expensive.



Top of consumers' mind is often **sorting waste** (collecting glass bottles, paper and plastic packaging). This was learned in the 80s and 90s when Germany was more leading in this aspect in Europe at the time. There is also a focus to find less plastic packaging in order to **produce less waste**. Or, they try to buy products that are packed in multiple use glass bottles (with deposit return system).

Mobility is an issue too. **Flight shame** is a growing topic for several consumers. Many people think that one should **use the car less often** so many electric bikes have been bought and there's efforts to try to replace this vehicle to commute to work in the past years.

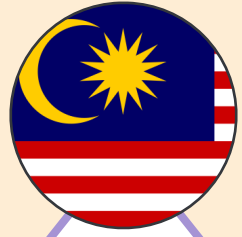
And finally, Germans did **cut down the amount of meat** they eat. There is a decreasing amount of meat which is eaten per person (this could be caused by health considerations too, but has an impact on sustainability).



At the moment, **water** is a big concern, impact of climate change, the **extreme weather** as this is what people can see first hand (e.g. no snow in the mountains, etc). In terms of what consumers are looking for:

- **Buy local** - to support local communities and less transport. We have a lot of small, independent stores popping up that are doing really well. It's made in France and their claim is that nothing has travelled more than 200 miles.
- **Seasonality** is also of interest - now seeing this called out on mainstream products from big supermarkets.

Have you noticed any changes to consumers' sustainable attitudes since the pandemic?



I think that sustainability has dropped off the radar a bit post pandemic. Several of the zero-waste stores in KL have ceased trading. Engagement on the [zero waste app](#) has dropped too. There seems to be less effort put into managing plastic packaging and food waste.

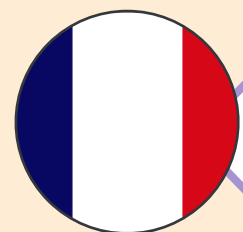
There has been a lot of change both for consumers and at a government level since the pandemic, so likely a **sustainability agenda has been lower in priority**.



Consumers' activity [with regards to sustainable living] has definitely been growing in the past couple of years, but I don't feel that has been influenced by the pandemic necessarily!

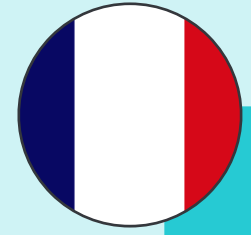


Health has become more top of mind post pandemic. One very big change, during the pandemic, was this recognition of 'I've got to do my bit to keep myself and my family safe'. People really bought into it and did their bit. And now, I think when sustainable initiatives are linked to health, people will listen to you much more. If talk about climate change in very broad terms, people won't understand as much, or won't listen, but **link it to them and their health, and they're more likely to buy into it**.



A big change we had with the pandemic was on food and a lot more people cooking from raw ingredients. A lot more DIY cooking and it has probably changed the way people purchase, by looking more at the ingredients list. But the biggest impact has been from products going out of stock - from the pandemic and also the war in Ukraine. The idea that resources can run out, I think was a shock, with many people realising that money can't buy everything and there are finite amounts.

B. What are the biggest barriers for consumers in your market holding them back from engaging more with sustainable brands & products?



Cost

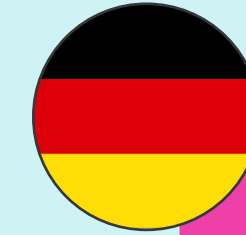
Time

Convenience/
effort

Pleasure

Pleasure definitely comes before sustainability. There is the idea that it's hard to live the sustainable life you want to without spending your life on it. I think consumers are ready for small efforts, so long as there is still some pleasure and it doesn't take too much time.

Right now it is scary to make changes with budget as a big constraint due to inflation. For example, the new regulations coming in that take some cars off the market and force you to change cars to be more sustainable – that is scary for people. A lot are just trying to survive and put food on the table, so despite the fact it's a central issue many care about, there is fear toward some changes.



Cost

Convenience going outside comfort zone

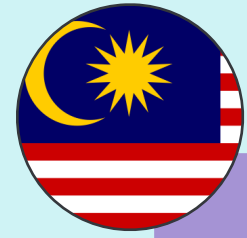
Trustworthiness

Conflicting information

Of course, costs are an important issue! But there are two other problematic issues. 1. **Trustworthiness** (greenwashing - Germans can be very critical here) & **conflicting information** on what is the best option e.g. is tetra pack or glass the better option? The effect of this is a feeling of 'it doesn't matter, my personal influence is too little to change things'. So they may go for the easier option even if they were willing to act sustainably.



What are the biggest barriers for consumers in your market holding them back from engaging more with sustainable brands & products?



Cost

Convenience

Modern not 'Kampung'

Vision from the top (government/corporations)

Cost is the main barrier. There is a perception that eating healthy food and living a more 'eco-friendly' lifestyle will cost more money (whether this is true or not) and there are often a lack of cheap alternatives.

There's also definitely an emotional barrier to acting more sustainably for consumers. It's important that sustainable solutions look or feel modern and worldly and not 'kampung' (i.e. from the village)



Cost

Don't know where to start

Convenience / infrastructure

There are certain things that are not as feasible - for example water brands in other countries may change from plastic bottles or set up refill stations. In our country, that would be hard to do - it becomes much more expensive and there would be the question of whether the water is safe.

For some people who read deeply there is discourse in India about the west being mainly responsible for spoiling the world, and India being asked to do things in terms of reducing emissions. It's interesting as our economy is growing, there are lots of policies which are being positively responded to. In some ways, it's easier as a developing nation to for example, change the vehicles, as the market is still growing so it's less about replacing existing vehicles like it is in other countries.

Thoughts on the future – predictions and consideration for brands to engage consumers



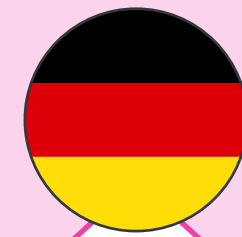
At a policy level, I hope that we finally have some members of parliament and local government who are starting to take sustainability more seriously. One of the most significant challenges here is urban planning, and I'm finally seeing some conversations around this topic.

I feel that in Gen Z we have a generation that is more likely to champion sustainability. They take some sustainable actions such as buying second-hand clothes, reducing plastic waste, etc. are actually quite 'trendy' at the moment. As with other countries, this generation seem more willing to take the initiative and challenge or agitate against the status quo (in a very Asian way of course – Extinction Rebellion is unlikely to happen here.) I have a hope that by localizing the challenges, they can bring about the awareness and therefore the changes that need to happen.



Culturally, we have a very strong reuse habit with clothes, electronics, packaging. Those habits encourage recycling too, especially if we are incentivised to do it. But you can't incentivise with money – we are a collective culture so it's about doing something together. I think that's where the answer lies. Asking consumers to do something because the world is 2 degrees warmer, people understand it, but are puzzled as to what they should do about such broad issues. But if you bring it down to not just you, but your immediate neighbourhood community, then it becomes easier to understand and a collective way of responding, which people identify with. We are a very 'village' culture.

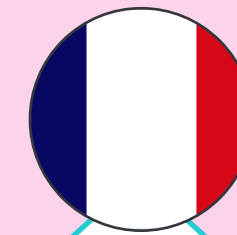
They do this in schools well, asking children to bring in plastic to recycle and then stating that 'this school gave X many kilograms'. Getting involved in the community is what brands need to associate vs. just telling consumers 'this brand is carbon neutral', which Indian consumers don't understand.



There are some good examples of more sustainable products that are becoming more popular, especially in personal hygiene. There's a stronger offer of more solid shower gel/shampoo blocks that come without any packaging. Solid soap is not new of course, but that concept is being embraced again by more people.

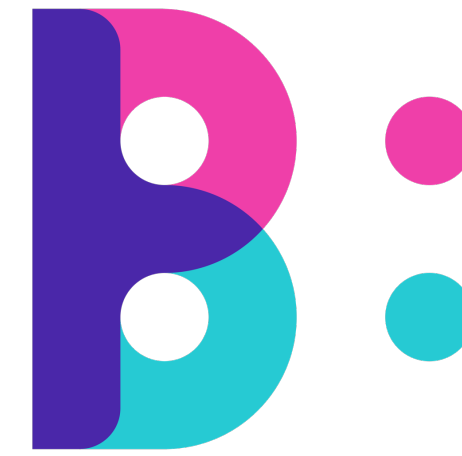
In general where there are any hints that packaging is 'made of recycled materials' instead of just 'can be recycled', that is seen really positively by consumers.

Personally, I'd like to see more brands offering repair services to help you use the products longer. E.g. Globetrotter and Patagonia not only offer a repair service, but have a second use offer for customers too. I think reuse is an interesting concept for the future.



I think people in general are more and more interested in the story of the product and what it takes to make it. Not everyone will be actively engaged with sustainability, but knowing where the product comes from and who made it is engaging. Talking about the impact of it on the planet through that story will be key. People want the emotional story, but also appreciate the rational explanation of what it is they're buying and why it's benefiting them.

I think packaging is a key focus for brands in the near future and it will be about 'doing without the unnecessary to preserve the pleasure'. In my opinion, the key challenge will be reducing the amount of unnecessary packaging without impacting the pleasure of the experience for consumers.



A huge thanks to our global partners for sharing their expert opinions with us!

If you'd like to hear more about consumers attitudes surrounding sustainability across the world, please get in touch with us or our partners directly!



Stephane Lavelle

Think Tuvalu

France



Maren Clausen

Clausen Market Research

Germany



Piyul Mukherjee

Quipper research

India



Sophie Cox

Firestar Research

*Malaysia, Singapore &
SE Asia*