

CHAPTER 12

DOES A SUSTAINABLE ORIENTATION AFFECT GLOBAL CONSUMERS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH INTERNATIONAL ONLINE BRANDS?

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to shed light on the role that a sustainable orientation plays in strengthening the relationships between global consumers and online brands. Despite many previous studies about the importance of sustainability considerations for national consumers' brand commitments and purchase intentions, there is a lack of empirical studies focussing on this relationship from a global consumer perspective. A pre-study (consisting of focus group discussions) and a widely distributed international survey with responses from 74 countries show mixed results. Whereas the results from the focus groups imply that a sustainable orientation influences both global consumers' purchase intentions and brand commitments towards online brands, the survey results imply that global consumers' sustainable orientations do not affect purchase intentions directly,

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even though they influence brand commitments. An implication of these results is that an international online brand's possibility to portray a sustainable orientation plays an important role in strengthening the relationship with global consumers, especially regarding brand commitment.

Keywords: Global consumer; international online brand; sustainable orientation; purchase intention; brand commitment; relationships

INTRODUCTION

The Internet allows consumers around the world to interact with, purchase and build relationships with international online retailers on a broad scale (Ipsmiller et al., 2022; Özbek et al., 2022; Pan et al., 2022; Tolstoy et al., 2021; Yamin & Sinkovics, 2006). Based on international online business models, studies have been conducted on the relationships between consumers and online retailers, and the impact of sustainability on these relationships (Ignat & Chankov, 2020; Mangiaracina et al., 2015; Prajapati et al., 2022; Xiao et al., 2019). With a few exceptions (Zhang et al., 2018), most previous studies focus on a single product or industry and/or are based on consumer data collected from a smaller number of pre-specified markets. For example, there are studies about the relationship between online retailers and consumers from Belgium and Sweden (Agarwal & Teas, 2002); the United States, Canada and India (Ganguly et al., 2010); the United States and Turkey (Ozdemir & Hewett, 2010); Spain and the United Kingdom (Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2018); Germany and Taiwan (Cheng et al., 2019); China and Finland (Hallikainen & Laukkanen, 2018); the United States and Korea (Lee & Choi, 2019); the United States, Germany, China and India (Hoehle et al., 2015); and the Netherlands and Vietnam (Broeder & Wildeman, 2020). Although the aforementioned studies have contributed to increasing knowledge about international online marketing, there is still a lack of studies that investigate consumers from a broader global perspective while scrutinizing how consumers from a great variety of different markets regard the importance of sustainability and how this impacts their relationship with online retailers that sell international brands. This chapter aims to dig deeper into this question by studying relationships between global consumers and online brands from a global consumer perspective.

Many previous studies have focussed on consumers from a few different markets. On the other hand, this study uses the same survey to study consumers from multiple countries simultaneously. The term global consumer does not imply that certain consumers are global per se but rather that the study has a global reach, mapping consumers' perceptions on a global scale. Hence, we argue that we can capture the view of a great variety of consumers in various global markets with our study, and we call these consumers 'global consumers'. The respondents in this study's quantitative data set are from 74 countries; therefore, we can provide some novel information about the global consumer view of international online purchasing.

The premise for this chapter is, thus, that there exists a cohort of 'global consumers' exhibiting similar purchasing behaviours when shopping online. In this chapter, we define global consumers as individuals from different countries who are either currently in a relationship with or are in the process of establishing a relationship with a brand that is sold online. In such cases, the consumer might lack prior knowledge of a brand and the retailers that offer it. Thus, the consumer-brand relationship typically relies upon the consumer being presented with a visual representation and description of the product before making a purchase decision. Hence, consumers do not need a close relationship with a brand or an online retailer to purchase products. Still, previous research highlights the usefulness of adopting a relationship view (Eastlick et al., 2006; Pavlou et al., 2007) for understanding the exchange between consumers and international online brands/retailers. Even though relationships between consumers and retailers are not likely to be as strong as those investigated in industrial marketing contexts, the relationships are still important to study (Hadjikhani & Bengtsson, 2004). The reason for this is that even though the price may be important in initially attracting online customers, the consumers are likely to return only if they are provided with relationship-oriented benefits such as good customer service and on-time delivery (Reibstein, 2002).

Besides caring about customer service and on-time delivery, many consumers (private end-users of products and services) are giving increasing consideration to the environmental and social sustainability of products and business processes when they make purchase decisions (Toppinen et al., 2013). Sustainability-oriented consumers express a personal inclination towards sustainability, such as showing social and environmental concerns (Sung & Park, 2018). This inclination will probably affect their purchase intentions (Han et al., 2009; Verma et al., 2019) and their brand commitment (Hadjikhani et al., 2011; Pavlou et al., 2007; Safari, 2014) to specific brands.

In extant retailing literature, however, it is not evident how global consumers' sustainable orientation affects their purchase intentions and brand commitments. Previous studies have indicated that consumers increasingly request companies to minimize the use of toxic materials and unnecessary waste on a global scale (Roman et al., 2015; Toppinen et al., 2013). Contrasting results, however, imply a need for clarification regarding the extent to which consumers' sustainable orientation affects actual purchase intentions (Phipps et al., 2013) and how it affects brand commitment (see Pavlou et al., 2007; Safari, 2014). Based on focus group discussions and a large global consumer survey, the relationships between global consumers' sustainable orientation, purchase intentions and brand commitments are, therefore, tested in this chapter. By doing this, we can shed light on the impact of global consumers' sustainable orientation on their purchase intentions and brand commitments, which will influence their relationship with international online brands and retailers. By investigating these relationships, this chapter can contribute to international retailing literature with relevant insights into how online retailers can use a sustainable orientation strategy to strengthen the relationship with consumers from many different parts of the world, that is, with a global consumer base.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Since its infancy, the marketing research field has been signified by various theoretical paradigm shifts (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995). Influential theories are the transaction cost theory (Levitt, 1960) and the relationship network perspective (Håkansson, 1982). While transaction cost theory focusses on exchanges between different market actors, network researchers generally view exchanges as the foundation for long-term relationship building. Relationship-oriented researchers have shown that the relationship-building process is often signified by mutual adaptations between business partners, which enhances the development of trust and commitment in business relationships (Eastlick et al., 2006; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Contrary to this view, transaction cost theorists typically regard exchanges as signified by short-term, rational and opportunistic actions, where switching one business relationship with another is easy.

Relationships in the e-Commerce Context

Building on relationship-oriented ideas, previous e-commerce studies have highlighted the importance of studying consumers and online retailers through a relational lens (Eastlick et al., 2006; Pavlou et al., 2007). Specifically, a relational perspective is needed when studying the interaction between global consumers and international online retailers (Safari, 2012, 2014; Safari et al., 2013; Safari & Thilenius, 2013). Building on these ideas, this study draws upon a relational exchange approach, where commitment is seen as a necessary foundation that holds the consumer–brand/retailer relationship together (Safari, 2014; Safari & Albaum, 2019). When a global consumer decides to commit to a brand, a relationship is developed between the two parties (Eastlick et al., 2006). An aspect that generally increases commitment in relationships is affective commitment, a measure of how much one party likes the counterpart (Thilenius Lindh & Rovira Nordman, 2020). Geyskens et al. (1996) describe affective commitment as the ‘desire to continue the relationship’ (p. 225), thus emphasizing its important role in enhancing a relationship’s longevity and success (Thilenius Lindh & Rovira Nordman, 2020). The affective part of commitment has also been shown to be an important ingredient for enhancing long-term relationships between consumers and brands (O’Malley & Tynan, 2000; Safari, 2014; Safari & Albaum, 2019).

Sustainability Orientation

Sustainability-orientated consumption aspires to enhance healthy living for everyone with due consideration of the earth’s capacity. Sustainability considerations are, thus, becoming increasingly likely to influence the relationship between consumers, brands and retailers (Roman et al., 2015; Toppinen et al., 2013). Sustainability-oriented consumers can be described as consumers that express a personal inclination towards sustainability, such as showing social and environmental concerns (see Sung & Park, 2018). For example, an increasing number of consumers worldwide demand that retailers minimize their use of toxic

materials and unnecessary waste (Roman et al., 2015). Sustainability-oriented consumers' view of a company's sustainability profile is, therefore, likely to affect their purchase intentions (Han et al., 2009; Verma et al., 2019) and make them look for brands that live up to their standards. Previous research has implied that sustainability considerations affect consumers' purchase intentions for different types of products, such as cars (Wang et al., 2021), energy-efficient appliances (Waris & Hameed, 2020) and clothing (Buzzo & Abreu, 2019). Park and Lin (2020) indicate that there is a relationship between consumers that consider recycling, reuse and general product responsibility to be important and these consumers' purchase intentions. Other scholars have supported this view and have provided evidence that sustainability positively affects purchasing among consumers (Lavuri et al., 2022). Thus, a consumer's sustainability orientation is likely to positively affect purchase intentions towards specific brands online that fit the consumer's demand profile. Based on the above arguments, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H1. A sustainability orientation among global consumers positively affects their purchase intentions towards their chosen brands online.

Besides purchase intentions, marketing scholars are particularly interested in consumers' brand commitment, defined as the emotional or psychological attachment to a brand (Byun & Dass, 2015). Brand commitment is a key element in predicting the brand–consumer relationship stability and a driver of consumer loyalty and repeated purchases (Byun & Dass, 2015). Studies focussing on the relationship between a sustainability orientation and brand commitment have shown that while consumers are often willing to increase their commitment towards sustainable brands, the actual effect of sustainability on brand commitment tends to be low (Davies & Gutsche, 2016; Szmigin et al., 2009). Brands that want to achieve strong commitment from global consumers must work with their sustainability values regarding product recycling, product reuse and environmental preservation (Loureiro & Kaufmann, 2016; Shao & Lassleben, 2021). A recent study by Sánchez-González et al. (2020) indicates that companies' sustainable orientation can lead to increased customer loyalty and brand commitment. A consumer's sustainability orientation is, thus, likely to positively affect global consumer brand commitment towards specific brands online that fit the consumer's demand profile. Based on the above arguments, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H2. A sustainability orientation among global consumers positively affects global consumer brand commitment towards sustainability-oriented brands online.

Brand commitment is vital for long-standing relationships (Eastlick et al., 2006) between consumers and retail companies. When brand commitment is strong among consumers, they tend to prefer that brand over other brands, leading to increased retailer profit (Bouhleb et al., 2011). Brand commitment,

however, involves two behavioural features. The consumer can either have the intention to purchase from the brand because of brand commitment (Eastlick et al., 2006; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) or engage in switching behaviour because of the short-term benefits of using another brand (Safari & Albaum, 2019). Previous international online retailing studies (Safari & Yamin, 2016; Yamin & Sinkovics, 2006) imply that international retailers need to focus on building strong relationships with consumers to increase consumer brand commitment and thereby reduce the importance of other external factors. Brand commitment possesses two main behavioural consequences: the intention of buying again to maintain the relationship (Debenedetti, 2004) and change resistance (Bouhleb et al., 2011). Based on the above arguments, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H3. Brand commitment positively affects global consumer purchase intentions towards online brands.

In summary, global consumers' commitment to brands depends on how much they like a brand and its values. Therefore, a brand's perceived sustainable orientation is probably important for consumers who care about sustainability issues. A brand displaying a sustainable orientation is likely to positively affect both purchase intention (Buzzo & Abreu, 2019; Wang et al., 2021; Waris & Hameed, 2020) and brand commitment (Sánchez-González et al., 2020). Brand commitment is also likely to affect purchase intention (Debenedetti, 2004; Eastlick et al., 2006). Building on these ideas, a conceptual model (Fig. 1) is suggested.

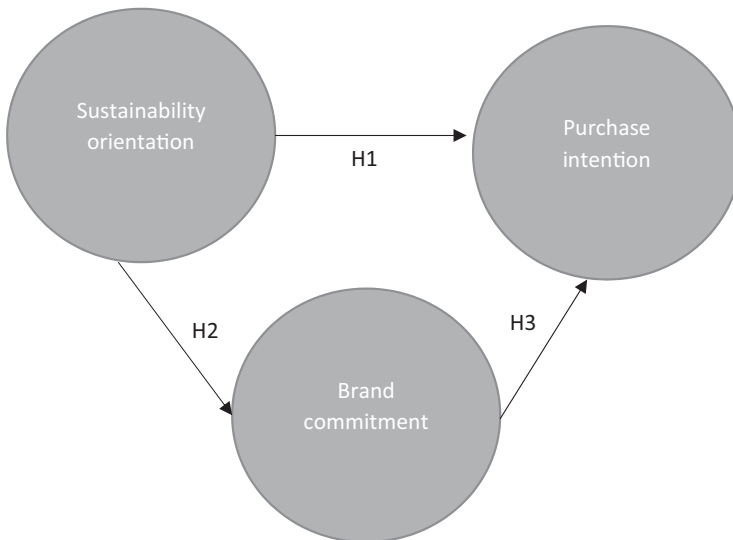


Fig. 1. The Model and Hypotheses Paths.

RESEARCH METHODS AND RESULTS

Pre-study

This study is based on data from a pre-study and a questionnaire. In 2019, convenience sampling was commissioned for three focus groups with 16 participants. The participants are Master's students aged 19–35 (13 females and 3 males). They originated from the following countries: Sweden (5), Finland (3), Germany (2), The Netherlands (1), South Africa (1), Lebanon (1), Mexico (1) and Rwanda (1). One focus group member would not reveal this information. The focus group discussions were conducted (in English) to investigate the relationships between (among other issues) sustainability, brand commitment and purchase intention to obtain insights on the overall global consumer view relating to these aspects in general. The focus group participants were not instructed to think about a pre-decided brand/retailer but spoke freely about different brands during the discussion. Focus group discussions are frequently used as a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of a social issue (such as consumption) and are also often utilized as one of several techniques in a multi-method research design (O.Nyumba et al., 2018). This chapter's findings from the focus group discussions provided ideas for the larger quantitative investigation. The focus group participants were purposefully recruited and selected (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011) based on their online purchasing experience from an international online retailer during the last 3 months. The focus group discussions were led by an experienced discussion leader, who transcribed and analysed the discussions after they were finalized. Example quotes from the focus groups relating to sustainability orientation, brand commitment and purchase intention are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Example Quotes from One of the Focus Group Discussions.

Subject Matter Discussed in the Focus Group	Example Quotes from the Focus Group Discussions
The sustainability orientation – purchase intention relationship	(FG1, Female, The Netherlands) 'but nowadays you can choose from so many different things so if you don't like that part of it you can buy something else, like there are even newer brands that do everything sustainable'.
The sustainability orientation – brand commitment relationship	(FG1, Female, Sweden) 'I know that if you look at H&M they are working, 'cause they have been criticised a lot, like just for example now they even make special collections that are more environmental friendly. They use recycled materials to make new clothes and stuff like that because they have been criticised a lot. Then I'm not saying what they're doing, or that everything is great but they [are]at least taking steps into making things better'.
The brand commitment – purchase intention relationship	(FG1, Male, Germany): 'I want very good quality that's right but oh that's true my shoes are from the same brand because I've known of the quality there and they're made in the US ... it's a brand that fits my expectations ...'.

The Main Study – The Quantitative Data Collection Project

The main study is based on data from an online questionnaire about global consumers' relationships with an online brand of their choice. The respondents were asked to think of a brand and respond with this brand in mind. Like the focus group participants, the questionnaire respondents originate from many different countries, are online shoppers and can speak English.

During the autumn of 2020, the online questionnaire was designed and distributed in English to an international data set of global online consumers by combining a convenience sampling method, a forwarding sampling method and a purposive sampling technique. Students in an international Master's degree course about business research methods helped distribute the questionnaire. Even though the questionnaire was not distributed to a totally randomized sample (because the international students used their network connections to distribute the questionnaire), a strength of using this method in this context is that the respondents are more likely to be globally oriented than the average consumer. After 50 questionnaires were discarded (due to missing data), 773 questionnaires remained with respondents from 74 countries such as Sweden, Kenya, Croatia, the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Cameroon, Iran, France, Germany, Bangladesh, Spain, Norway, Canada, the Netherlands, Italy, Nigeria, etc. More information about the respondents is provided in [Table 2](#).

The questionnaire seeks information about, for example, the respondents' demographic affiliation, sustainability orientation, brand commitment and purchase intention. Items are measured using a 7-point ordinal scale where '1' indicates 'totally disagree', and '7' indicates 'completely agree'.

Previous research indicates that sustainability-oriented consumers care about product recycling, product reuse and environmental preservation (see [Loureiro & Kaufmann, 2016](#); [Shao & Lassleben, 2021](#)); the construct *Sustainability orientation* measures the degree to which consumers consider sustainability to be important. The sustainability orientation measure is an adaptation of items from [Duan and Aloysius \(2019\)](#) and [Hazen et al. \(2012\)](#). The construct builds on question items regarding an individual consumer's concern for (1) recycling and reuse, (2) product responsibility and (3) valuation of a refurbished/recycled product, the same as if it was new. The first two items are included for their significance in assessing the individuals' concern for the uniquely sustainable attributes of recycled and refurbished products. The third item complemented the first two

Table 2. Information About the Respondents.

Gender	595 identify as female, 177 identify as male
Mean age span	21–30 years
Level of education	48% with a Bachelor's degree 28% with a Master's degree
Mean household size	3
Online purchasing frequency (often)	54% make purchases monthly, weekly or daily
Online purchasing frequency (seldom)	45% make purchases a few times a year

by assessing the individuals' value attribution of refurbished/recycled products. Thus, the three items provide insight into the individuals' extrinsic and intrinsic value attributions as they relate to sustainability. The *Brand commitment* was measured using four items based on the work of [Rather \(2018, 2012\)](#) and [Chaudhuri and Holbrook \(2001\)](#). The construct evaluates individuals' personal beliefs for why they buy products online from one brand and builds on question items relating to hedonic values of customer commitment, brand affect, satisfaction and attitudinal loyalty: (1) I like it, (2) I feel committed to this brand, (3) they always meet my expectations and (4) I feel good when I use this brand. The dependent variable, *Purchase intention*, refers to individual desires to fulfil shopping inclinations ([Akar & Nasir, 2015](#)). *Purchase intention* is measured using three items previously used in [Anastasiadou et al. \(2018\)](#). The construct builds on the question items (1) I intend to keep buying from the Internet/web, (2) in the future, I believe that I will buy more things/services online and (3) I want to buy other things (that I have not bought previously) from the Internet in the future. Information about constructs and indicators connected to the individual question items in the model is presented in [Table 3](#).

Validity

LISREL analysis is the chosen method for analysing the data because of its revelatory potential (see [Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993](#)). The fit of the data to the model, construct and discriminant validity and the iterations validating items were, thus, ascertained using LISREL ([Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993](#); [Martínez-López et al., 2013](#)). Evaluation of the model establishes that no threats to the validity,

Table 3. Constructs, Question Items and Indicators.

Constructs (with Cronbach's Alpha) and Indicators	R ²	T	Factor Loading
<i>Sustainability orientation</i> ($\alpha = 0.752$)			
I am concerned about recycling and reuse	0.82	4.86	0.91
I am concerned about product responsibility	0.70	8.80	0.84
I value a refurbished/recycled product the same as if it were new	0.30	18.41	0.55
<i>Purchase intention</i> ($\alpha = 0.832$)			
I intend to keep on buying from the Internet/web	0.55	16.71	0.74
In the future, I believe that I will buy more things/services online	0.90	4.49	0.95
I want to buy other things (that I have not bought previously) from the Internet in the future	0.67	13.83	0.82
<i>Brand commitment</i> ($\alpha = 0.609$)			
I buy products from this brand because...			
I like it.	0.40	15.60	0.56
I feel committed to this brand	0.25	17.33	0.50
They always meet my expectations	0.34	15.88	0.59
I feel good when I use this brand	0.58	9.73	0.76

convergent or discriminant are found; they are separated but consistent internally for each construct (see Figs. 1 and 2). Fig. 2 and Table 4 show that the tested model meets the established criteria for the p -value, $p > 0.01$ (Fornell & Larker, 1981; Steenkamp & van Trijp, 1991). Table 3 shows that the data meet the criteria of $R^2 > 0.2$, t -values > 1.96 (Eriksson, 1998) and factor loading (completely standardized solution) > 0.3 (Holm et al., 1996). Table 3 also presents Cronbach's alpha for each construct (cf. Boateng et al., 2018).

Results from the Main Study

The relationships between the constructs are presented in Fig. 2. Three hypotheses and their paths are tested in the model, with purchase intention as the dependent variable. Significant paths are considered confirmed hypotheses, and non-significant paths are interpreted as providing no support for the hypothesis. Fig. 2 and Table 4 present the results of the hypothesis testing.

The model's reliability is found to be sufficient, with a p -value of 0.06 establishing that the data fit the model due to the criteria being met. The first hypothesis that a sustainability orientation among global consumers positively affects their purchase intentions towards their chosen brands online is not supported (0.06 \dagger ; 1.43). The confirmation of the second hypothesis (0.18***; 3.84) signifies a positive relationship between sustainability orientation and brand commitment towards sustainability-oriented brands online. Additionally, the third hypothesis, that brand commitment positively affects global consumer purchase intention towards online brands, is supported (0.36***; 6.86). There

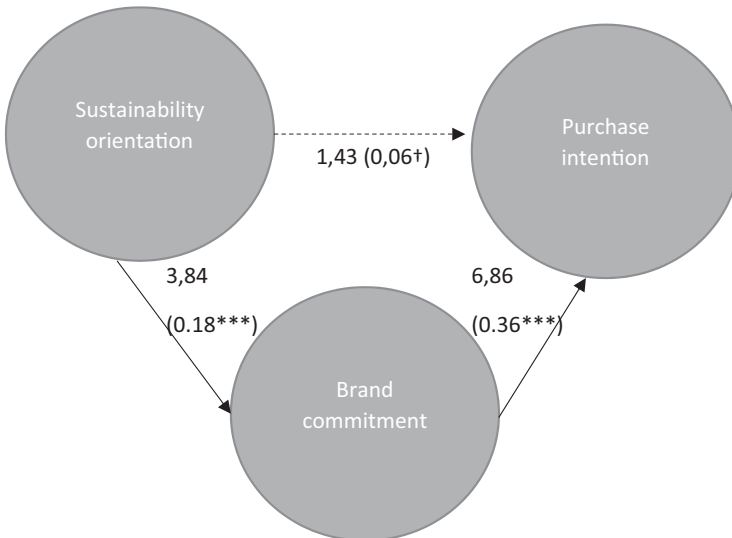


Fig. 2. The Model with t -Values and Estimates. The Indirect Standardized Effects of KSI on ETA Is 3.55 (0.06), Indicating the Mediating Effect of Brand Commitment.

Table 4. The Model's Paths and Significance.

Paths (independent – dependent)	Estimate	t-Value
H1 Sustainability – Purchase intention	0.06†	1.43
H2 Sustainability – Brand commitment	0.18***	3.84
H3 Brand commitment – Purchase intention	0.36***	6.86

Note: † $P < 0.1$, * $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$, *** $P < 0.001$; $n = 773$.

Table 5. Key Statistics of the Tested Model: Structural Equation Modelling.

Fit Measures	Fit Guideline	References	Model ($n = 773$)
Chi-square (P -value)	$P \geq 0.05$		43.60 (0.02)
Chi-square/df	$P \leq 3.0$	Segars and Grover (1993)	1.61
GFI	$P \geq 0.90$	Hayduk (1988)	0.99
AGFA	$P \geq 0.80$	Hayduk (1988)	0.98
CFI	$P \geq 0.90$	Byrne (2001)	0.99
TLI (NNFI)	$P \geq 0.90$	Bentler and Bonnet (1980)	0.99
RMSEA	$P \leq 0.08$	Byrne (2001)	0.03

is also support for an indirect effect or mediating effect of brand commitment on purchase intention. Table 5 presents the key statistics for the structural equation model.

ANALYSIS

The focus group analysis implied that a relationship exists between sustainability orientation, brand commitment and purchase intention among global consumers. Some focus group discussants even indicated that it was important for them that brands work with recycling and product responsibility for their long-lasting brand commitment to be evoked. That a brand cares about sustainability issues is, thus, of particular importance for sustainability-oriented global consumers to develop positive emotions towards the brand.

The quantitative analysis results contradict the focus groups' results, given that no significant relationship between sustainability orientation and purchase intention could be confirmed. In line with previous research results (Roman et al., 2015; Toppinen et al., 2013), several focus group discussants indicated that they were sensitive to the sustainability endeavours of the brands they purchased from. Lack of support for the first hypothesis, thus, signifies a relationship between global consumers' valuation of sustainability orientation that is more complex than was previously anticipated (Khan & Hameed, 2019; Park & Lin, 2020; Suki, 2016). While many respondents in the questionnaire answered that they cared about sustainability issues (the sustainability items scored high), a sustainability orientation does not impact purchase intention significantly. These results imply that the purchase intentions of global consumers are formed by a compilation of

multiple valuation factors and not merely the result of a single altruistic view or ideology. Another explanation might be related to the attitude-behaviour gap that has been investigated extensively in previous studies (Boulstridge & Carrigan, 2000; Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014; Shaw et al., 2016).

The second hypothesis was, however, supported. Support for the second hypothesis implies that there exists a positive relationship between sustainability orientation and brand commitment among global consumers, which has also been indicated in previous studies (Sánchez-González et al., 2020). The result of the analysis also supports the result from the pre-study. Several focus group discussants indicated that they expect brands to work with sustainability issues (such as recycling and product reuse) in exchange for their long-lasting commitment to the brand. One implication of these results is that global consumers not only have expectations concerning a brand's quality and consistency but also expect that the brand is sustainability-oriented. An online brand that wants to build long-term relationships with global consumers benefits from showing that the brand is sustainability-oriented and that the company behind the brand is actively engaged in recycling and reuse and acts responsibly.

Additionally, the third hypothesis is supported by the results from both the pre-study and the results from the questionnaire. Offering support to previous research findings (Bouhrel et al., 2011), brand commitment positively affects global consumer purchase intentions towards online brands. This result implies that international online brands must build strong relationships with global consumers (Safari, 2014; Yamin & Sinkovics, 2006) to support their long-term survival. The analysis confirms that for global consumers, the impact of brand commitment on purchase intention is more profound than the impact of a sustainability orientation on purchase intention. Once a global consumer is committed to a brand, it has a greater propensity to engage in long-term business relationships with the brand (Safari, 2014).

Taken together, the analysis reveals that relationships between global consumers and international online brands are complex and multifaceted. Furthermore, the quantitative study's results indicate a mediation effect of sustainability orientation on brand commitment and purchase intention. The results imply that a sustainability orientation increases the effect or strength of brand commitment on purchase intention from the perspective of global consumers when they choose which online brand to purchase from. While previous research has suggested that the effects of sustainability measures on brand commitment tend to be low (Davies & Gutsche, 2016; Szmigin et al., 2009), the mediation findings of this study present a new quandary. If the direct effect of a global consumer's sustainability orientation on its purchase intentions cannot be confirmed, brand managers may be led to believe that sustainability efforts are merely practices that support good public relations campaigns. However, the mediation effect suggests that sustainability efforts are important and that global consumers are aware of and consciously evaluate the sustainability efforts of brands, impacting their purchasing decisions. Supporting previous studies that have found evidence that sustainability approaches influence purchase intentions (Khan & Hameed, 2019; Lavuri et al., 2022; Park & Lin, 2020; Suki, 2016), this study indicates that the

effect of a global consumer's sustainability orientation on its purchase intentions is indirect. That is to say that many global consumers expect the brands they purchase from to behave sustainably, and this is important for them when they commit to a specific brand.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This chapter addresses the lack of studies that investigate consumers from a broader global perspective and scrutinizes how consumers from a great variety of different markets regard the importance of a sustainable orientation related to brand commitment and purchase intention. We created a model to contribute more information about these issues. We discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the results below.

Theoretical Implications

The chapter adds to existing knowledge by focussing on a sample of global consumers and their relationships with online brands. Although previous studies have focussed their investigations on multiple markets simultaneously (Ignat & Chankov, 2020; Prajapati et al., 2022; Xiao et al., 2019), this study can contribute to the international online brand and retailing literature with a global consumer view of international online purchasing. By highlighting this, we build on a current research stream in international retailing literature that focusses on investigating how international online retailers can act to improve their connection to foreign consumers (Özbek et al., 2022; Tolstoy et al., 2021). The results of this study imply that international brands benefit from highlighting sustainability aspects when their offerings are communicated to online consumers on a global scale. The results imply that a stronger relationship between global consumers and international online brands is possible if the brand can portray a sustainable orientation. This especially affects brand commitment but also indirectly affects purchase intention. Even though many global consumers are likely to conduct sporadic or one-time purchases from international online brands that provide them with a good offer on a specific product, switching behaviour is likely to occur (Safari & Albaum, 2019) if the brand is not able to build a relationship with the consumer and connect the consumer to the brand.

The results of this study also have implications for the consumer–brand/retail relationship in general. Contrary to some previous studies (Khan & Hameed, 2019; Suki, 2016), the results of this chapter imply that a sustainability orientation does not directly affect the purchase intention of consumers, even though an indirect effect can be detected. The impact of a sustainability orientation effect on purchase intention is mediated by brand commitment. One implication of these results is that purchase intention is indirectly affected by the online sustainability orientations of brands and retailers. The study thereby seeks to contribute to the debate on whether or not sustainability issues influence brand commitment. Because we found a direct effect of consumers' sustainability orientation

on brand commitment, our results somewhat contradict previous results about the sustainability-brand commitment relationship, indicating that the actual sustainability effect on brand commitment tends to be low (Davies & Gutsche, 2016). The results add to the findings of Shao and Lasseben (2021), who show that consumers' actions are often determined by individual factors and that environmental attitudes impact how they regard brands. In line with Sánchez-González et al. (2020), we argue that brand commitment is important for the relationship between consumers and brands to flourish and that retailers need to work with sustainability efforts regarding brands to strengthen this relationship.

Finally, the study highlights the importance of using a relational exchange approach when studying the interaction between global consumers and international online retailers (Safari, 2014; Safari & Thilenius, 2013). The results imply that commitment is an important foundation that holds the consumer–brand relationship together (Safari, 2014; Safari & Albaum, 2019). Building relationships is possible in the context of global consumers and international online brands, but it is important for the brands to show that they are sustainability oriented to strengthen their relationships with sustainability-oriented global consumers.

Managerial Implications

Insights generated in this chapter can be leveraged by managers in international online retail companies in several ways. Investments made to increase sustainability can offer a chance to move past thresholds for growth and build new relationships with global consumers on the Internet. Every company must balance short-term gains against gaining a sustainable position as a strong, legitimate community member (Elg et al., 2017). Companies can attract a new and sustainability-oriented consumer base by preparing to make substantial initial investments and committing to an international e-commerce strategy that portrays their sustainability orientation for global consumers. Although the Internet has provided international retailers with prerequisites and possibilities to reach global consumers, the Internet has also generated a highly competitive environment. To become successful, it is important to be aware of the impact of extrinsic cues, such as working in accordance with a sustainability-oriented approach. Successful sustainable business models build on approaches that are used to control sustainability aspects in production, service offerings and the support system to attract global consumers. Brands and retailers that succeed in implementing a successful sustainable business model have better opportunities to stand out against the competition in international markets and to build long-term relationships with loyal consumers.

Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

This study is based on a sample of global consumers from several countries, but all these countries are not equally represented. This study's respondents are mostly women from Europe and other Western economies. However, cultural and contextual factors regarding what is considered the right way to act may

vary across the world (Elg et al., 2017). Therefore, we suggest that future studies focus on investigating consumers' perceptions in other parts of the world to obtain a more regionally representative sample. For example, do consumers from Africa and South America have the same perceptions as the respondents in the current study, and how much are they affected by their sustainability orientation when engaging with international online brands? Even though the combination of a convenience sampling method, a forwarding sampling method, and a purposive sampling technique was beneficial in reaching a multitude of respondents in many parts of the world, the method can be developed in future studies to enable more data to be collected over longer periods of time to achieve a greater number of observations and a greater geographical variety. Furthermore, we do not distinguish between different product types or industries, and it is important that this is considered in future studies.

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