



Sustainable Customer Development Strategies in Nordic Countries

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores sustainable customer development strategies within Nordic countries, highlighting the complex relationship between customer engagement strategies and sustainability objectives. As businesses increasingly face the dual pressures of meeting evolving customer expectations and addressing environmental challenges, this study underscores the necessity of aligning business practices with societal well-being.

By synthesizing existing literature and empirical data, key themes such as circular economy principles, responsible consumption, and stakeholder collaboration are identified as central to sustainable customer development strategies. Theoretical frameworks, including the Triple Bottom Line and the Theory of Planned Behaviour, are employed to understand the motivations behind sustainable customer engagement, with contributions from scholars like Kotler, Keller, and Elkington providing a foundation for the analysis. These frameworks are further validated by empirical data collected through a questionnaire distributed to experts in the field, with insights gathered from 37 experts across the Nordic region, who were selected for their experience in sustainability within the Nordic countries and their roles in management and business development.

The findings reveal both opportunities and challenges in implementing sustainable customer engagement practices within the Nordic context. While the region's commitment to sustainability provides fertile ground for innovation, there are significant gaps in the current body of research, particularly in areas such as longitudinal studies, industry-specific analyses, and the exploration of sustainable practices within Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Additionally, the influence of cultural diversity on customer engagement remains underexplored, presenting a critical area for future research. By providing a comprehensive overview of sustainable customer development, this research equips stakeholders with the knowledge needed to navigate the challenges and opportunities associated with sustainability in the Nordic context.

Key words: Sustainable customer development, Nordic countries, Customer engagement

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GLOSSARY or ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS (choose one or other)

CSR	corporate social responsibility
EPSI	European performance satisfaction index
ESG	environmental, social, and governance
EU	European Union
FP	financial performance
NGOs	nongovernmental organizations
NPD	new product development
NSRS	Nordic sustainability reporting standard
PCE	perceived consumer effectiveness
ROI	return on investment
SCRM	sustainable customer relationship management
SD	sustainable development
SDG	sustainable development goals
SDI	Sustainable Development Index
SoG	shades of green
TBL	triple bottom line
TPB	theory of planned behavior
TRA	theory of reasoned action
UN	united nations

1 INTRODUCTION

In an era marked by growing environmental consciousness and evolving customer expectations, businesses face the unique challenge of crafting strategies that not only foster customer engagement but also actively contribute to long-term environmental and social well-being. Amid this backdrop, the Nordic countries, renowned for their progressive situation on sustainability, offer a distinctive context to explore the convergence of these critical objectives. This thesis is a comprehensive exploration of sustainable customer development within the Nordic countries, aiming to illuminate the strategies, theoretical frameworks, key themes, and existing gaps that define this dynamic field.



Figure 1. SDG goals (UN site)

1.1 Background and Context

In a world grappling with complex global challenges, including climate change and resource scarcity, the concept of sustainable customer development has emerged as a pivotal strategy for businesses striving to harmonize economic

growth with environmental responsibility. This paradigm shift highlights a critical realization, businesses manage influence that extends far beyond profit-generation. Within this evolving landscape, sustainable customer development embodies a proactive approach, one that not only nurtures brand loyalty and market growth but also contributes to broader societal and environmental well-being.

At the heart of this dynamic landscape, the Nordic countries—Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden—stand as exemplars of sustainable innovation and progressive values. Renowned for their forward-thinking approaches, these nations have forged a unique path characterized by their unwavering dedication to ecological balance, social equity, and economic prosperity. This consistent commitment not only provides insights into the business landscape within the Nordic countries but also serves as a model with the potential to catalyse global sustainable transformation.

The distinctive attributes of the Nordic region provide an ideal backdrop for our exploration. A fusion of awe-inspiring landscapes, technological advancements, and robust social systems creates an environment conducive to the adoption of sustainable practices. The region's heightened public awareness of environmental and social concerns, coupled with a strong tradition of corporate social responsibility, fosters an ecosystem where sustainable customer engagement can thrive.

Interestingly, the Nordic countries present a duality that encapsulates both the opportunities and challenges inherent in sustainable customer development. On one hand, their unwavering commitment to sustainability establishes fertile ground for innovative practices. On the other hand, the complexities of implementing sustainability are also magnified due to the elevated standards and expectations set by the region's stakeholders.



Figure 2. CSR concept (<https://www.thegivingmachine.co.uk/blog/posts/corporate-social-responsibility-a-simple-guide/>)

1.1.1 The Nordic Sustainability Reporting Standard (NSRS)



Nordic Sustainability Reporting Standard

The Nordic Sustainability Reporting Standard (NSRS) stands as a comprehensive set of guidelines dedicated to sustainability reporting and social responsibility within the Nordic countries (<https://www.nsr.eu/>). Crafted through collaborative efforts involving stakeholders from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, the NSRS serves as a testament to the collective commitment to transparency, accountability, and comparability in sustainability reporting across diverse organizations and industries. Rooted in its purpose, the NSRS extends its reach over a wide spectrum of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) concerns, including pivotal issues such as climate change, human rights, labour practices, and anti-corruption initiatives.

Central to its mission, the NSRS establishes a shared lexicon and a robust framework tailored to the complexities of sustainability reporting. It serves as an invaluable compass for organizations, providing the means to identify areas primed for improvement, gauge performance relative to peers, and coordinate coherent communications regarding their unwavering dedication to sustainability. Beyond its practical utility, the NSRS also symbolizes the pioneering spirit deeply embedded within the Nordic nations—a testament to their unwavering commitment to advancing sustainability on a global stage. This standard underscores their profound commitment, transcending mere words on paper to represent a sign of their resolute journey toward a more sustainable future.

1.2 Problem Statement and Research Objectives

1.2.1 Problem Statement and Research Objectives

Within the ongoing discourse on sustainability and customer engagement, a critical imperative arises, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the strategies employed by businesses in fostering supporting customer relationships while advancing sustainability objectives. This research endeavour is carefully designed to address this imperative by conducting a thorough exploration of the complex landscape of sustainable customer development within the Nordic countries.

At its core, my central inquiry revolves around a fundamental question: **“What methods can be employed to attain a comprehensive understanding of sustainable customer development in the Nordic Countries?”** To achieve this main objective, I employed a combination of methods. First, I conducted a comprehensive exploration of existing scholarly works to illuminate diverse research methodologies, theoretical frameworks, key themes, and identified gaps that collectively define the expansive domain of sustainable customer development. Second, I gathered empirical data through a questionnaire. Invitations were sent to approximately 400 experts, with around 80 experts receiving the questionnaire, ultimately resulting in 37 responses. These experts were selected for their experience in sustainability within the Nordic countries and/or their roles in management and business development. These responses provided valuable insights and practical perspectives that complement our literature review, offering a more

valuable and comprehensive understanding of sustainable customer development in the Nordic context.

This overarching inquiry is further enriched by a series of pivotal sub-questions that guide my expedition:

- **What key themes and concepts emerge from the literature on sustainable customer development, and how are these reflected in expert opinions?**

This sub-question directs my efforts towards discerning, analysing, and clarifying dominant themes, concepts, and trends within the domain of sustainable customer development by combining insights from scholarly works and expert responses.

- **How do different theoretical frameworks contribute to our understanding of sustainable customer development, and are these frameworks validated by expert feedback?**

Central to this sub-question is the exploration of diverse theoretical foundations employed by researchers, enhanced by expert opinions, to deepen our insights into sustainable customer development.

- **What gaps or areas of limited research exist within the literature on sustainable customer development in the Nordic countries, and do experts identify additional gaps or emerging issues?**

This sub-question embarks on the identification of research gaps by reviewing existing literature and confirming these findings with expert input, thereby shedding light on unexplored domains that require further investigation and outlining potential avenues for future research endeavours in sustainable customer development.

These insightful sub-questions chart a crucial path for my investigation, guiding me as I navigate the complex dimensions of sustainable customer engagement. By addressing these sub-questions, my aim is to construct a comprehensive panorama, delving into strategies, theoretical foundations, tangible challenges, and latent opportunities that define sustainable customer development.

Through this scholarly pursuit, my aspirations encompass a significant contribution to the knowledge ecosystem surrounding sustainable customer development

strategies. My insights are poised to resonate with businesses, policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders who share a vested interest in the harmonious interplay of sustainability and customer engagement

1.3 Scope and Limitations

This thesis focuses on analysing both the existing body of literature and empirical data related to sustainable customer development. While our exploration aims to provide a comprehensive overview, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. Firstly, although we conducted a thorough literature review, our findings are confined to the available literature up until the knowledge cut-off date in July 2023. Secondly, the empirical data was collected through a questionnaire distributed to experts, with responses from 37 participants. While these responses provide valuable insights, the sample size and selection may limit the generalizability of the findings. Lastly, while this study aims to offer insights that hold broad relevance, the scope is primarily focused on sustainable customer development within the Nordic countries, which may limit the applicability of the findings to other regions.

1.4 Methodology Overview

Our research methodology centres on a combination of a comprehensive literature review and empirical data collection through a questionnaire. First, we meticulously analysed and synthesized a diverse range of academic articles, reports, and publications to construct a holistic understanding of sustainable customer development. This approach allowed us to unearth underlying themes, examine various theoretical lenses, and identify gaps that call for further exploration. Second, we distributed a questionnaire to approximately 80 experts, with 37 responses received. These experts were selected for their experience in sustainability within the Nordic countries and/or their roles in management and business development. The empirical data gathered from these experts provided valuable insights and practical perspectives that complement and enhance our literature review, offering a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of sustainable customer development.

1.5 Importance and Contribution

Our study bears significance across academia, business communities, and policymaking spheres. Through a synthesis of existing knowledge, we aim to furnish a pivotal resource that guides decision-makers and strategists in navigating the complexities of sustainable customer development. Additionally, our research endeavours to lead the dialogue surrounding sustainable business practices forward, furnishing actionable insights conducive to the development of customer-centric endeavours that resonate with the ethos and goals of sustainable development.

1.6 Thesis Structure

The organization of this thesis is as follows:

The introduction sets the stage by presenting the context, problem statement, research objectives, scope, and significance of the study.

Following the introduction, the Literature Review section delves into key themes and concepts in sustainable customer development, integrating findings from the questionnaire regarding respondents' familiarity with concepts like the Triple Bottom Line (TBL), Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), and Circular Economy (CE). It also examines theoretical frameworks and updates the existing literature landscape with insights from the questionnaire.

The Methodology section outlines the research approach, detailing the design and administration of the questionnaire, the data collection and analysis processes, and the limitations encountered during the study.

Next, the Findings section presents the demographic profile of respondents, their familiarity with key concepts, their alignment and applicability of these concepts within their organizations, the challenges and considerations they face, and their perceptions and outcomes related to sustainable customer development practices.

Building on these findings, the Discussion section offers a detailed interpretation of the data, discussing the implications for sustainable customer development in the Nordic countries. This section provides insights into theory, practice, and future research.

The Limitations and Future Research section discusses the constraints of the study and proposes directions for future research based on emerging themes and unanswered questions from the questionnaire responses.

The Conclusion section summarizes the key findings, emphasizes the contribution of the study to existing knowledge, and discusses the implications for practice and policy.

Following the conclusion, the Recommendations section provides actionable insights for businesses, policymakers, and stakeholders based on the questionnaire findings.

Finally, the References section ensures comprehensive attribution to all sources cited throughout the thesis, maintaining academic integrity.

In the pages that follow, we embark on an exploration of sustainable customer development within the Nordic countries, driven by empirical insights and a commitment to contributing to a more sustainable future for businesses and societies.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The exploration of sustainable customer development within the Nordic countries goes beyond a mere examination of strategies; it unfolds a rich design of pivotal themes and profound concepts that collectively forge the very outlines of this evolving discourse. In their dedicated pursuits, researchers have illuminated a fundamental truth—the paramount significance of customer engagement strategies that seamlessly intertwine with comprehensive sustainability objectives. This interconnection is not merely coincidental; it's a strategic fusion born from an acute understanding of the inseparable connection between business and societal well-being.

Delving deeper, these scholarly endeavours magnify the indispensable nature of integrating environmental and social considerations into the very fabric of customer interaction models. The discourse has transcended transactional engagement; it's a convergence where values converge with commerce, and ethos blends with economics. The result is an approach that transcends the boundaries of conventional business models, where the sustainable customer engagement of today becomes the foundational legacy of tomorrow.

Emerging from this complex landscape are guiding points—key themes that serve as compass points for sustainable customer development strategies. The representation of circular economy principles redefines traditional business cycles, infusing sustainability and ecological harmony into the value chain. The advocacy for responsible consumption patterns indicates a consumer-centric era, empowering individuals as agents of positive change. And, in the proactive cultivation of stakeholder collaboration, businesses not only nurture customer loyalty but also foster partnerships that amplify collective impact.

The Nordic approach blends elements of green growth and transformative green economy models, emphasizing active state roles in economic steering, innovation, and industry collaboration. This reflects the region's neo corporatist traditions (cf. Andersen, 2020; Hildingsson et al., 2019; Kronsell et al., 2019).

Amidst these themes, the fundamental goal remains constant: to cultivate enduring, mutually beneficial, and sustainable customer relationships that thrive side-by-side with ecological and societal prosperity.

2.2 Key Themes and Fundamental Concepts in Sustainable Customer Development

Kotler and Keller (2016), Marketing management

In this seminal work, Kotler and Keller delve into the significance of sustainable marketing as a catalyst for sustainable development. They underscore that sustainable marketing involves crafting and delivering products and services that satisfy immediate customer needs while considering the long-term environmental, social, and economic impacts. Communication of sustainability efforts to stakeholders, including customers, investors, and employees, emerges as a pivotal component. The authors highlight exemplars of companies that have successfully ingrained sustainable marketing into their models, emphasizing the necessity of an organization-wide commitment. Their work underscores that sustainable marketing is not just an option—it's an essential tool for competitiveness and a more sustainable future.

Peattie, et al. (2010). Sustainability marketing

Peattie and Belz, propose a paradigm shift from traditional marketing to sustainability marketing, considering broader impacts. They advocate shared value creation, long-term perspectives, and integration of sustainability across business operations. Examples illustrate its potential to enhance loyalty, trust, and brand reputation. This article lays a compelling foundation for businesses aiming to align marketing with sustainability.

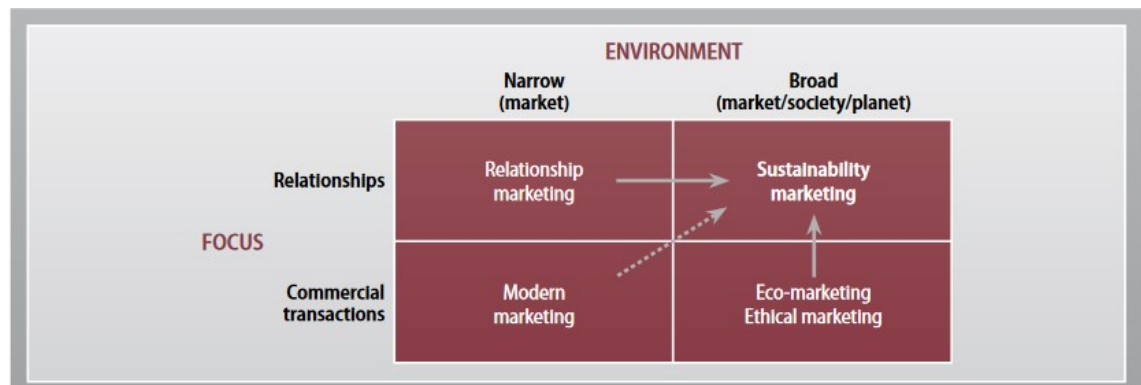


Figure 3. Towards a New Concept of Sustainability Marketing (Peattie, et al. 2010)

The whitepaper produced by Nordic Innovation emphasizes the environmental impact of the healthcare sector (Nordic Innovation 2019)

The "Nordic Whitepaper about Sustainable Healthcare" by Nordic Innovation addresses the pressing environmental challenge of climate change and the need for sustainability in the healthcare sector. The document emphasizes that healthcare services in developed countries contribute significantly to carbon emissions, making it crucial to target this sector to achieve UN sustainable goals. The Nordic countries are praised for their leadership in sustainable healthcare, achieved by adapting operations, setting sustainability criteria for procurements, and controlling hospital outputs. The whitepaper presents five main focus areas



Wastewater treatment plant in Lindköping.
Photo: Tekniska verken in Lindköping

Picture 1. Wastewater treatment plant in lidköping (Nordic innovation 2019)

related to Nordic sustainable healthcare: taking a broader perspective, creating

synergy with cities, encouraging innovation, focusing on sustainable hospital buildings, and fostering sustainable healthcare organizations. The Nordic approach to sustainability is holistic, recognizing the interconnectedness of hospitals with their cities and ecosystems.

Adrienn (2023), Sustainability in the Consumer Decision Journey: Comparing the Nordics and Eastern Europe

Adrienn's research investigates the integration of sustainability into the consumer decision journey, comparing the cases of Sweden and Hungary. The study explores differences in touchpoints across various stages of the decision journey and analyses their influence on consumers' sustainability approach. The findings underscore the significance of emphasizing the purchase and post-purchase phases for effective sustainability communication, while also revealing disparities in customer thinking and approaches between the two countries.

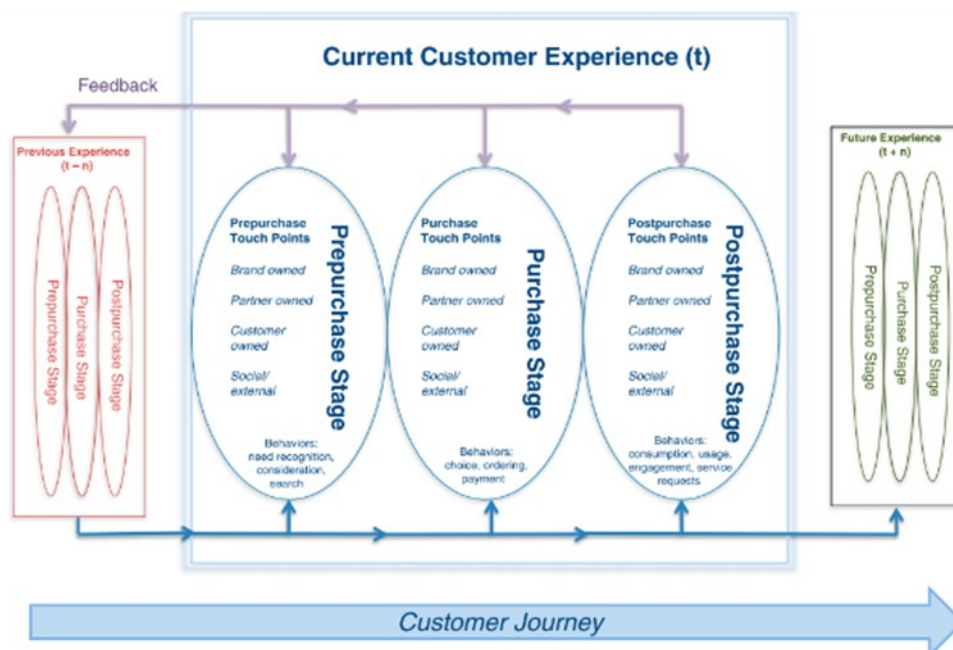


Figure 4. The consumer decision journey process (Adrienn 2023)

Iqbal and Todi (2015), the Nordic Model: Existence, Emergence and Sustainability

Iqbal and Todi's research examines the Nordic model's existence, emergence, and sustainability, with a focus on the welfare state. The study highlights the resilience of the Nordic model, particularly during economic challenges like the

2008 recession. The conclusion underscores the ongoing popularity of the welfare state in Nordic countries and its ability to adapt to internal and external factors while maintaining its core structure and impressive results.

Ferrer-Estévez & Chalmeta, (2023), Sustainable customer relationship management:

Sustainable Customer Relationship Management (SCRM) has emerged as a crucial area of study at the intersection of marketing, business management, and computer systems. SCRM integrates sustainability into customer relationship management, aligning businesses with the growing demand for socially and environmentally conscious practices. This systematic literature review employs the PRISMA methodology, content analysis, and bibliometric tools to comprehensively assess the state of SCRM research. It classifies existing knowledge into research categories, identifies major research streams, and outlines a future research agenda. This review addresses a critical gap in the field by offering insights into top contributing countries, authors, institutions, sources, and the most cited papers in SCRM. The findings presented in this section pave the way for a deeper understanding of SCRM's evolution and set the stage for future research in this dynamic domain.

Ambiguity and Capital in Sweden's Circular Economy

Niskanen, Anshelm, and McLaren (2020) analyse the circular economy (CE) concept in Sweden, highlighting its inherent ambiguity and the resulting consensus among key actors despite underlying local conflicts. Locally, resistance to extractive industries emphasizes biodiversity and long-term economic wellbeing, while nationally, a CE is promoted as a means for growth and sustainability through gradual transitions involving recycling and repurposing.

2.3 Exploring Corporate Social Responsibility as a Catalyst for Sustainable Business Practices

Corporate Social Responsibility, A Case Study Approach

Edited by Christine A. Mallin, this book examines CSR through diverse case studies. The intention is to exemplify the practical application of CSR across industries and global regions. Encompassing topics such as environmental sustainability,

labour practices, human rights, and community engagement, the cases provide analyses of initiatives, challenges, and outcomes. The book bridges theoretical frameworks with real-world practices, appealing to those keen on business's role in society and its contribution to sustainable development.

Carroll, et.al. (2010). the justification for corporate social responsibility from a business perspective

This comprehensive review explores the business case for CSR, emphasizing its strategic relevance. Drawing from diverse theoretical frameworks, the authors analyse empirical evidence, while addressing challenges like ROI measurement and greenwashing. This article presents a detailed analysis of CSR's strategic value, catering to academics, practitioners, and policymakers interested in the interplay between business and societal impact

Hichri and Ltifi (2021), Corporate Social Responsibility and Financial Performance in Sweden

Hichri and Ltifi's research examines the reciprocal connection between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and financial performance (FP) in Sweden. The authors shed light on the less-explored dynamics of the interaction between CSR and FP, offering insights into how these dimensions influence each other. Moreover, their exploration introduces the mediating effect of customer loyalty, revealing how CSR performance impacts FP through the lens of customer loyalty. This study bridges gaps in the literature, providing a valuable perspective on the intricate relationships within sustainable business practices.

Sanchez-Planelles et al. (2022), Identifying Different Sustainable Practices

Sanchez-Planelles et al.'s article contributes to the development of the Theory of Corporate Sustainability by analysing four companies using sustainable concepts and case-study protocols. The study explores the integration of sustainability in organizational strategies and its impact on value and supply chains. The research highlights the success of companies that embed sustainability in their core business, as well as the transformation challenges faced by mature companies seeking to adopt sustainable business models. Moreover, the study underscores the positive impact of purpose-driven executives and the substantial increase in sales and profitability resulting from the implementation of sustainable practices. The

authors emphasize the need to understand customer valuation of sustainable attributes and the transfer of value to stakeholders. This study provides valuable insights for executives aiming to enhance their organizational capabilities in sustainability integration.

Midttun et al. (2012), Government Policies on Corporate Social Responsibility in Four Nordic Countries: Alignment of Objectives and Divergence in Approaches

In the past, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) was primarily a business-centred concept, suggesting that businesses ought to willingly enhance their social and environmental responsibilities. More recently, CSR has increasingly attracted governments' attention, and is now promoted in public policy, especially in the European Union (EU). However, tensions may emerge when developed welfare states incorporate CSR into their public policies. This tension arises because CSR entrusts significant public welfare matters to the judgment of private enterprises. This voluntary issue assignment contrasts starkly with advanced welfare states' traditions favouring negotiated agreements and strong regulation to control corporate conduct. This article analyses the conflicts and compatibilities arising when advanced welfare states introduce CSR, focusing on how the two traditions diverge and on how conflicts are reconciled. Empirically, this study concentrates on four Nordic nations: Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. These countries are renowned for their advanced welfare state systems and are progressively seen as frontrunners in the implementation of CSR public policies. From interviews of 55 officials of government ministries, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), labour unions, and employer associations, the authors conclude that tension indeed exists between CSR public policies and advanced welfare state traditions in all four countries. While the objectives of CSR align with Nordic institutional traditions, the methods advocated by CSR conflict with Nordic practices such as corporatist agreements and rights-based welfare state regulation of social and environmental issues. The four Nordic countries examined share common goals, but differ in their approaches.

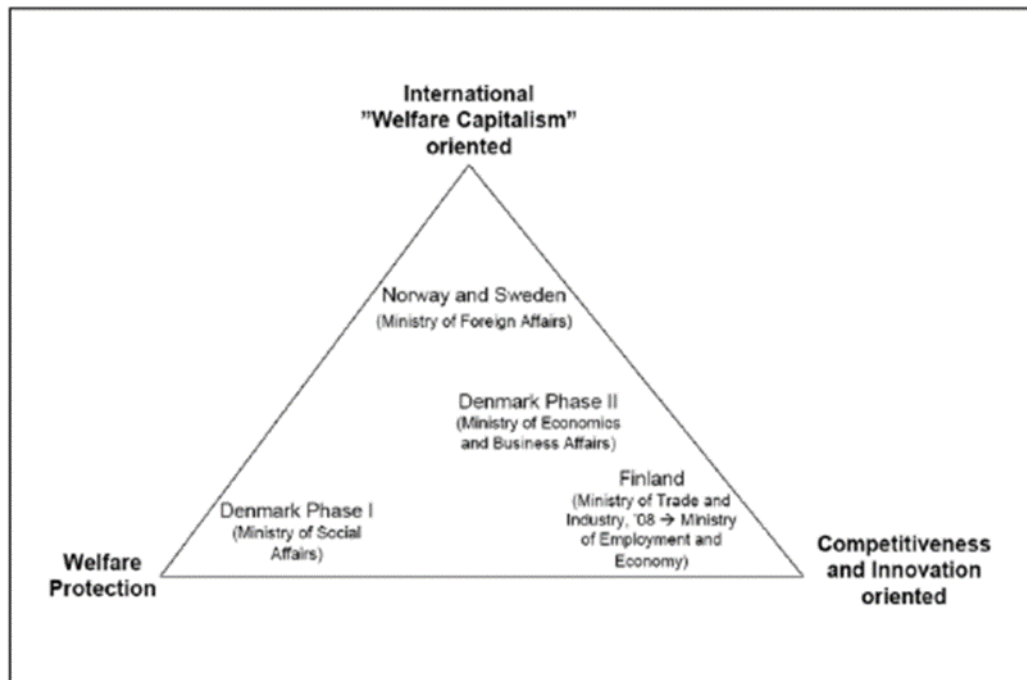


Figure 5. Governance strategies to increase compatibility between CSR and advanced Welfare states' policies (Midttun et al. 2012)

2.4 Theoretical Frameworks in Sustainable Customer Development

Elkington (1997), Cannibals with Forks

In "Cannibals with Forks", Elkington introduces the Triple Bottom Line—a paradigm incorporating social, environmental, and economic dimensions—as a framework for sustainable business practices. The book encapsulates case studies of companies embracing sustainability and offers practical guidance for others to adopt the Triple Bottom Line approach. This seminal work shapes the field of corporate social responsibility and sustainable business.



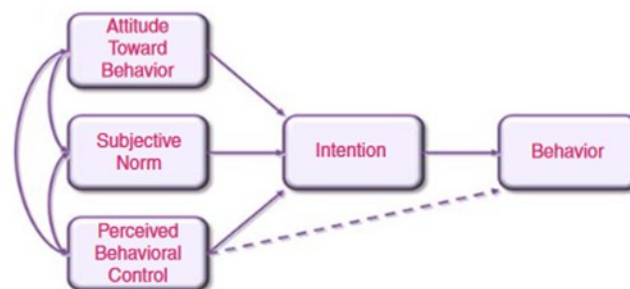
Figure 6. TBL concept (<https://uwex.wiscconsin.edu/stories-news/triple-bottom-line/>)

Critique of the Triple Bottom Line Concept

Kjøde, van der Velden, and Motevallian (2021) critically assess the "Triple Bottom Line" (TBL) concept, which aims to integrate environmental and social dimensions into business operations alongside economic considerations. The concept is intertwined with economic growth, making it inherently anthropocentric. Critics argue that the visual analogies of balance, like the "three-legged stool," are flawed because the environment is foundational to both economy and social well-being, rather than a separate pillar. Scholars have also criticized TBL for its measurement difficulties and potential for "green-washing." Even its originator, John Elkington, has recalled the concept, emphasizing that the TBL framework cannot support a true sustainability transition unless data is aggregated and analyzed to genuinely aid decision-makers in managing the systemic effects of human activity.

Sharma and Foropon (2019), Green Product Attributes and Green Purchase Behavior

The article, titled "Green Product Attributes and Green Purchase Behaviour: A Theory of Planned Behavior Perspective with Implications for Circular Economy" by Aasha Sharma and Cyril Foropon, focuses on understanding the behaviour of green consumers and its relevance to both marketing strategies and the design



Original TPB model
by Ajzen (1991)

Figure 7. TPB model (Sharma and Foropon 2019)

of sustainable products and services. The study builds upon the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and extends it by introducing environmental knowledge and perceived consumer effectiveness (PCE) while also examining three types of green purchase behaviour.

The authors investigate the interplay between product attributes (such as product risks and benefits) and the degree of environmental concern, the intention to make green purchases, and different types of green purchase behaviour. They emphasize that green products, including those with attributes like recyclability, durability, and energy efficiency, significantly influence consumers' decisions. The study reveals that consumers with varying degrees of environmental concern may engage in unconditional purchase, conditional purchase, or accidental purchase. Notably, product benefits, specifically cost-effectiveness and energy efficiency, play a crucial role in these decisions.

The article highlights the importance of considering these product attributes in communication and promotion efforts for green products. It emphasizes that consumers make rational purchase decisions and will choose green products when they match non-green products in quality, price, durability, and convenience.

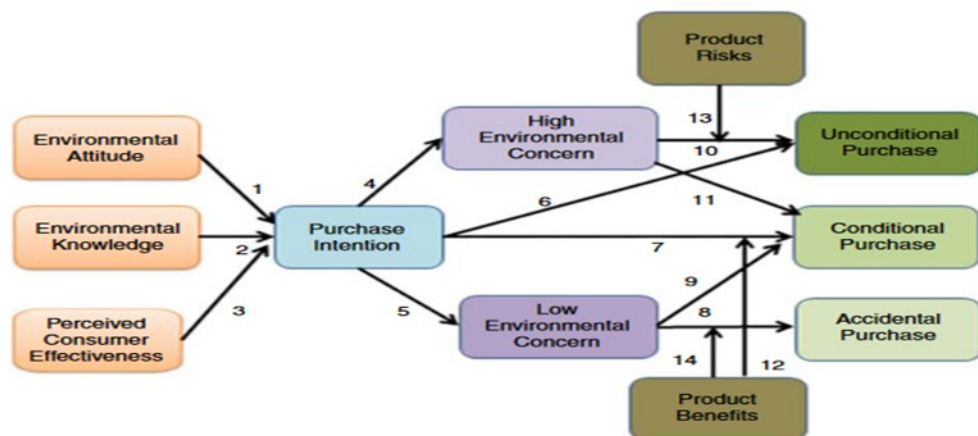


Figure 8. Extended TPB model (Sharma and ForoPON 2019)

Rex et al. (2015), Assessing the Factors Influencing Sustainable Behavioral Intentions

The article, titled "Evaluating the Drivers of Sustainable Behavioral Intentions: An Application and Extension of the Theory of Planned Behavior," focuses on understanding the factors influencing sustainable behavior intentions among consumers. The authors address the challenge that, despite the growing concern for environmental protection, society remains predominantly focused on disposability rather than sustainability.

The study conducted research in Australia, surveying 511 participants aged 18 and older. It tested two models, one employing the original Theory of Planned behavior (TPB) constructs and the other extending TPB to include internal ethics and moral intensity. The authors emphasize the importance of promoting sustainable practices and increasing consumer awareness and motivation, especially related to their internal ethics.

The study suggests that individuals need to consider the ecological and environmental impact of their consumption practices, leading to more sustainable choices. Various organizations and campaigns in Australia have encouraged sustainable practices, but consumption levels and the adoption of sustainable products remain low. The complexity of ethical and sustainable consumption practices highlights the need for further research.

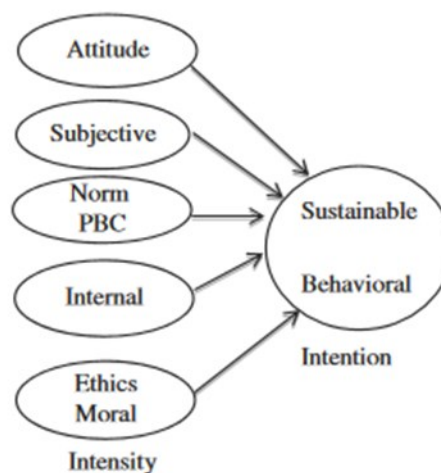


Figure 9. A conceptual model of sustainable behavioural intention (Rex et al. 2015)

The authors suggest that the TPB model can be enhanced by adding variables like internal ethics and moral intensity, as they significantly contribute to explaining sustainable behavioral intentions. Sustainable behavioral intentions are likely to occur when individuals have positive attitudes toward sustainable behaviors, receive support from their social network, and believe the actions are easy to achieve, align with their self-identity, and involve ethical and moral considerations.

Müller et al. (2021), Predictive Sustainability Model Incorporating Ecological Conscience and Moral Obligation

The literature review explores the critical factors influencing green consumer behavior in emerging markets, with a particular focus on Mexico. Recognizing the ethical and environmental significance of consumer choices, this review delves into the theoretical foundations of consumer behavior, including the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). It highlights the factors commonly associated with green purchase intention, such as attitudes, environmental knowledge, past behavior, social influence, social responsibility, and trust.

The review emphasizes the importance of the TPB in understanding consumer intention and the variables that significantly influence it. Specifically, perceived behavioral control, ecological conscience, and moral obligation are highlighted as critical determinants of green purchase intention, drawing from previous research in this field. Overall, this literature review provides a comprehensive foundation for the findings of the current study, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of green consumer behavior and its implications for emerging markets.

Circular Product Design in Nordic Industries

Shahbazi and Jönbrink (2020) highlight the critical role of product design and development in advancing the circular economy. Despite its importance, circularity aspects are often overlooked during the design phase. The authors present a set of generic design guidelines that align with various circular strategies, which support decision-making and enhance product circularity. These guidelines help companies map circular product design initiatives in the early stages of development, aiding in the identification of additional design guidelines as needed.

The study finds that while companies commonly adopt strategies like sourcing raw materials, recycling, and enhancing product robustness, the transition to other strategies such as repair, remanufacture, and reuse is gradual. The authors emphasize the necessity of integrating circular strategies comprehensively during the design process to avoid conflicts and ensure cost-effectiveness. Adapting product design to innovative business models is identified as the most effective approach for achieving a circular economy.

2.5 Innovation and Business Models for Sustainability Transitions

Aagaard, A. et al. (2021). Introduction to business models for sustainability transitions

The article titled "Introduction to Business Models for Sustainability Transitions" by Annabeth Aagaard, Florian Lüdeke-Freund, and Peter Wells explores the intersection of sustainability transitions and business models. The authors emphasize the need for radical transformations and new business models to address the persistent sustainability challenges facing modern societies. They introduce a conceptual framework referred to as the 'spiral' to illustrate the spectrum between micro-level considerations of business models and macro-level sustainability transitions. The 'spiral' framework motivates thinking systematically about the scope of transition phenomena across time and the dynamics between boundary conditions and business models. The article identifies research gaps, including the role of time, interaction patterns between organizations and society, and the impact of transition pathways on business models.

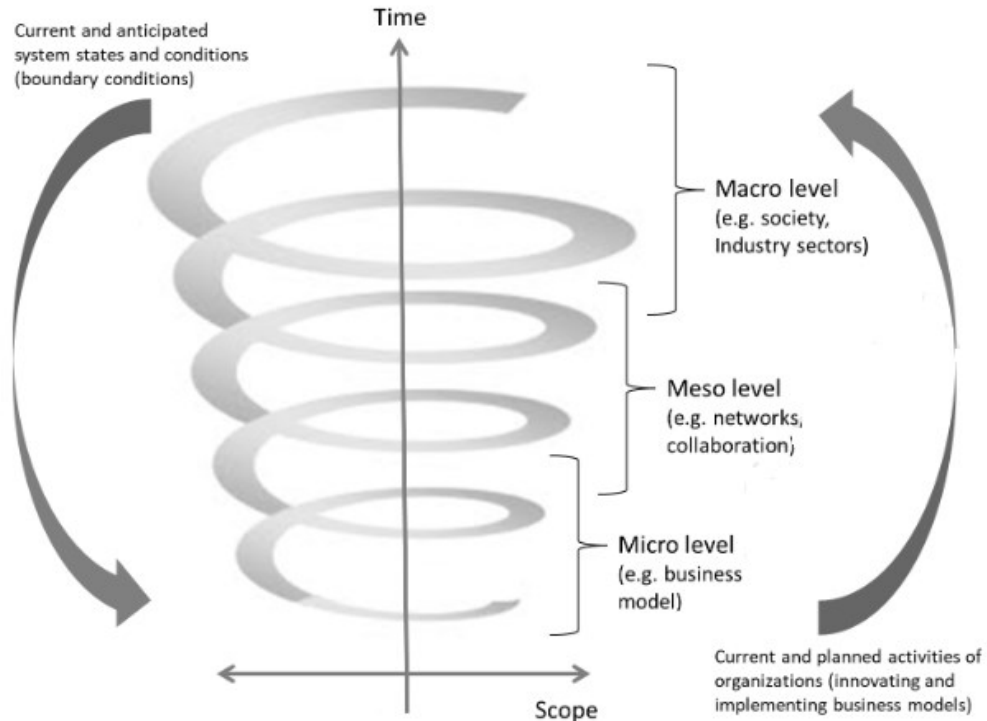


Figure 10. The 'spiral' – Framework connecting business models to sustainability transitions (Aagaard, A. et al. 2021)

Salo et al. (2020), Motivations for Eco-Innovation and the Implementation of Eco-Design Tools

Salo et al.'s study delves into the motivations behind eco-innovation and the implementation of eco-design tools within Nordic companies operating in the textile and information technology sectors. Their research explores the relationships between various innovative mechanisms, barriers, stimuli, and sustainability maturity. The study highlights the importance of both technical and non-technical innovation in the transition towards a circular economy. Companies are recognized as crucial players in this transition, requiring support through information, tools, and regulatory mechanisms.

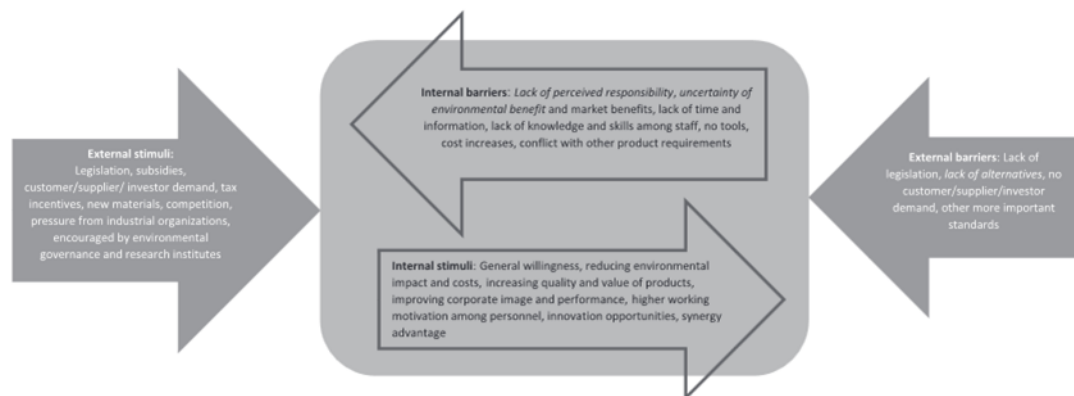


Figure 11. Internal and external stimuli that encourage companies to promote eco-design and eco-innovation and the barriers they face. No-go barriers have been italicized (Salo et al. 2020)

Birkin et al. (2009), A New Business Model for Sustainable Development

The article "A New Business Model for Sustainable Development" presents an exploratory study conducted in Nordic organizations, aiming to identify a new business model for sustainable development. This study is prompted by the pressing issue of consumption without limits and the challenges it poses to sustainability. While businesses have made substantial progress in incorporating environmental and social aspects into their performance, questions persist regarding the fundamental inhibitions within contemporary business models that may hinder even exemplary corporations from achieving sustainability. The study adopts the theory of constraints as its methodology, employing semi-structured interviews and secondary material. It also utilizes the cloverleaf account of sustainable development to structure and analyze information. Findings reveal that

the social context in which Nordic organizations operate plays a crucial role in sustainable development, and specific management tools and approaches are instrumental in this regard. The study emphasizes the urgent need for businesses to address the issue of consumption without limits and incorporate sustainable development into their management practices.

Randall et al. (2018 The Utilization of Digitalization for Advancing Sustainable Regional Development in the Nordic Context

Randall et al.'s discussion paper explores the role of digitalization as a tool for sustainable regional development in the Nordic context. The research investigates digitalization strategies, priorities, challenges, and opportunities at both regional and national levels. It emphasizes the need to understand the interaction between policies, governance, and various aspects of sustainability, including social, economic, and environmental dimensions.

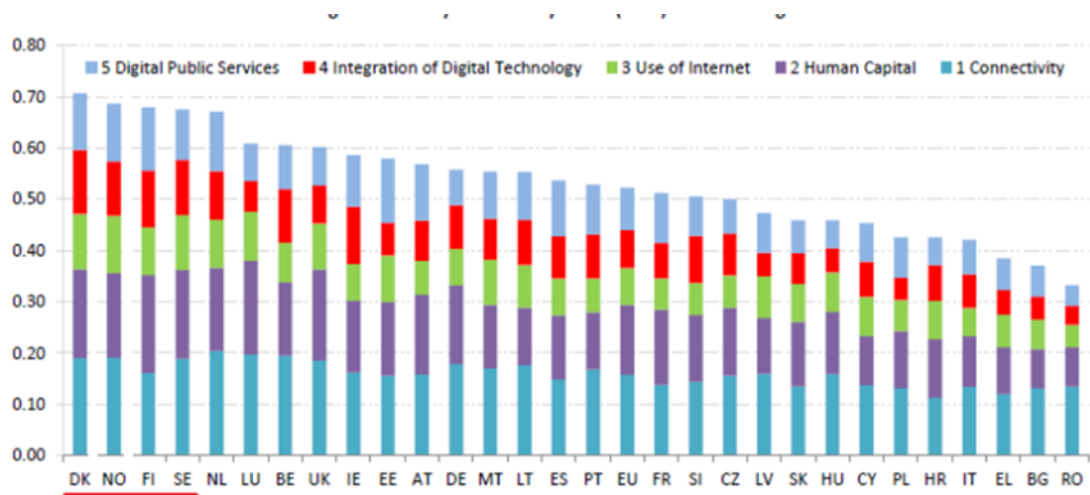


Figure 12. Digital economy and society index (DESI) 2017 ranking (Randall et al. 2018)

Circular Economy and the Triple Bottom Line Approach in Norway

Wiebe et al. (2023) examine the potential of the circular economy (CE) in Norway to enhance environmental sustainability and economic performance. Their study highlights that CE practices can lead to significant value addition and employment growth, particularly through increased material efficiency in sectors like plastic packaging and metals. The benefits vary depending on the implementation method: substantial employment gains are observed when efficiency is driven by

research and development, while benefits are more modest if savings are retained as higher profits.

For consumer goods, transitioning from a buy-and-discard model to a buy-repair/share/use longer model boosts employment due to the need for maintenance, despite a slight rise in domestic GHG emissions. However, reduced imports of manufactured goods result in lower overall upstream emissions, as imported goods typically have higher emissions per monetary unit compared to Norwegian services.

In the construction sector, re-use and recycling of building materials replace emission-intensive extraction processes with labour-intensive yet less emission-intensive activities, leading to significant GHG emission reductions. The study underscores the positive triple bottom line effects—economic, environmental, and social—of CE practices.

2.6 KPIs and indicators, measuring the successfulness and customer communication

Sustainable Development as a Driver for Customer Experience (Love et. Al 2019)
The concept of sustainable development (SD) has gained widespread acceptance across nations, organizations, and individuals. Characterized as progress that fulfils the requirements of the current generation without jeopardizing the capacity of future generations to satisfy their needs, sustainable development (SD) has been the subject of comprehensive research and discourse. Theoretical perspectives of SD have been debated and applied, encompassing various requirements for what constitutes a sustainable organization. However, despite decades of research, there remains a gap in bridging SD theory with practical implementation, highlighting the challenge of translating theory into action.

One influential framework in this context is the Triple Bottom Line (TBL), which extends the traditional focus on financial performance to include economic, environmental, and social dimensions. This approach has become a widely adopted framework for measuring and managing SD within organizations. It emphasizes

fair business practices toward labour and society, ecological responsibility, and economic value creation evaluated from a societal perspective.

Positive attributes have been associated with organizations effectively communicating their SD policies, including increased attractiveness to employees, enhanced reputation and brand image, greater customer loyalty, and higher customer satisfaction, all of which ultimately impact financial results. However, despite these advancements, SD models remain complex and challenging to implement, particularly concerning customer perceptions.

This study aims to estimate a Sustainable Development Index (SDI) to capture customer perceptions of intertwined SD dimensions and assess its effects on the European Performance Satisfaction Index (EPSI) rating variables, which encapsulate the customer experience. The study uses a cross-sectional dataset comprising customer perception data from various industries.

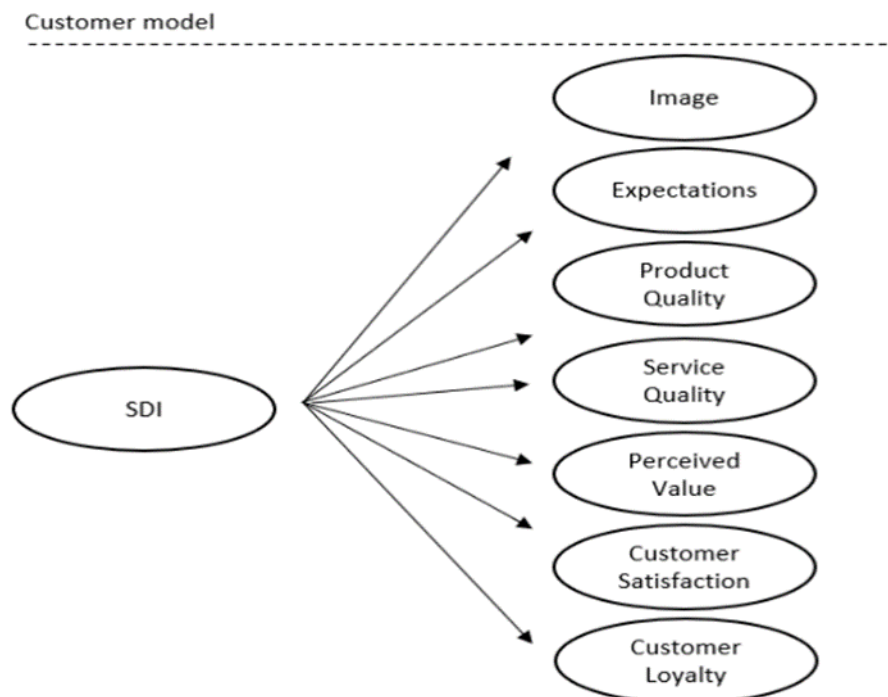


Figure 13. Conceptual layout of the PLS-PM setup in the customer model (Love et. Al 2019)

Introducing the Shades of Green instrument developed by Turunen and Halme (2021), a novel approach to actionable sustainability communication to consumers:

Consumer-oriented sustainability communication has encountered challenges in effectively translating consumers' sustainability-oriented attitudes into actual purchasing behaviours. Despite an abundance of sustainability information and emotionally appealing messages, there remains a significant gap between consumers' attitudes and sustainable consumption actions. Much of the sustainability information provided to consumers is not sufficiently actionable, leading to confusion in navigating industry-specific sustainability communication.

Companies have primarily relied on third-party verified sustainability labels and free-form sustainability communication to reach consumers. Third-party labels provide trustworthy information but can be complex for consumers to decipher, while free-form communication often appeals to emotions but may lack reliability. These approaches have not been optimal for bridging the attitude-behaviour gap.

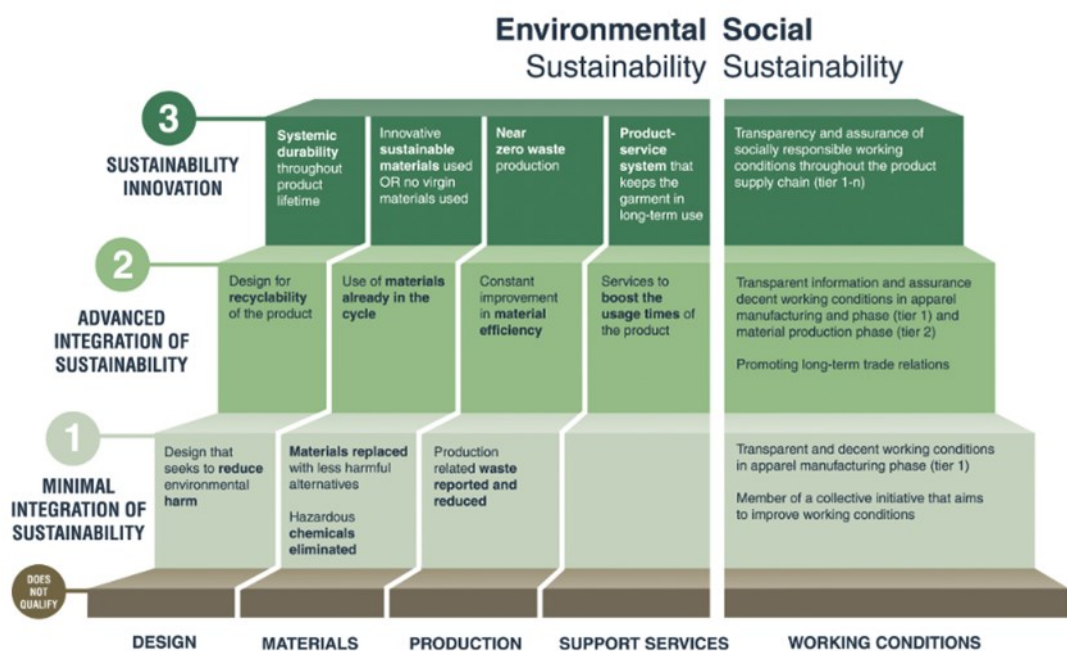


Figure 14. Shades of the green instrument (Turunen and Halme 2021)

This paper introduces a new instrument called Shades of Green (SoG), designed to simplify and enhance sustainability communication to consumers. SoG offers

straightforward yet comprehensive information about the environmental and social sustainability impacts of products, making it easier for consumers to make informed decisions. It also aids companies in structuring their sustainability communication in a more actionable form.

Criticisms of the Triple Bottom Line Approach

Sridhar and Jones (2013) critically analyze the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) approach, highlighting its fundamental shortcomings. They argue that TBL and other reporting systems enable corporations to bypass key sustainability issues, primarily due to the absence of mandatory standards. Companies can selectively report metrics that are easy to measure, ignoring those that might reveal negative aspects of their sustainability efforts. The TBL approach also suffers from a lack of integration among its three principles—economic, social, and environmental—each of which is measured independently, without showing how they interrelate. This compartmentalization leads to a compliance-focused rather than a genuinely sustainable approach, with corporations using TBL to gain ethical accreditation and public acceptance without substantial change. The study of 40 corporations' sustainability reports revealed a lack of integration, poor social impact measurement, and inadequate aggregation of results. The authors suggest that for TBL to truly advance sustainability, it needs to evolve into an integrated bottom line (IBL) approach, incorporating broader issues like culture and corporate governance. Future research should focus on improving TBL's measurement and integration to make its outputs more meaningful and understandable.

Stakeholder Integration Strategies in Sustainability Innovations

In their article titled "Strategies for Integrating Stakeholders into Sustainability Innovation: A Configurational Perspective" (Juntunen et al., 2019), the authors delve into the growing significance of infusing sustainability into innovation processes. Contemporary businesses are increasingly acknowledging the vital role of involving stakeholders throughout the innovation journey to attain exemplary sustainability outcomes. This literature review delves into the fundamental ideas and discoveries associated with stakeholder integration strategies and their profound influence on the realm of sustainable innovations. The authors resulted stakeholder integration strategies play a crucial role in achieving high sustainability performance in innovation projects. Organizations should carefully select

the strategy that aligns with their goals, resources, and the nature of their innovation efforts.

Theoretical Framework:

1. **Stakeholder Theory:** Stakeholder theory posits that organizations should consider the interests of all relevant stakeholders in their decision-making processes. This theory forms the basis for understanding the importance of stakeholder integration in sustainability innovations.
2. **Capabilities Lens:** The capabilities lens emphasizes that firms must develop specific capabilities to drive sustainability-oriented innovations successfully. Stakeholder integration is considered one such capability.

One key insight from the literature is the pivotal role of organizational engagement with integrated stakeholders. Studies have shown that deep engagement, often involving top management or multiple members of the organization, enhances the absorption of stakeholder views. This engagement is crucial for legitimizing sustainability efforts and influencing key decisions in new product development (NPD) projects.

2.7 Methodological Approaches in the Field

Navigating the terrain of understanding sustainable customer development demands versatile research methodologies. Scholars adeptly traverse this landscape, employing a multidimensional approach to reveal profound insights.

Prominently, qualitative case studies emerge as artisanal masterpieces, delving into the stories of Nordic businesses that have orchestrated sustainable customer engagement. These narratives unveil intricate tactics, challenges, and successes, transcending data to share lived experiences.

On the quantitative front, surveys wield statistical power, illuminating the relationship between customer engagement and sustainability indicators. This empirical validation bridges theoretical frameworks and real-world impact, anchoring concepts in tangible figures.

2.8 Gaps and Limitations in the Literature

Within the brilliance of scholarly exploration, gaps cast shadows. Longitudinal studies are notably absent, hindering an understanding of the enduring impacts of sustainable customer development. These studies are crucial for predictive models guiding businesses toward sustainable futures.

Cultural diversity across Nordic countries remains unexplored, concealing insights into localized customer engagement nuances. This gap impedes tailoring strategies to cultural contexts, rendering it a pivotal omission in sustainable customer development research.

Khan, Johansson, and Hildingsson (2021) investigate green economy strategies in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. Despite strong policy rhetoric, the study finds a lack of comprehensive national strategies for a green economy. Instead, policies focus on specific areas like low-carbon initiatives, environmental technology competitiveness, and circular economy principles. However, radical structural changes and beyond-growth approaches are largely absent from national policies, remaining marginal in the broader policy discourse. This suggests a need to consider a wider range of viewpoints for a truly sustainable economy.

Bridging these gaps isn't mere academic pursuit; it's a cornerstone for understanding sustainable customer development in the Nordic context. Addressing these voids offers insights shaping strategies that endure and resonate.

2.9 Synthesis and Discussion of Findings

The synthesis of literature's varied threads unfolds a multifaceted tapestry—vivid and detailed, painted with insights, theories, and methodologies that intersect in a symphony of understanding. The theoretical lenses through which scholars view sustainable customer development enrich the discourse, offering profound glimpses into the motivations and intricacies that steer sustainable customer interactions. These theories provide more than frameworks; they offer the tools to

decode the underlying psychology and aspirations that guide conscious consumer choices.

Parallel to these theoretical explorations, the spectrum of research methodologies harmoniously resonates. The qualitative narratives of case studies breathe life into strategies, unravelling the dynamic narratives of businesses that have embraced sustainable customer engagement. At the quantitative forefront, surveys and statistical analyses provide empirical validation, grounding the discourse in real-world impact.

Together, these components form a multidimensional tableau of understanding, resonating beyond academic circles. They equip businesses, policymakers, and stakeholders with insights that extend beyond theories and data—insights that illuminate paths toward sustainable futures.

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction to the Methodology

This section outlines our approach to conducting a comprehensive literature review on sustainable customer development in Nordic countries, supplemented by empirical data gathered through a structured questionnaire. Our methodology systematically analyses existing research to gain insights into diverse strategies, theoretical frameworks, key themes, and gaps within this dynamic field. Additionally, we include primary data from respondents to validate and enhance our findings.

3.2 Research Approach

Our research approach initially centered on conducting a literature review, aligning with the recommendations of Snyder (2019) and Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart (2003). This approach entailed a comprehensive examination of existing literature to gain a profound understanding of sustainable customer development in Nordic countries. However, to enrich our study, we have added an empirical component through a structured questionnaire distributed to relevant stakeholders.

Literature reviews serve as a foundation for synthesizing knowledge in complex fields, as emphasized by Snyder (2019). By following a systematic approach, we aim to go beyond traditional ad hoc reviews and instead conduct a rigorous examination of the relevant literature.

Incorporating primary data collection through a questionnaire enables us to validate our literature review findings and gain current insights from industry professionals and stakeholders. This mixed-method approach enhances the reliability and relevance of our research (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

3.3 Research Design

Our research design now includes both a literature review and a quantitative survey. The literature review follows systematic principles to ensure a thorough and unbiased synthesis of existing research. The quantitative survey, distributed to a targeted group of professionals and stakeholders in the field of sustainable customer development in Nordic countries, collects empirical data to support and enrich the findings from the literature.

The questionnaire was divided into several sections: demographic information, professional background, perspectives on sustainable customer development, challenges faced, and opportunities identified. This structure allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the respondents' insights and experiences. The questionnaire consisted of 38 questions, of which 14 were mandatory.

3.4 Search Strategy

To ensure a comprehensive exploration of available research, our literature review employed a systematic search strategy guided by principles drawn from previous literature, such as Skoglund and Runeson (2009) and Bramer et al. (2018). This strategy aimed to balance sensitivity and specificity in exploring the literature related to sustainable customer development in Nordic countries.

Reference-Based Search Strategies in Systematic Reviews by Skoglund and Runeson (2009) introduced an innovative search strategy for managing the substantial volume of articles encountered in systematic reviews. This approach begins by identifying a "take-off paper" as the starting point and then follows references from that paper. The strategy also considers "cardinal papers," which are frequently referenced by many authors, to guide the selection process.

In contrast, A Systematic Approach to Searching by Bramer et al. (2018) introduced a systematic methodology for creating comprehensive search strategies

for systematic reviews. This method emphasizes a step-by-step process for developing search strategies, particularly the preparation of single-line search strategies using search syntax, field codes, parentheses, and Boolean operators.

By integrating the innovative elements from these articles into our search approach, we sought to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of our systematic search strategy. The incorporation of novel strategies for handling large volumes of data while improving precision was crucial for achieving our research objectives.

3.5 Survey Design and Data Collection

For the empirical part, we designed a structured questionnaire to gather quantitative data. The questionnaire was developed based on key themes identified in the literature review and aimed to capture insights on sustainable customer development practices, challenges, and opportunities in the Nordic region.

The questionnaire was planned and designed in February 2024, and data collection was conducted in March and April 2024. The questionnaire was created using WP Forms and included 38 questions, of which 14 were mandatory. In total, the questionnaire received 37 responses, with around 400 invitations sent and 80 accepting to participate. The invitations were sent through LinkedIn to experts related to the thesis topic and working in the Nordic region.

3.6 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

For the literature review, sources were included if they focused on sustainable customer development within the Nordic countries, provided insights into customer engagement strategies, and contributed to our understanding of the theoretical foundations and gaps in the field. Studies published within the timeframe of 2010 to 2023 were considered. Sources lacking relevance to our research objectives or published outside the defined timeframe were excluded.

For the survey, participants were included if they had direct experience or substantial knowledge in sustainable customer development in the Nordic countries.

Responses from participants who did not meet these criteria were excluded from the analysis.

3.7 Data Extraction and Analysis

The data extraction process followed established guidelines for systematic data gathering from selected sources. We adopted a methodology in line with recommendations as detailed in "Automating Data Extraction in Systematic Reviews: A Systematic Review" by Jonnalagadda et al. (2015). For the survey data, responses were collected and analysed using statistical methods to identify patterns and correlations.

Excel was utilized to:

- Enter and organize the collected survey data.
- Create various charts and visual representations of the data.
- Perform statistical analysis to extract meaningful insights from the survey responses.

3.8 Synthesis and Coding

Thematic coding was employed for the literature review to categorize and organize findings from the selected sources, influenced by principles outlined in Joffe (2011). For the survey data, quantitative analysis techniques, including descriptive statistics and inferential analysis, were used to interpret the results.

3.9 Quality Assessment

Addressing quality in mixed methods research, we employed a standardized quality assessment framework, as outlined by Fàbregues et.al (2017). Also, for the survey data, we ensured the reliability and validity of the questionnaire through pilot testing and expert review.

3.10 Limitations of the Methodology

While our study leverages systematic review methodologies, a well-recognized approach in evidence synthesis, we acknowledge that inherent limitations are associated with this methodology, as articulated in recent literature (Almeida, 2017 & Ownens, 2021) These limitations encompass potential biases and constraints that may stem from the existing literature base.

One of the primary limitations lies in the dependence on the availability and quality of the existing literature. Systematic reviews rely on the data and findings present in published sources. If there are gaps, biases, or limitations in the existing literature, they may be perpetuated in the systematic review. This is particularly relevant when dealing with emerging or under-researched topics.

Furthermore, the potential for publication bias exists, as studies with significant or positive results are more likely to be published, while negative or null findings may remain unpublished. This can lead to an overrepresentation of certain types of studies and an incomplete picture of the research landscape.

Another limitation pertains to the quality and rigor of the included studies. While systematic reviews aim to synthesize the best available evidence, the quality of the primary studies can vary. Variations in research methodologies, sample sizes, and data collection procedures across studies can impact the reliability of the conclusions drawn.

Additionally, systematic reviews may be constrained by the choice of databases and search terms. Despite comprehensive search strategies, some relevant studies may be missed, leading to potential gaps in the evidence considered.

Beyond the limitations associated with the systematic review, our empirical data collection through questionnaires also encountered several challenges. Accessing experts from various industries proved difficult, limiting the diversity of perspectives represented in our study. Although invitations were sent to approximately 400 experts, the final sample consisted of 37 respondents, which may not

fully capture the breadth of views across different sectors. This limited access could affect the generalizability of our findings.

Moreover, potential biases among respondents represent another limitation. Participants may have had predispositions or subjective interpretations of the questionnaire items, which could influence their responses. These biases might stem from their professional backgrounds, personal beliefs about sustainability, or their experiences within specific industries. Such biases could affect the objectivity of the data and, consequently, the conclusions drawn from it.

In summary, as with any research methodology, both systematic reviews and empirical data collection through questionnaires have their limitations. Careful consideration of these limitations, along with transparent reporting of the review process and data collection challenges, is essential to provide a clear understanding of the scope and reliability of the findings.

3.11 Conclusion of the Methodology

In conclusion, our methodology combines a comprehensive literature review with empirical data collection through a questionnaire, enabling a robust exploration of sustainable customer development in Nordic countries. This mixed-method approach enhances our understanding of the topic and provides a solid foundation for identifying strategies, theoretical frameworks, key themes, and gaps within this field.

4 Findings

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Position and responsibilities of respondents

In this section, we asked the respondents about their positions and responsibilities within their companies. Over 50% of them hold managerial or executive roles, while 40% are specialists or consultants in the field of sustainability (figure 16).

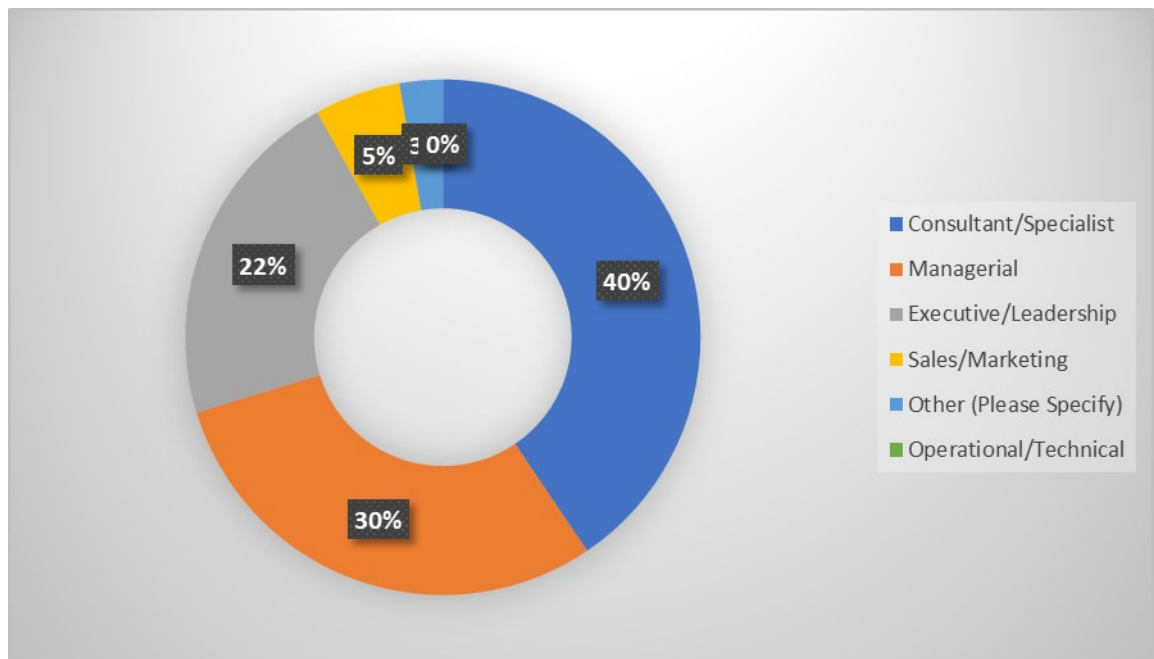


Figure15: Positions and Responsibilities of respondents

The country that the companies of respondents

In this section, we asked the respondents about the countries where their companies operate within the Nordic region. Most respondents as showed in figure 17, indicated that their companies operate in more than one Nordic country. Additionally, around 30% mentioned that their companies also operate in countries outside of the Nordic region, in addition to their Nordic operations.

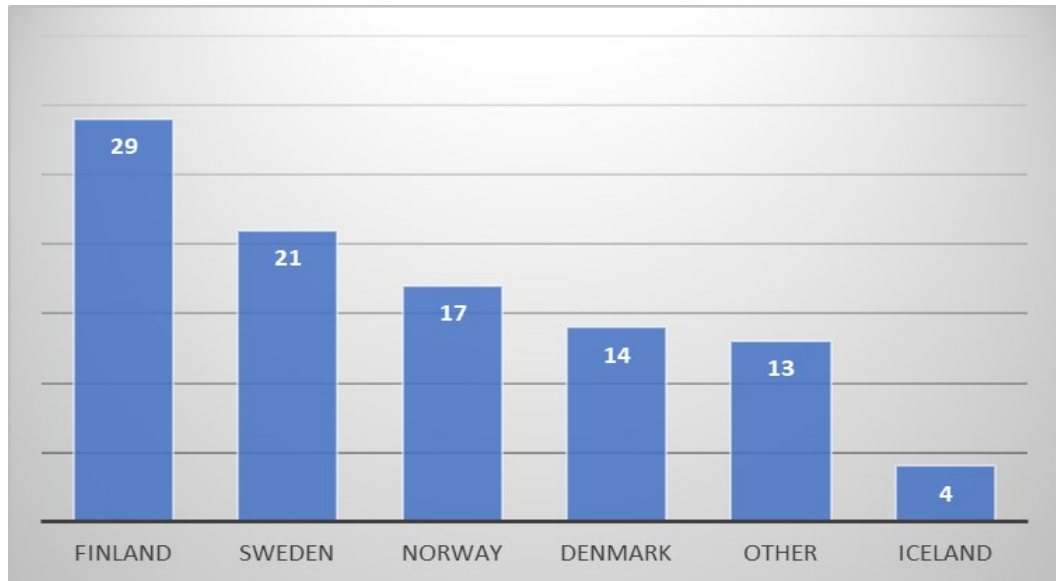


Figure 16: country of operation of the respondents' companies/organizations

Industry distribution

In this part we asked the respondents about the industry that they worked in. The following diagram (figure 18) presents the distribution of respondents across different industries, based on their selections from the provided options

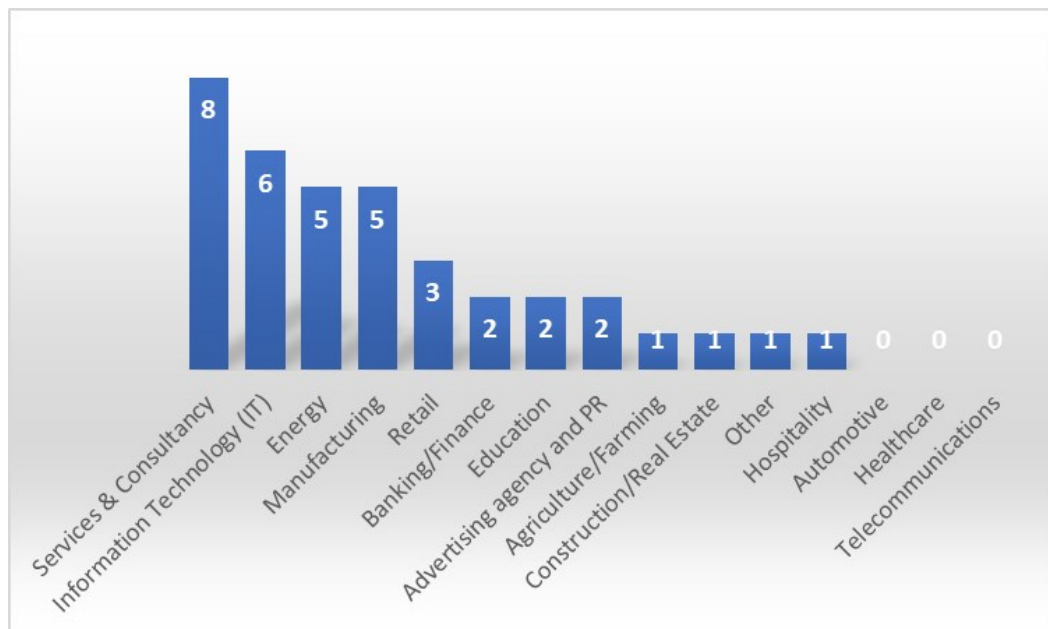


Figure 17: industry distribution

Duration of Involvement in Sustainability practice:

In this section, I asked the respondents about the duration of their involvement in sustainability practices. The largest portion indicated 1-3 years of involvement, followed by those with 4-6 years (figure 19)

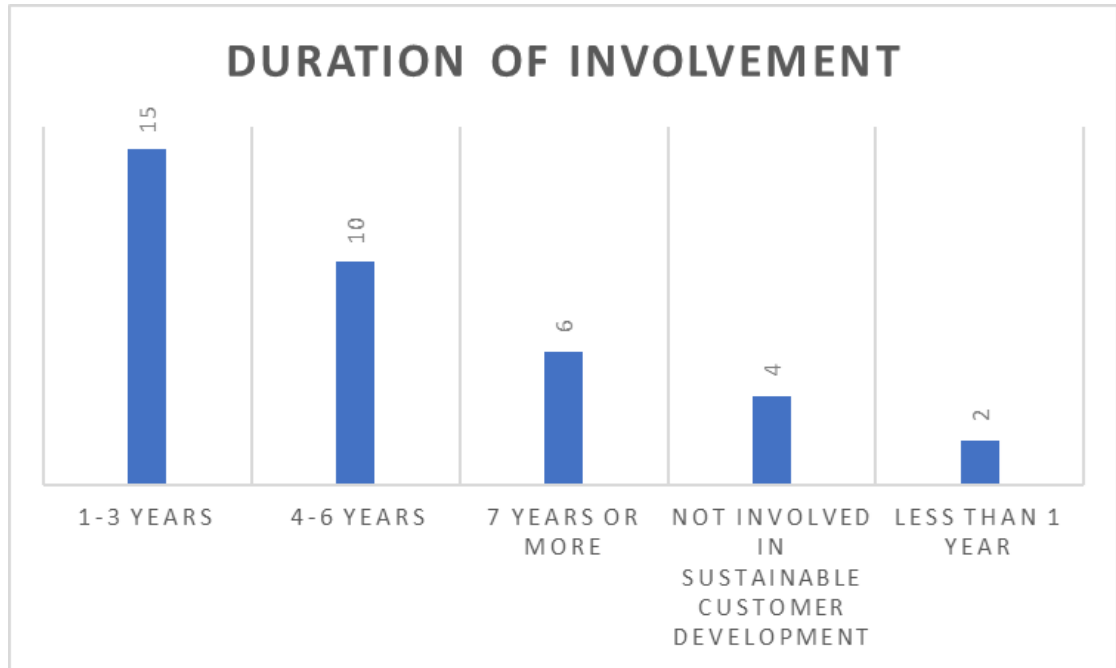


Figure 18: Duration of Respondents' involvement in Sustainability activities

Primary Motivation for Involvement

In this section, we explored the primary motivations driving respondents involve

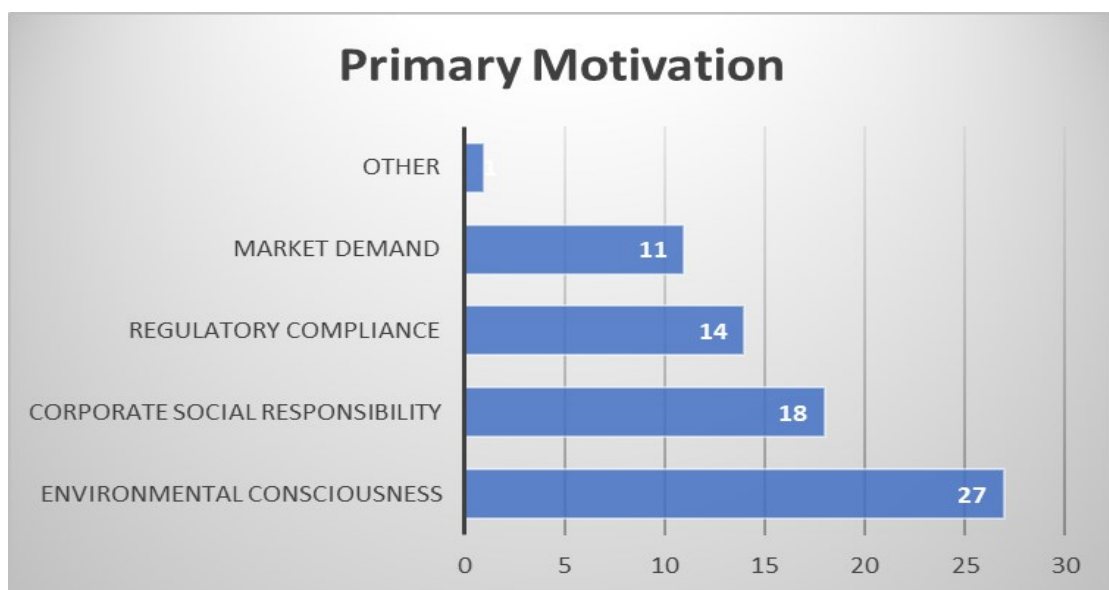


Figure 19: Primary motivation of respondents' for involving in sustainability

ment in sustainability practices. This distribution shows that while environmental consciousness is the leading motivator, a combination of ethical responsibility, legal requirements, and market forces also play crucial roles in driving sustainability initiative (figure 20).

4.2 Familiarity with Concepts

In this section we want to know how many of our respondents in the sustainability fields familiar with this concept and frameworks that we talked about them in this thesis.

Familiarity with TBL (Tripple Bottom Line) framework:

In this section we want to know how many of our respondents are familiar with TBL. More than 75% of them are familiar and 38% of them are very and extremely familiar with this framework.

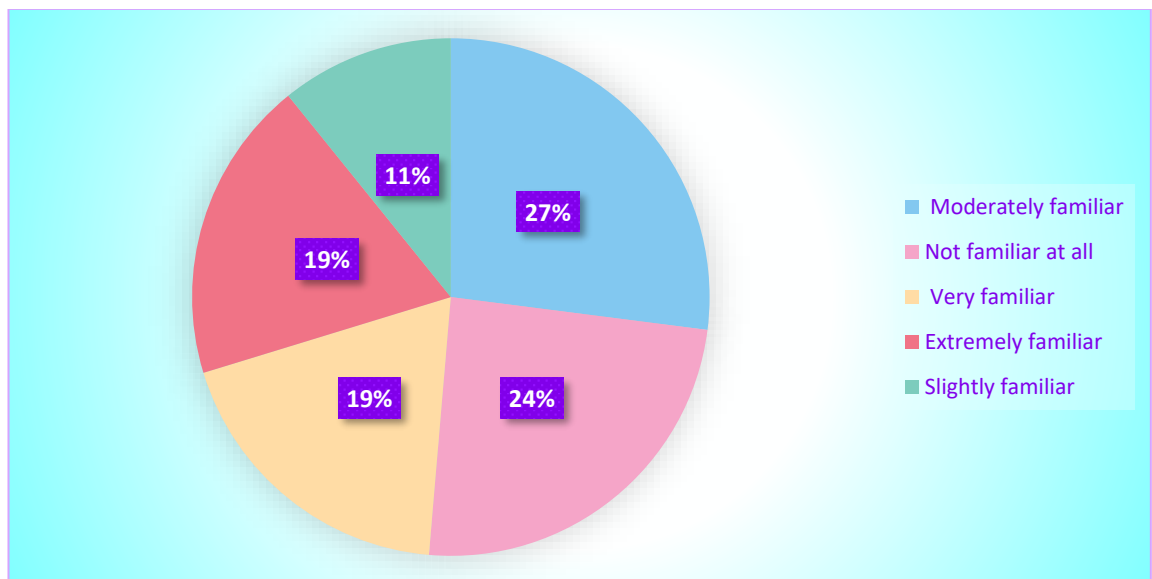


Figure 20: Familiarity with the concept of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL)

Familiarity with TPB (Theory of Planned Behaviour) framework:

In this section we want to know how many of our respondents are familiar with TPB. More than 50% of them are not familiar and 30% of them are slightly familiar 13% of the respondents are moderate familiar.

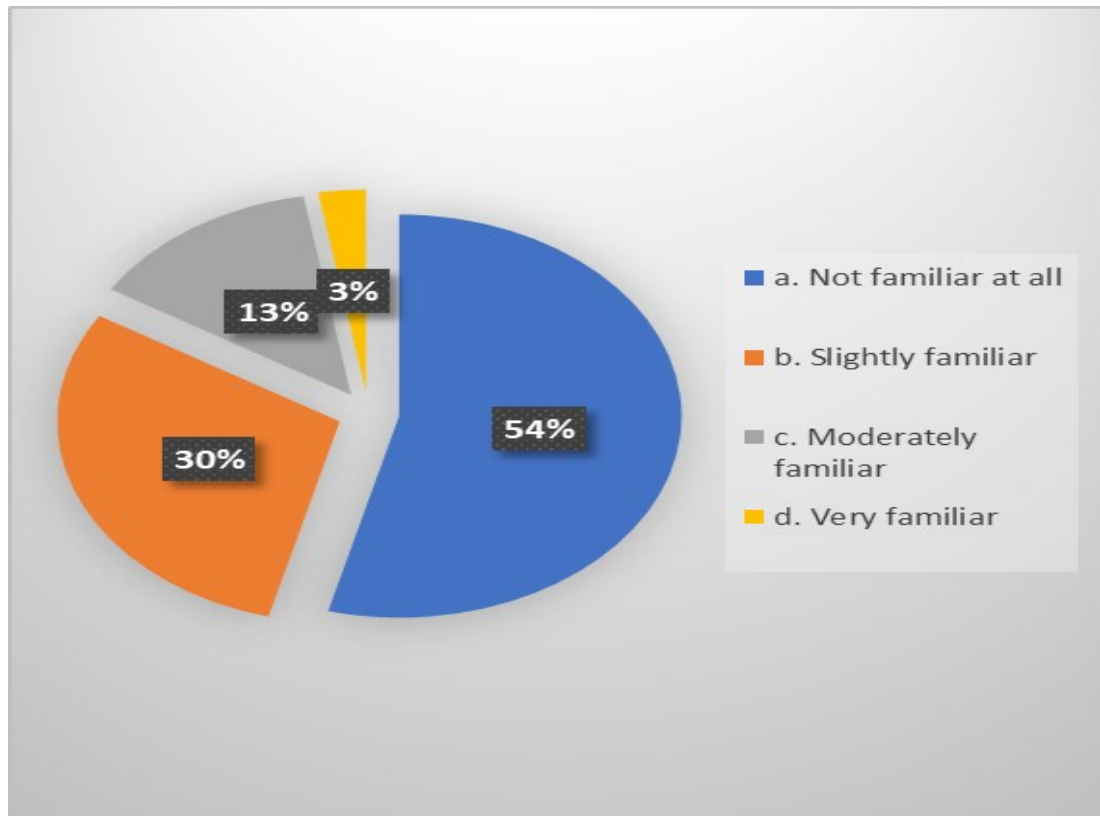


Figure 21: Familiarity with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

Familiarity with CE (Circular Economy)

In this section, we aimed to assess the familiarity of our respondents with the CE (Circular Economy) framework. The results indicate a high level of awareness and understanding among the participants:

- **68%** of respondents reported being very familiar with the CE framework.
- **24%** stated they are extremely familiar with this concept.

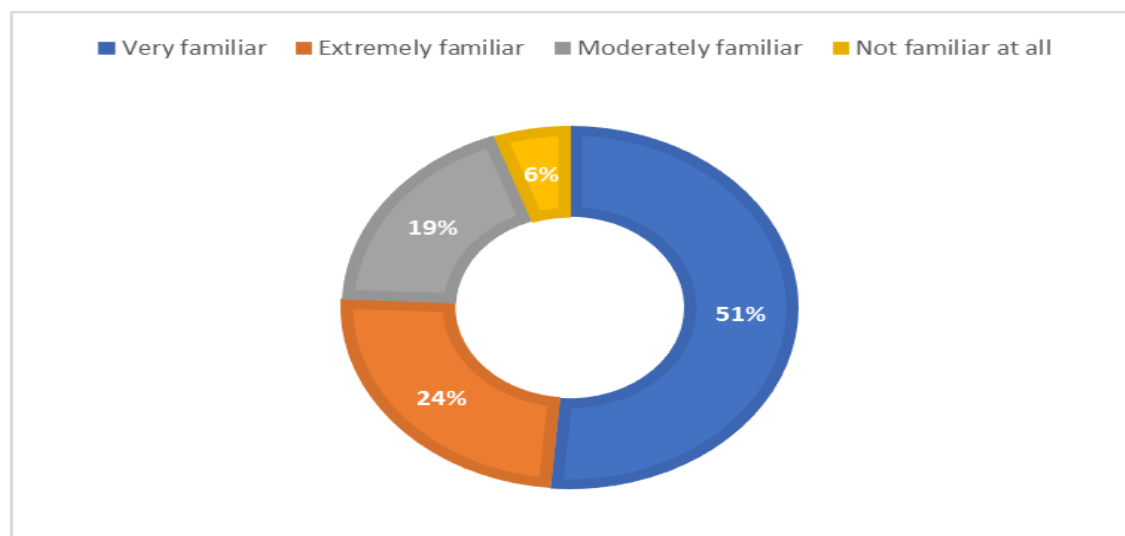


Figure 22: Familiarity with the concept of the Circular Economy (CE)

Overall, a significant 94% of respondents are familiar with the CE framework, demonstrating a strong recognition and understanding of this important concept among the survey participants.

4.3 Alignment and Applicability

Variations in the Importance of Sustainability Across Industries

In this section, we aimed to gather expert observations on how the importance of sustainability varies across different industries within the Nordic countries.

The question posed was: "Please select the option that best represents your observation regarding variations in the importance of sustainability across different industries within the Nordic countries."

The responses indicate:

- **Moderate to Significant Variation:** Over 72% of respondents believe there is a moderate to significant variation in the importance of sustainability across different industries.
- **Limited Variation:** At least 12% of respondents believe there is limited variation in the importance of sustainability across industries.

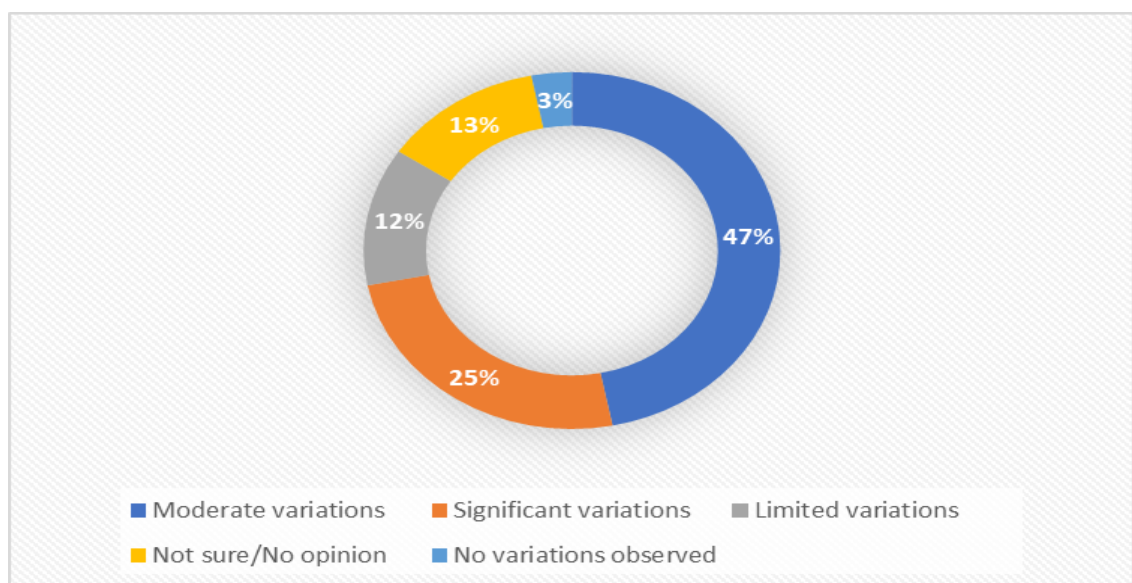


Figure 23: Variations in the importance of sustainability across different industries

Alignment of TBL with Sustainable Customer Development Goals and Practices

In this section, we inquired about the alignment of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) with the goals and practices of sustainable customer development. The responses indicate a positive perception among participants:

- **33%** of respondents believe that TBL has a strong alignment with sustainable customer development.
- In total, **75%** of respondents believe that there is a moderate to strong alignment between TBL and sustainable customer development practices.

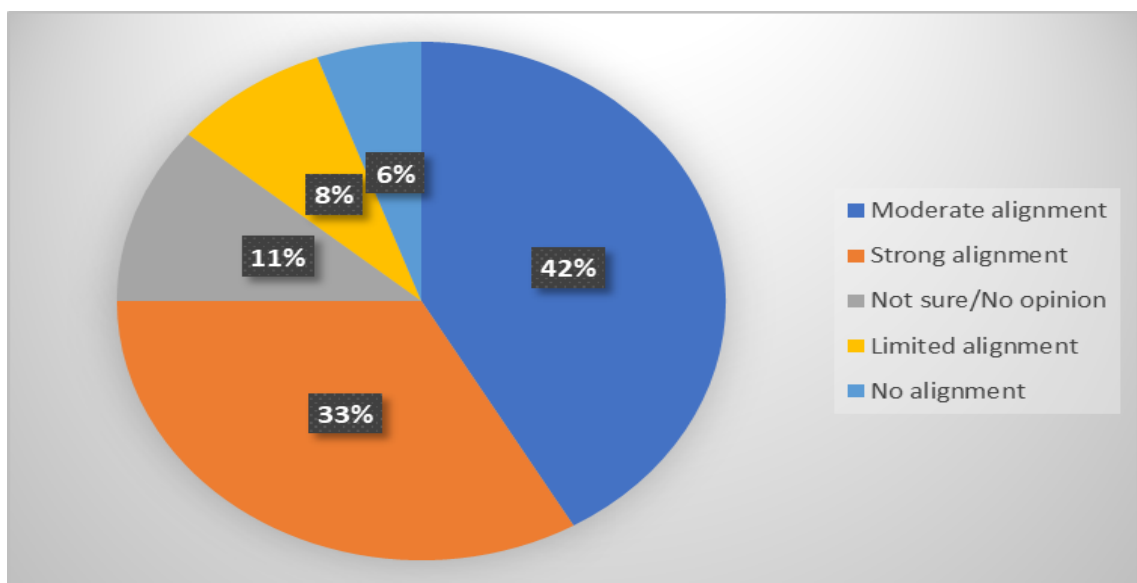


Figure 24: Triple Bottom Line concept aligns with the goals and practices of sustainable customer development

Alignment of TPB with Sustainable Customer Development Goals and Practices

In this section, we inquired about the alignment of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) with the goals and practices of sustainable customer development. The responses indicate a positive perception among participants:

- **32%** of respondents believe that TPB has a moderate relevance with sustainable customer development.
- In total, **13%** of respondents believe that there is a highly relevance between TPB and sustainable customer development practices.

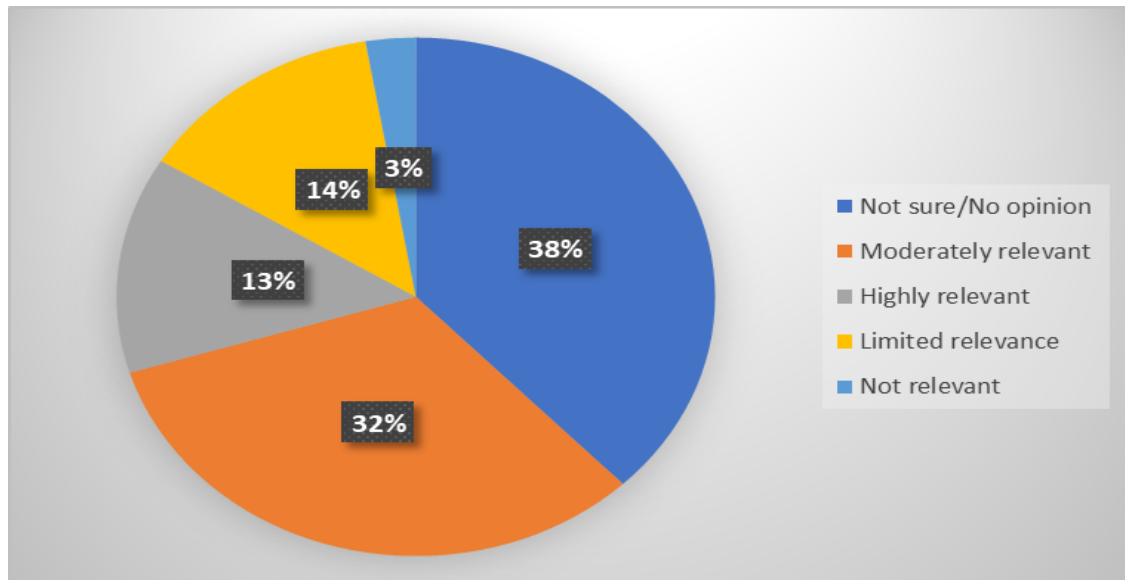


Figure 25: Alignment of TPB with Sustainable Customer Development Goals and Practices

Alignment of CE with Sustainable Customer Development Goals and Practices

In this section, we inquired about the alignment of the Circular Economy (CE) with the goals and practices of sustainable customer development. The responses indicate a positive perception among participants:

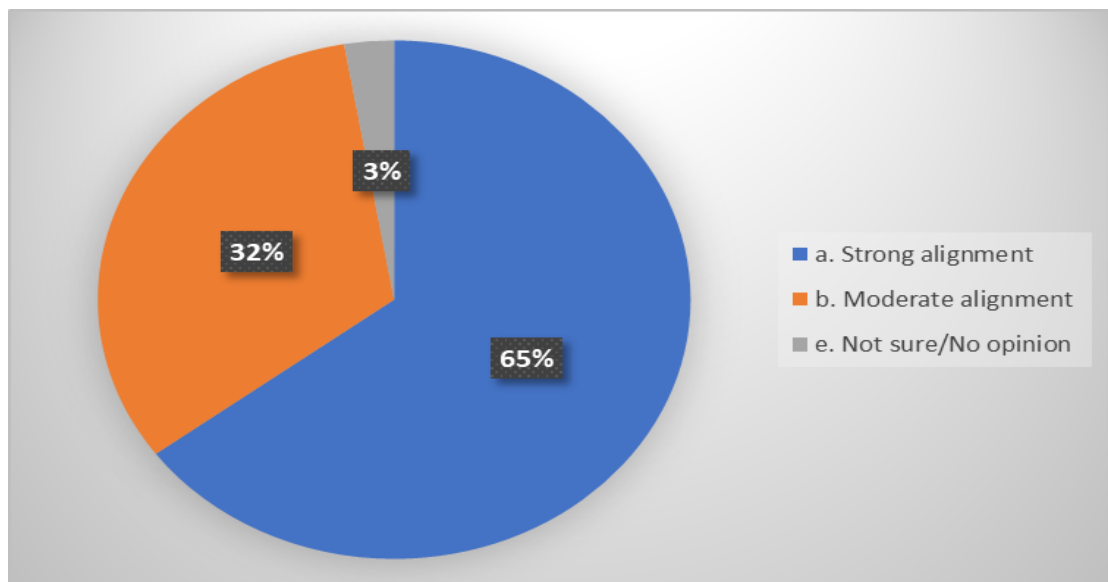


Figure 26: Alignment of CE with Sustainable Customer Development Goals and Practices

- **65%** of respondents believe that CE has a strong alignment with sustainable customer development.

- In total, **97%** of respondents believe that there is moderate to strong alignment between CE and sustainable customer development practices.

Sustainable Development Index (SDI)

In this section, we inquired about participants' opinions on the value of the Sustainable Development Index (SDI) in capturing customer perceptions of sustainability. The question asked was: "If relevant, please choose the option that most accurately reflects your organization's view of the Sustainable Development Index (SDI) and its effectiveness in capturing customer perceptions of sustainability."

The responses are summarized as follows:

- Highly Valuable: **9%** of respondents believe that the SDI is highly valuable.
- Moderate to Highly Valuable: In total, **37%** of respondents consider the SDI to be of limited to high value.
- Not Applicable: **21%** of respondents think that the SDI is not applicable to their organization.

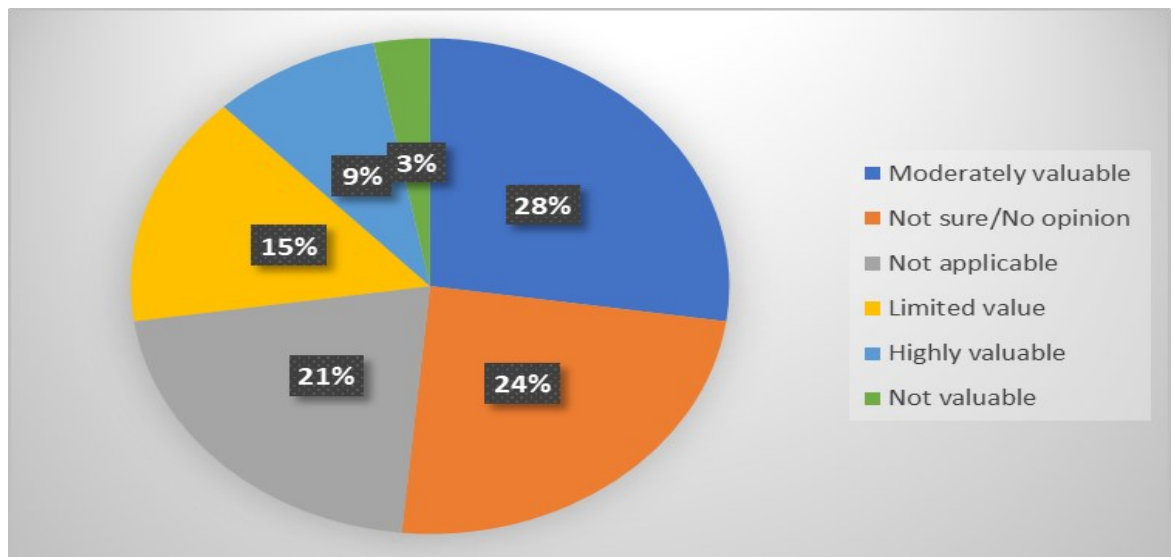


Figure 27: organization's perception of the Sustainable Development Index (SDI)

Expert Opinion on the Applicability of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) in their Company

The question posed was: "Please select the option that best represents your opinion on the applicability of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) in your company."

In this section, we asked experts to share their opinions on the applicability of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) in the sustainability process of customer development. The responses indicate varied perceptions among participants:

- **24%** of respondents believe that TBL is highly applicable and well-suited for implementation in their companies.
- In total, **65%** of respondents consider TBL to be applicable to a moderate to high extent, indicating some relevance but recognizing room for improvement in implementation.
- **11%** of respondents think that TBL is not applicable and not relevant or implemented in their companies.

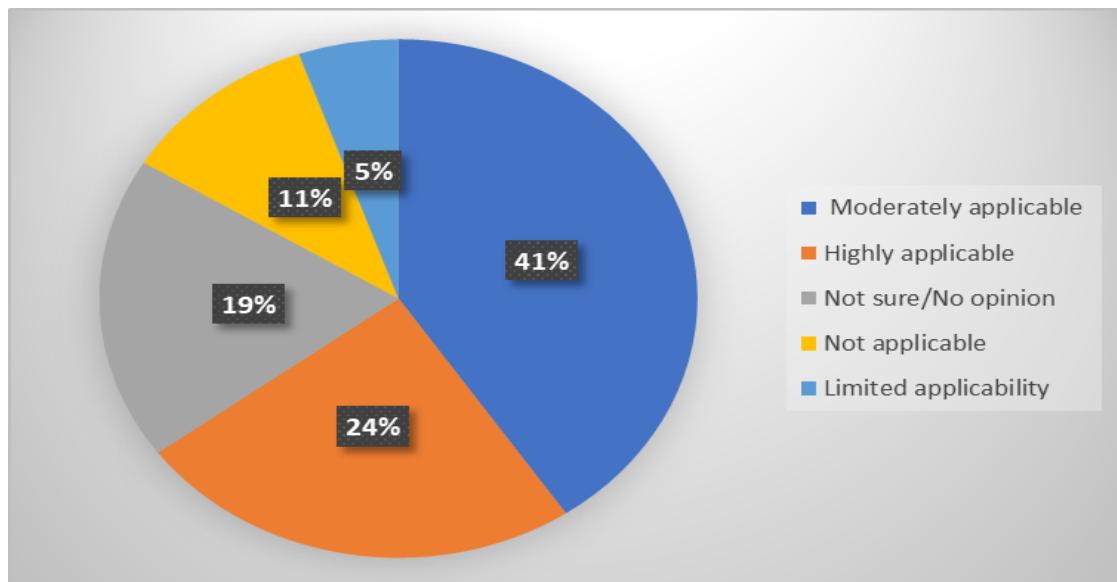


Figure 28: the applicability of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) in companies

4.4 Challenges, opportunities and considerations:

The Primary Challenge or Consideration When Implementing the Triple Bottom Line

The question posed was: "In your opinion, which option(s) best represent the primary challenge or consideration that businesses should be aware of when implementing the Triple Bottom Line in the context of sustainable customer development in the Nordic countries?"

In this section, we sought to understand the challenges companies face when implementing the TBL framework for sustainable customer development. The results indicate that:

- The top challenge identified by respondents is stakeholder engagement.
- Following this, regulatory compliance, resource allocation, and market perception are the next most significant challenges.

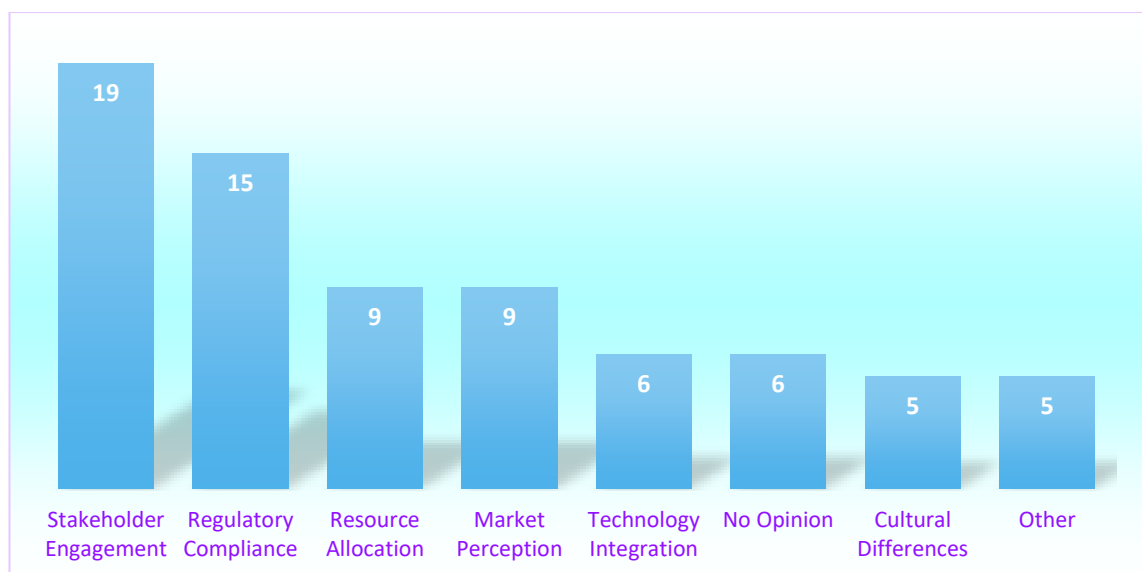


Figure 29: Primary challenge or consideration when implementing the Triple Bottom Line

Challenges Businesses May Encounter When Applying the Theory of Planned Behaviour

In this section, we aimed to identify the challenges businesses might face when applying the Theory of Planned Behaviour to sustainable customer development in the Nordic countries.

The question posed was: "In your opinion, what challenges do you think businesses may encounter when applying the Theory of Planned Behaviour to sustainable customer development in the Nordic countries?"

The top challenges identified were:

1. **Market Maturity:** This was the most frequently mentioned challenge, with 15 respondents highlighting it as a concern.
2. **Communication Challenges:** Identified by 14 respondents as a significant hurdle.
3. **Resource Constraints:** Also highlighted by 14 respondents as a key challenge.
4. **Competing Priorities:** Noted by 14 respondents as a common issue.
5. **Regulatory Variances:** Identified by 13 respondents as a challenge due to differing regulations across regions.

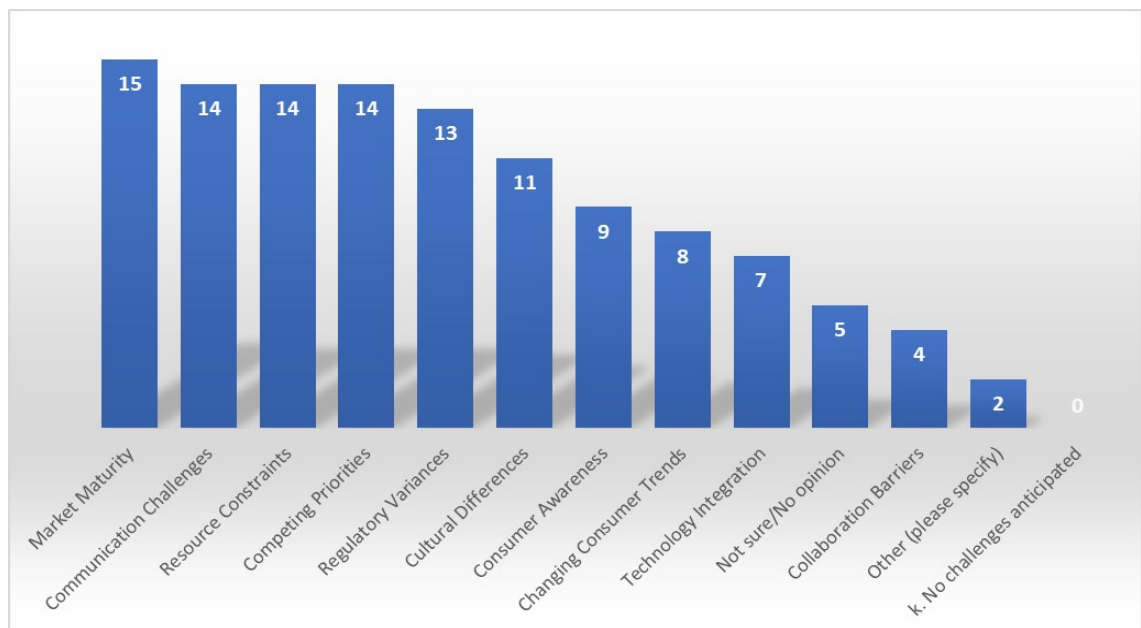


Figure 30: Challenges businesses may encounter when applying the Theory of Planned Behaviour

Primary Challenges for Businesses Implementing the Circular Economy

In this section, we aimed to understand the challenges businesses face when implementing the Circular Economy (CE) in the context of sustainable customer development.

The question posed was: "In your opinion, which option(s) best represent the primary challenge or consideration that businesses should be aware of when implementing the Circular Economy in the context of sustainable customer development in the Nordic countries?"

The top challenges identified were:

1. Supply Chain Complexity: Highlighted by 26 respondents as a major challenge.
2. Financial Investment: Cited by 18 respondents as a significant obstacle.
3. Infrastructure Challenges: Noted by 15 respondents as a key issue.
4. Regulatory Compliance: Mentioned by 14 respondents as an important consideration.
5. Consumer Behaviour: Also identified by 14 respondents as a critical challenge.

All respondents acknowledged the presence of challenges, with none selecting the option of "no challenges" in implementing CE.

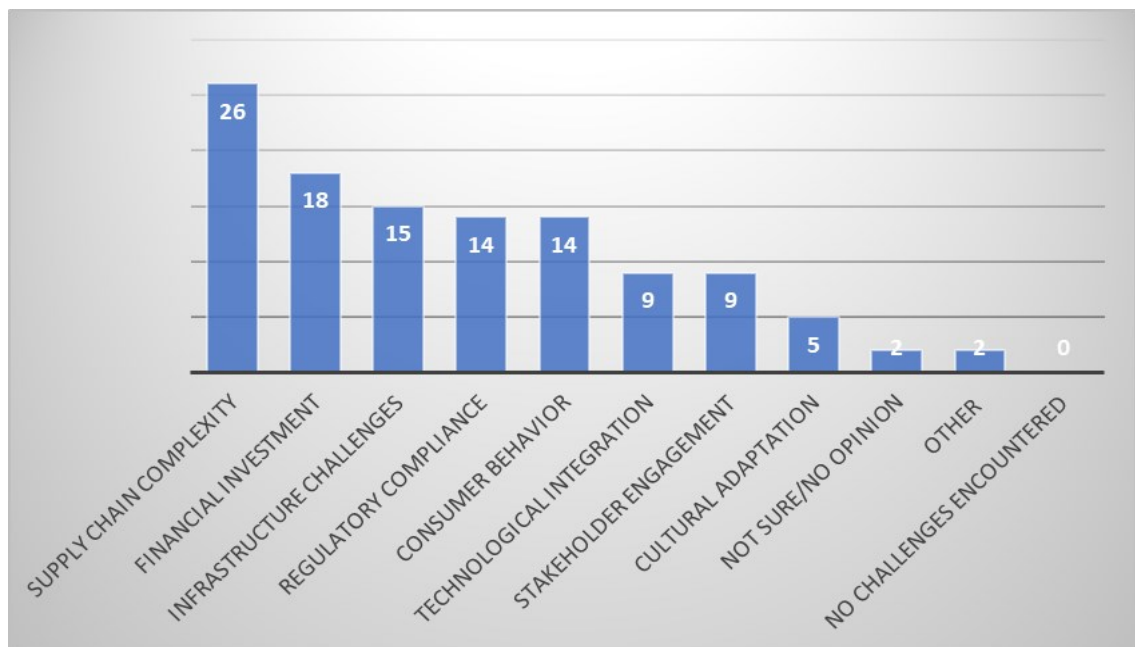


Figure 31: Primary Challenges for Businesses Implementing the Circular Economy in Nordic Sustainable Customer Development

Primary Challenges in Implementing and Scaling Sustainable Customer Development Practices

In this section, we aimed to identify the primary challenges organizations face in implementing and scaling sustainable customer development practices.

The question asked was: "If relevant, please choose the option that most closely reflects the main challenges your organization has faced in implementing and expanding sustainable customer development practices."

According to the experts, the top five primary challenges are:

1. Resource Constraints
2. Resistance to Change
3. Lack of Leadership Support
4. Consumer Awareness
5. Regulatory Challenges

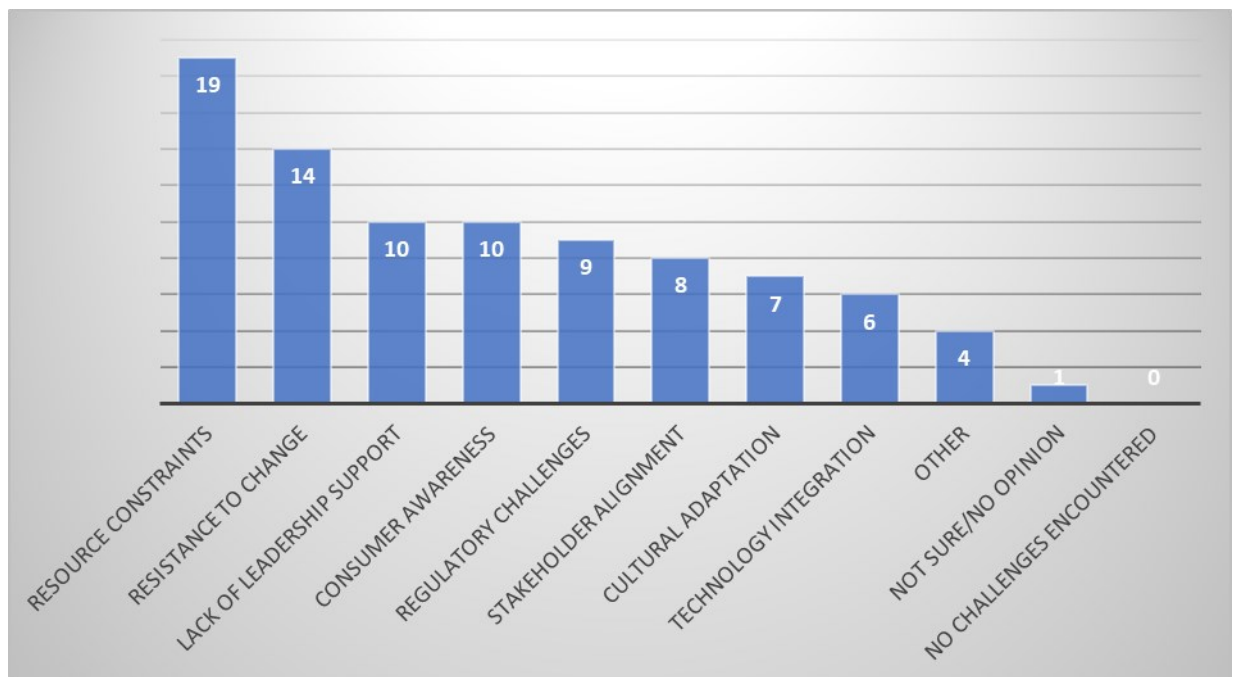


Figure 32: primary challenges that organizations encountered in implementing and scaling sustainable customer development practices

Opportunities and Positive Outcomes from Sustainable Customer Development

In this section, we sought to understand the particular opportunities or positive outcomes that have resulted from organizations' commitment to sustainable customer development.

The question posed was: "Please select the option that best represents the particular opportunities or positive outcomes that have resulted from your organization's commitment to sustainable customer development."

According to the respondents, the top five opportunities and positive outcomes are:

1. Improved Brand Reputation
2. Competitive Advantage
3. Positive Environmental Impact
4. New Business Opportunities
5. Regulatory Compliance



Figure 33: particular opportunities or positive outcomes that resulted organization's commitment to sustainable customer development

Challenges in Implementing New Business Models for Sustainability Transitions

In this section, we aim to understand the challenges or barriers organizations face when implementing new business models for sustainability transitions.

The question presented was: "In your opinion, what particular challenges or obstacles could organizations encounter when adopting new business models for sustainability transitions?"

Based on the responses:

- Limited Understanding of Sustainability Transitions: The most significant challenge, identified by **21** of respondents.
- Lack of Resources: The second most common barrier, cited by **20** of respondents.
- Resistance to Change: Mentioned by **19** of respondents as a major obstacle.
- Uncertainty About Long-Term Benefits: Highlighted by **17** of respondents as a concern.
- Regulatory Hurdles: Noted by **9** of respondents as a challenge.

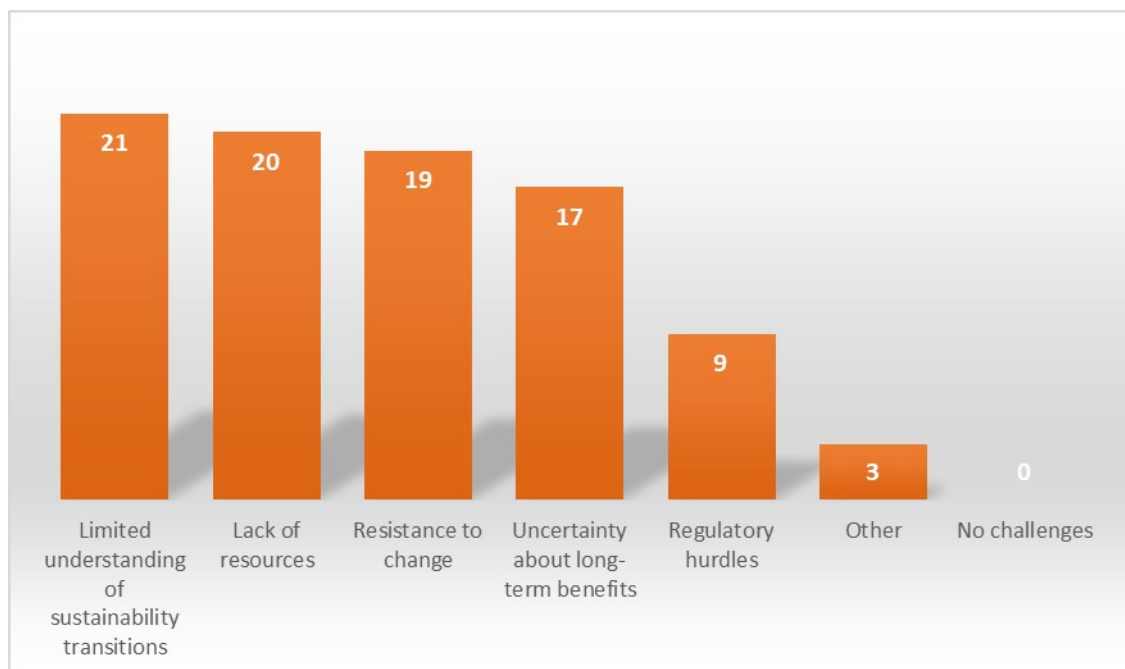


Figure 34: specific challenges or barriers that may organizations face in implementing new business models for sustainability transitions

Necessity of Radical Transformations and New Business Models for Addressing Sustainability Challenges

In this section, we aim to understand respondents' views on the necessity of radical transformations and new business models to effectively address persistent sustainability challenges in modern societies.

The question posed was: "To what extent do you believe radical transformations and new business models are necessary to effectively address persistent sustainability challenges in modern societies?"

Based on the responses:

- 1- **Highly Necessary: 60%** of respondents believe that radical transformations and new business models are highly necessary.
- 2- **Moderately Necessary: 27%** of respondents believe that such transformations are moderately necessary.
- 3- **Not Necessary: 7%** of respondents believe that these changes are not necessary.

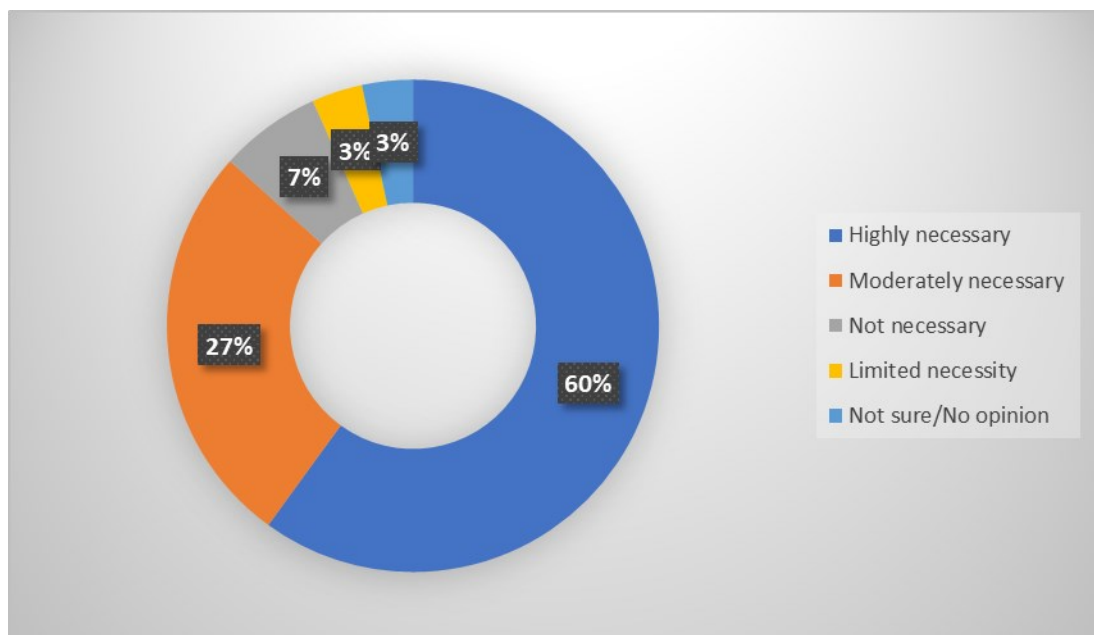


Figure 35: Radical transformations and new business models that are necessary to effectively address persistent sustainability challenges in modern societies

4.5 Perceptions and Outcomes

In this section of the thesis, the respondents' perceptions regarding the outcomes of sustainable customer development practices, and the engagement strategies employed by the organization are presented as follows

Communication Channels for Sustainability Efforts

In this section, we aim to understand the communication channels companies use to convey their sustainability efforts to customers.

The question posed was: "Select the option that best represents how your organization engages with customers to communicate sustainability efforts, including specific channels or communication strategies employed."

From the responses, we understood the following:

1. **Social media and Company Website:** social media is considered the most important communication channel, alongside the company's website. Respondents emphasized the significance of having a strong presence on social media and actively communicating sustainability efforts there. This option was chosen by 21 respondents.
2. **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Reports:** The next key communication channel is CSR reports. While these reports may not be of interest to all customers, they provide analytical insights into the company's sustainability efforts. This option was also chosen by 18.
3. **Collaboration with NGOs and Sustainability Organizations:** Companies also collaborate with NGOs or sustainability organizations as a part of their communication strategy. This option was selected by 15 respondents.
4. **Product Packaging:** Communicating sustainability efforts through product packaging is another method employed by companies. This option was chosen by 11 respondents.

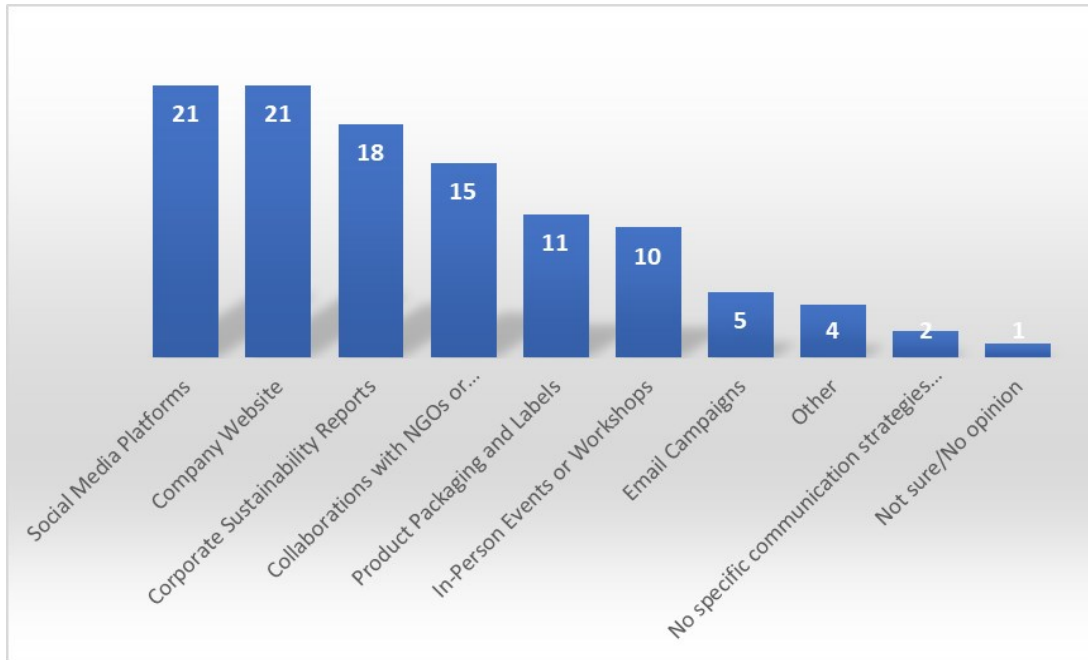


Figure 36: The option that organizations engage with customers to communicate sustainability efforts, including specific channels or communication strategies employed

5. Events and In-Person Communication: In fifth place, companies use events and in-person communication to engage with customers regarding their sustainability initiatives. This option was selected by 10 respondents

Sustainability and Building Meaningful Customer Relationships

This section explores the relationship between sustainability efforts and fostering meaningful relationships with customers.

The question posed was: "Select the option that best represents your view on how customer engagement contributes to building lasting and meaningful relationships in the context of sustainability."

According to expert opinions, the key factors are:

1. Enhancing Reputation and Credibility: Seen as the most important factor, with 26 positive responses from the respondents.
2. Fostering Trust and Transparency: Ranked second, this factor is crucial in building lasting relationships, receiving 24 responses.

3. **Strengthening Brand Loyalty:** Identified as the third key factor, with 19 responses.
4. **Driving Positive Customer Experiences:** Ranked fourth, with 16 responses, highlighting the significance of positive experiences in customer engagement.
5. **Aligning with Shared Values:** This factor, ranked fifth, emphasizes the importance of shared values between the company and its customers, with 14 responses.



Figure 37: How customer engagement contributes to building lasting and meaningful relationships in the context of sustainability

The Role of Sustainability in Customer Relations

In this section, we aim to understand the role of sustainability in customer relationships within the industries where respondents are active.

The question asked was: "Choose the option that most accurately reflects the role of sustainability in customer relationships and business operations within your particular industry."

Based on the responses:

- 1- Drives Innovation and R&D:** Most respondents believe that sustainability drives innovation and research and development within their industry, with 18 positive responses.
- 2- Influences Supply Chain Practices:** The next significant role of sustainability is its influence on supply chain practices, with 16 positive responses.
- 3- Integral to Product or Service Offerings:** Sustainability is also considered integral to product or service offerings, ranking third in importance with 15 responses.
- 4- Shapes Corporate Culture and Values:** Sustainability plays a crucial role in shaping corporate culture and values, with 14 positive responses.
- 5- Compliance with Industry Standards:** Ensuring compliance with industry standards is another important aspect of sustainability in business operations, with 12 positive responses.

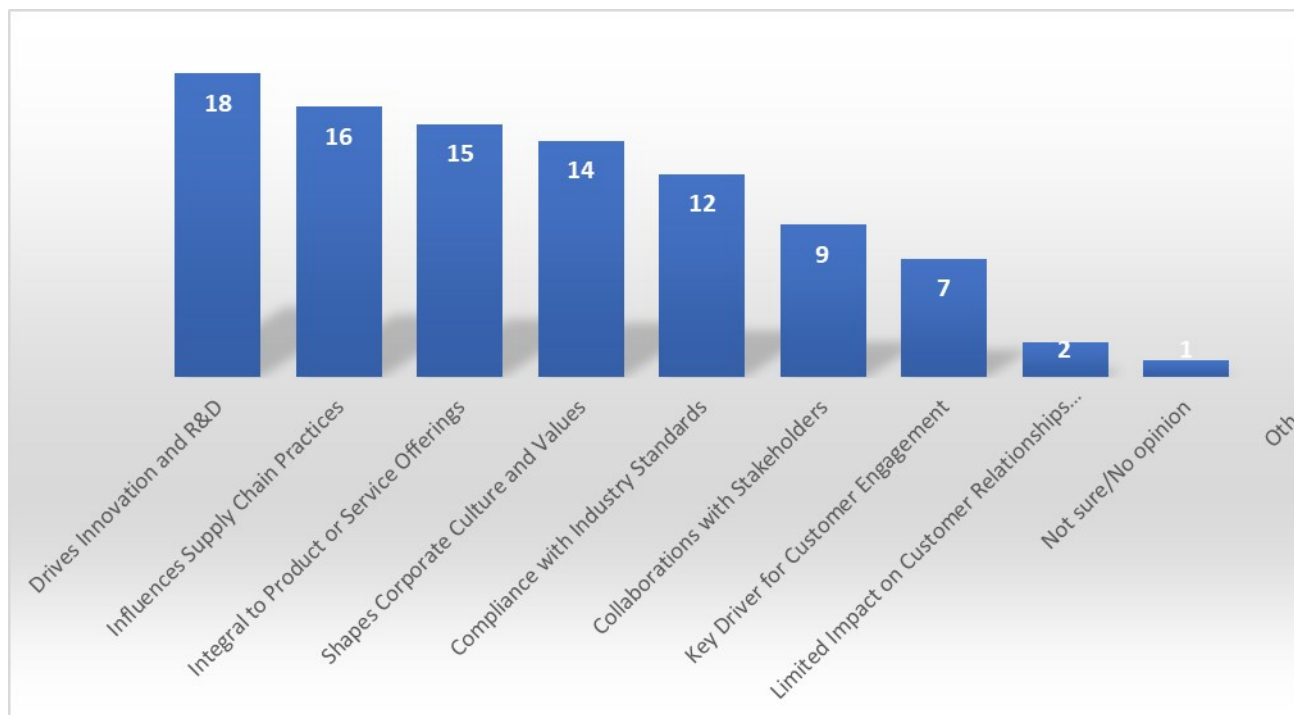


Figure 38: How sustainability plays a role in customer relationships and business operations

Organizational Engagement in Collaborations for Sustainable Development

In this part, we aim to find out how organizations in Nordic countries are involved in collaborations and partnerships to enhance sustainable customer development efforts.

The question asked was: "Please choose the option that best reflects your organization's involvement in collaborations or partnerships with other businesses or stakeholders to strengthen sustainable customer development initiatives."

According to the respondents:

- 1- **Actively Engaged in Collaborations/Partnerships:** 47% of respondents indicated that their organization is actively engaged in such collaborations.
- 2- **Limited Engagement in Collaborations/Partnerships:** 25% reported limited engagement in collaborations or partnerships.
- 3- **Occasionally Engaged in Collaborations/Partnerships:** 19% mentioned that their organization is occasionally engaged in these activities.

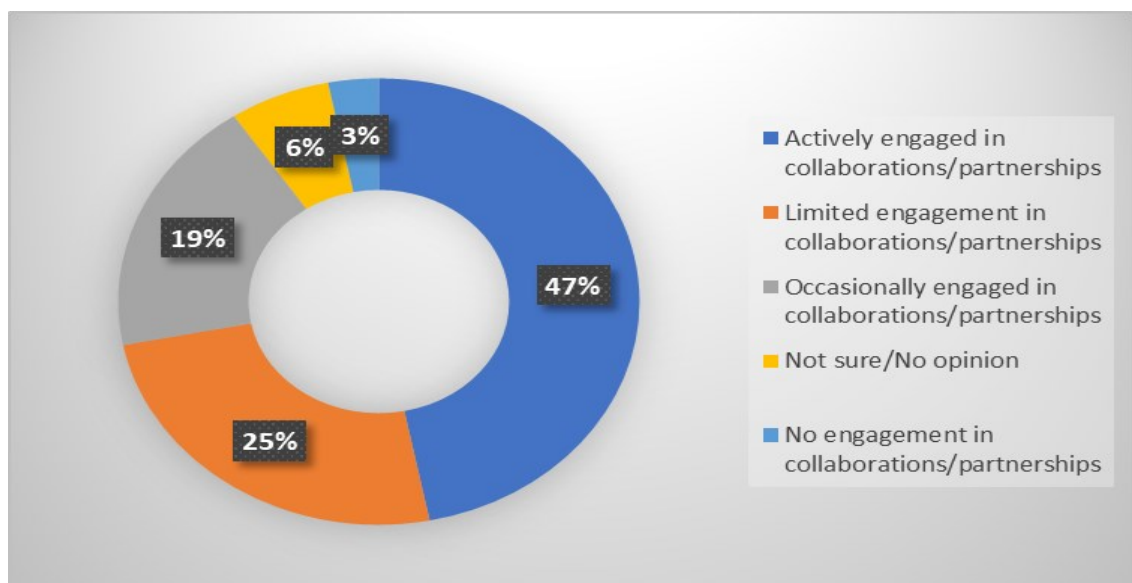


Figure 39: organization's engagement in collaborations or partnerships with other businesses or stakeholders to enhance sustainable customer development efforts

Critical Factors for Successful Sustainability Integration

In this section, we aim to determine the most critical factors for achieving successful sustainability integration within organizations.

The question asked was: "In your opinion, what is the most crucial factor for successfully integrating sustainability within organizations?"

Based on the responses:

- 1- Leadership Commitment: The most important factor identified is strong leadership commitment, with 30 positive responses from the respondents.
- 2- Customer Demand: Following leadership commitment, customer demand is seen as crucial, though with half the importance. This factor received 15 positive responses.
- 3- Employee Engagement: Employee engagement is also a key factor for successful sustainability integration, garnering 14 positive responses.
- 4- Regulatory Support: Regulatory support is considered important as well, with 14 positive responses.
- 5- Innovation and Technology: Lastly, innovation and technology play a significant role in achieving sustainability integration, with 9 positive responses.

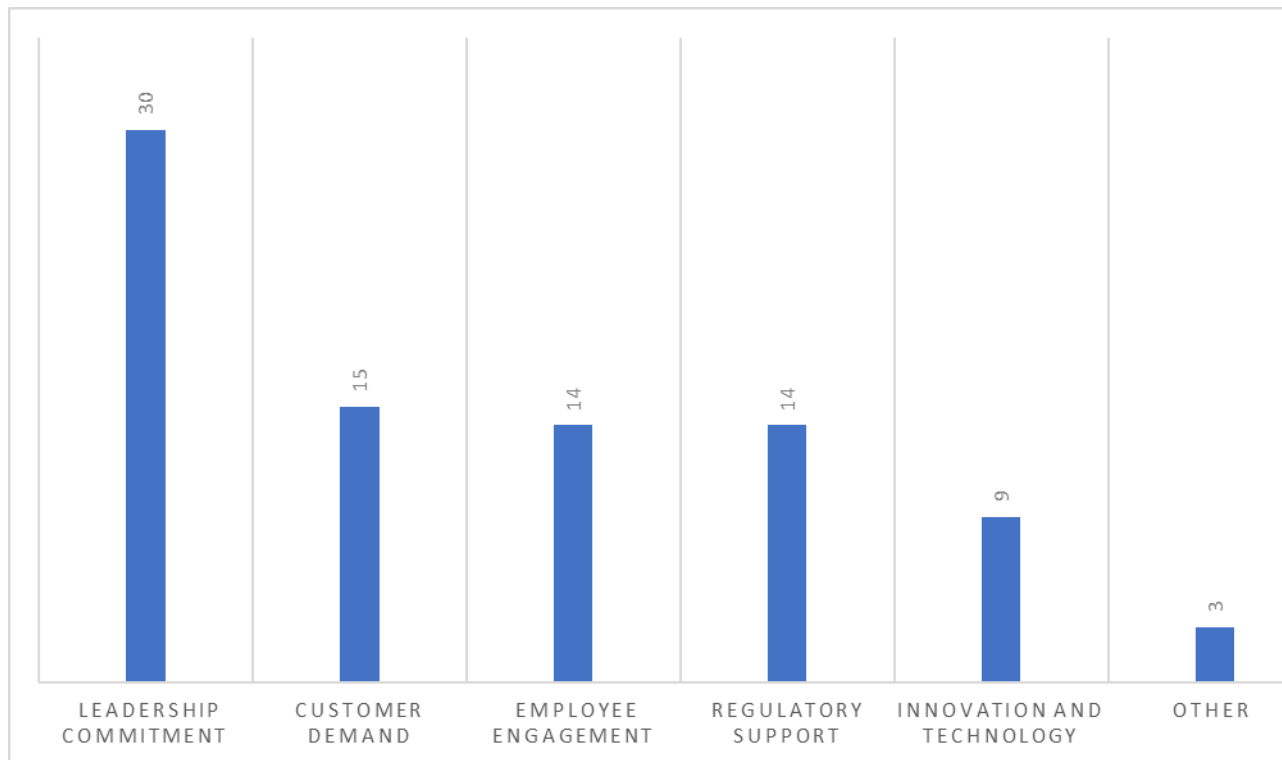


Figure 40: The most critical factor for achieving successful sustainability integration within organizations

The Impact of CSR on Financial Performance

In this section, we aim to understand the impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives on financial performance.

The question asked was: "Choose the option that most accurately reflects your perception of how Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives influence your organization's financial performance."

Based on the responses:

- **Positive Impact:** All respondents believe that CSR has a positive impact on financial performance.
- **No Negative Impact:** None of the respondents think that CSR initiatives have a negative impact on financial performance.

In terms of the degree of impact:

1. **Limited Positive Impact:** This was the most commonly selected option.
2. **Moderately Positive Impact:** This option was the second most popular choice.
3. **Highly Positive Impact:** This option was chosen by the fewest respondents.

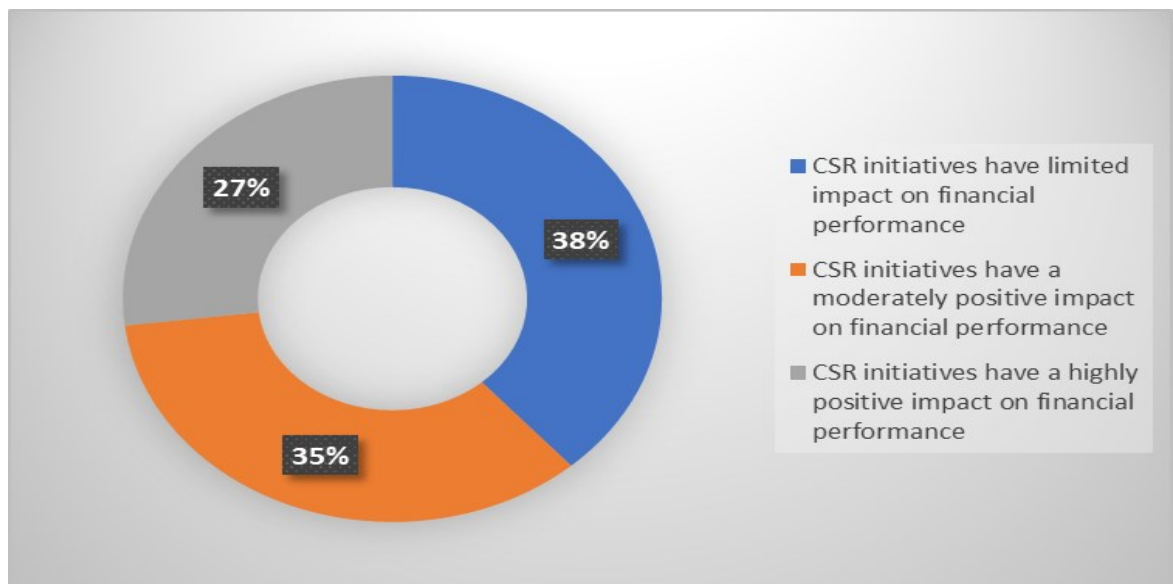


Figure 41: Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives on the organization's Financial Performance (FP)

The Impact of Customer Loyalty on the Relationship Between CSR Initiatives and Financial Performance

In this section, we explore the effect of customer loyalty in mediating the relationship between CSR initiatives and financial performance.

The question posed was: "To what extent do you believe customer loyalty mediates the relationship between CSR initiatives and financial performance in your organization?"

Based on the responses:

- 1- **Moderate Mediation:** 37% of respondents believe that customer loyalty moderately mediates this relationship.
- 2- **Limited Mediation:** 26% of respondents perceive a limited mediation effect.
- 3- **Strong Mediation:** Only 8% of respondents believe that customer loyalty strongly mediates the relationship.

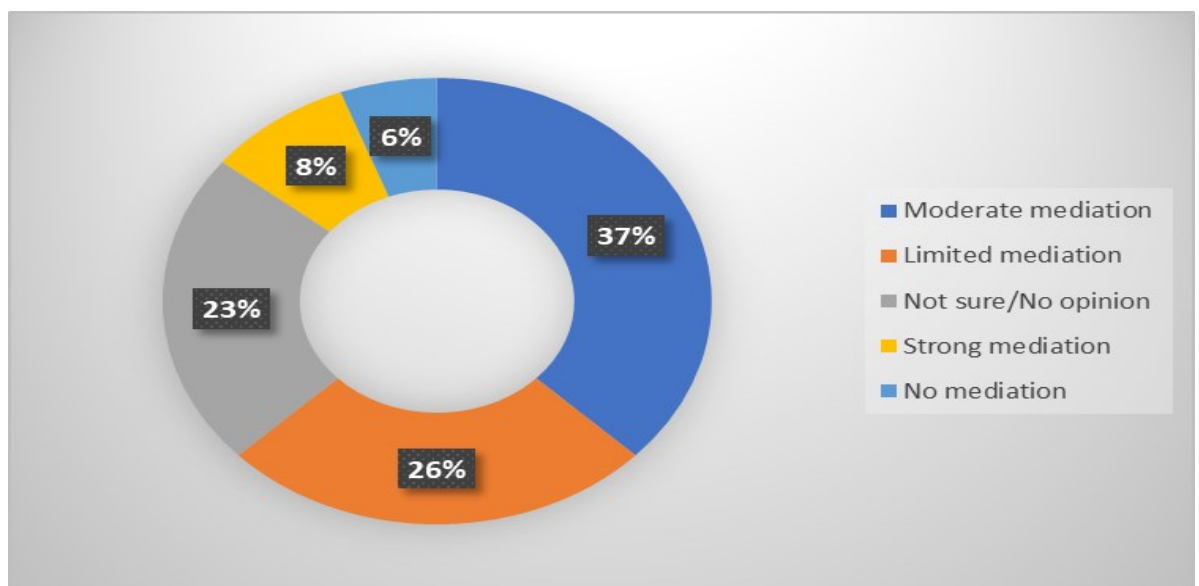


Figure 42: the effect of customer loyalty on the relationship between CSR initiatives and Financial Performance in your organization

Observations on Changes in Customer Behaviour, Loyalty, or Satisfaction Due to Sustainability Initiatives

In this section, we aim to understand respondents' observations about changes in customer behaviour, loyalty, or satisfaction as a result of sustainability initiatives.

The question asked was: "Choose the option that best reflects your observation of changes in customer behaviour, loyalty, or satisfaction due to sustainability initiatives."

Based on the responses:

1. **Moderate Positive Changes:** 53% of respondents observed moderate positive changes in customer behaviour, loyalty, or satisfaction.
2. **Significant Positive Changes:** 17% of respondents noted significant positive changes.
3. **No Noticeable Changes:** Only 3% of respondents observed no noticeable changes.

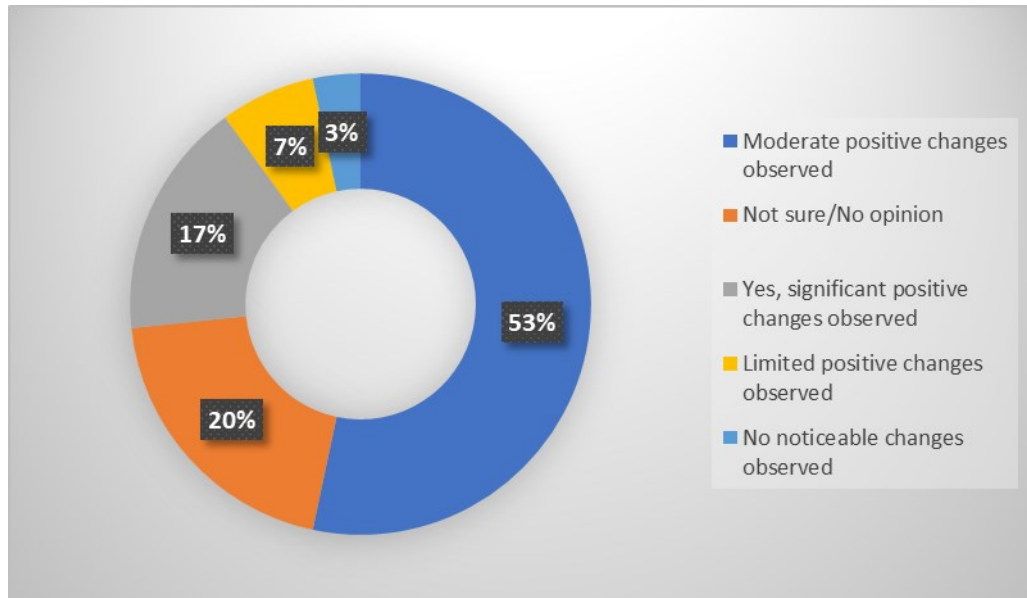


Figure 43: changes in customer behavior, loyalty, or satisfaction as a result of sustainability initiatives

The Role of Digitalization in Advancing Sustainability

In this section, we aim to understand the role of digitalization and its impact on sustainability from the perspective of the respondents.

The question posed was: "Select the option that best describes the role you believe digitalization plays in advancing sustainable regional development."

Based on the responses:

1. **Crucial Enabler:** More than half of the respondents believe that digitalization is a crucial enabler and significantly advances sustainable regional development.
2. **Some Relevance:** 38% of respondents believe digitalization has some relevance to sustainable regional development but may not be a primary driver.
3. **No Relevance:** None of the respondents think digitalization is not relevant to sustainable regional development.

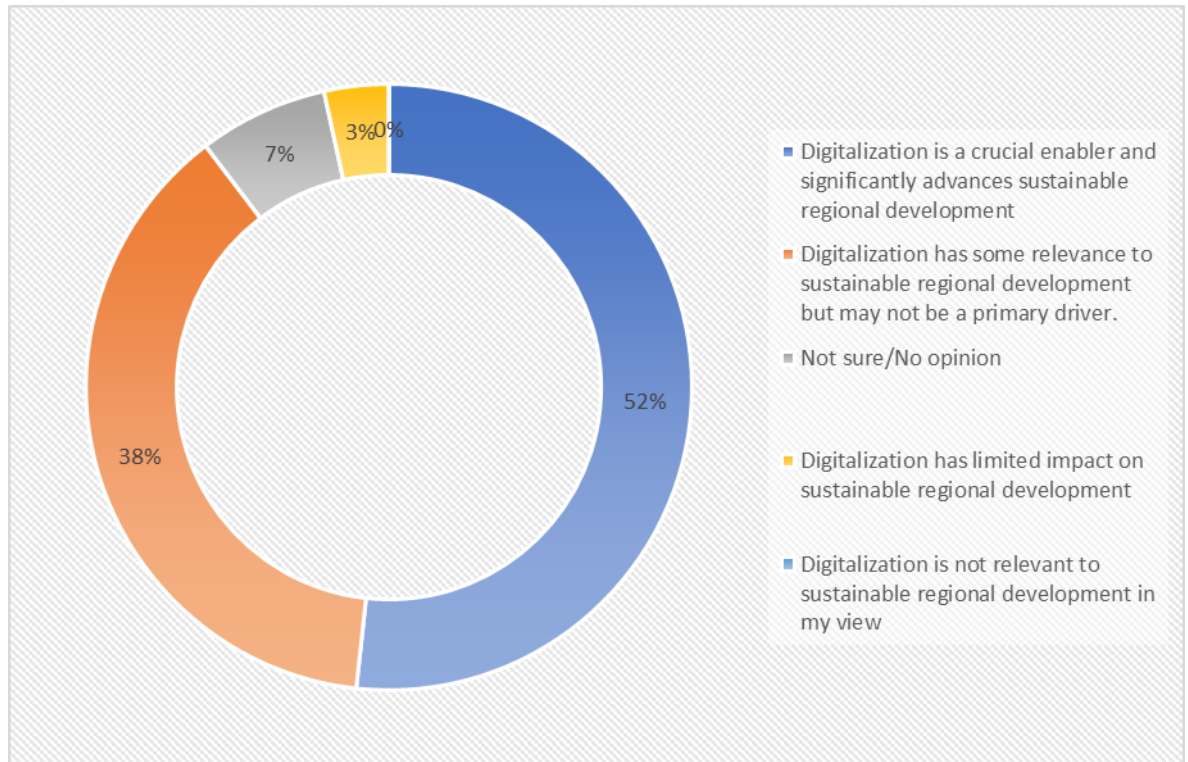


Figure 44: The role of digitalization in advancing sustainable regional development

The Relationship Between Sustainability and Collaboration Initiatives

This part of the thesis explores the relationship between sustainability and collaboration or partnership initiatives based on expert opinions.

The question posed was: "Select the option that best represents how collaborations or partnerships have contributed to the overall success of sustainable initiatives."

Based on the responses:

1. **Increased Innovation and Creativity:** This received the highest ranking, with 17 positive responses.
2. **No Significant Contribution Observed:** Notably, no respondents selected this option.
3. **Accelerated Implementation of Sustainable Practices:** Ranked second, with 14 positive responses.
4. **Improved Stakeholder Engagement:** This received 13 positive responses.
5. **Strengthened Supply Chain Sustainability:** Selected by 12 respondents.

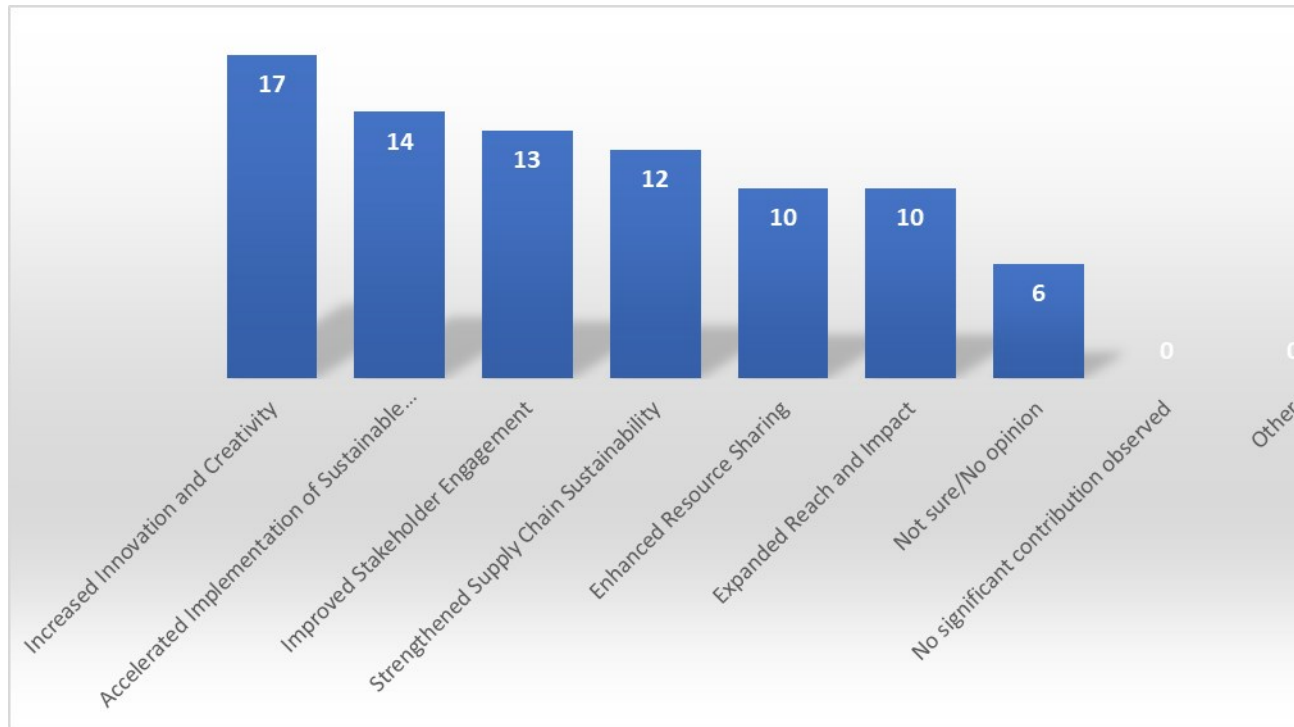


Figure 45: contribution of collaborations or partnerships to the overall success of sustainable initiatives

Adapting to Emerging Trends in Sustainable Customer Development

This section of the thesis explores how organizations plan to adapt to new trends in sustainable customer development.

The question posed was: "Select the option that best represents your opinion on emerging trends in sustainable customer development and how your organization is preparing to adapt to these trends."

Based on the responses:

- 1. Enhanced Transparency and Traceability:** The most significant adaptation strategy, chosen by 18 respondents.
- 2. Technological Innovations in Sustainability:** A close second, with 17 respondents highlighting this approach.
- 3. Emphasis on Circular Economy Practices:** The third most common strategy, with 13 respondents selecting this option.
- 4. Regulatory Changes Affecting Sustainability:** Identified by 11 respondents as a key factor in their adaptation plans.
- 5. Increased Focus on Social Impact:** This strategy received 10 votes.

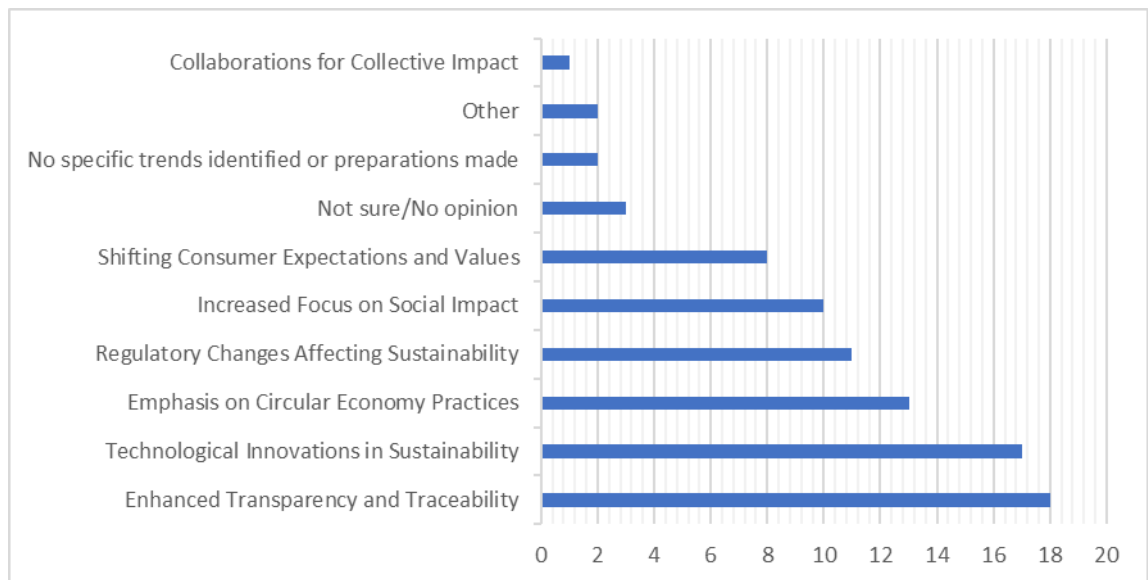


Figure 46: Emerging trends in sustainable customer development

Vision for the Future of Sustainable Customer Development in the Nordic Context

In this part of the thesis, we aim to uncover the respondents' vision for the future of sustainable customer development within the Nordic context.

The question posed was: "Select the option that best represents your vision for the future of sustainable customer development within the Nordic context."

Based on the responses, the top visions are:

- 1. Strong Integration of Sustainability into Business Strategies:** The most popular vision, receiving 24 votes.
- 2. Enhanced Corporate Transparency and Accountability:** This vision received 14 positive responses.
- 3. Heightened Consumer Awareness and Demand for Sustainable Products/Services:** This was chosen by 10 respondents.
- 4. Growing Importance of Circular Economy Principles:** Also selected by 10 respondents.
- 5. Advancements in Technology Driving Sustainable Practices:** This vision garnered 9 positive responses.

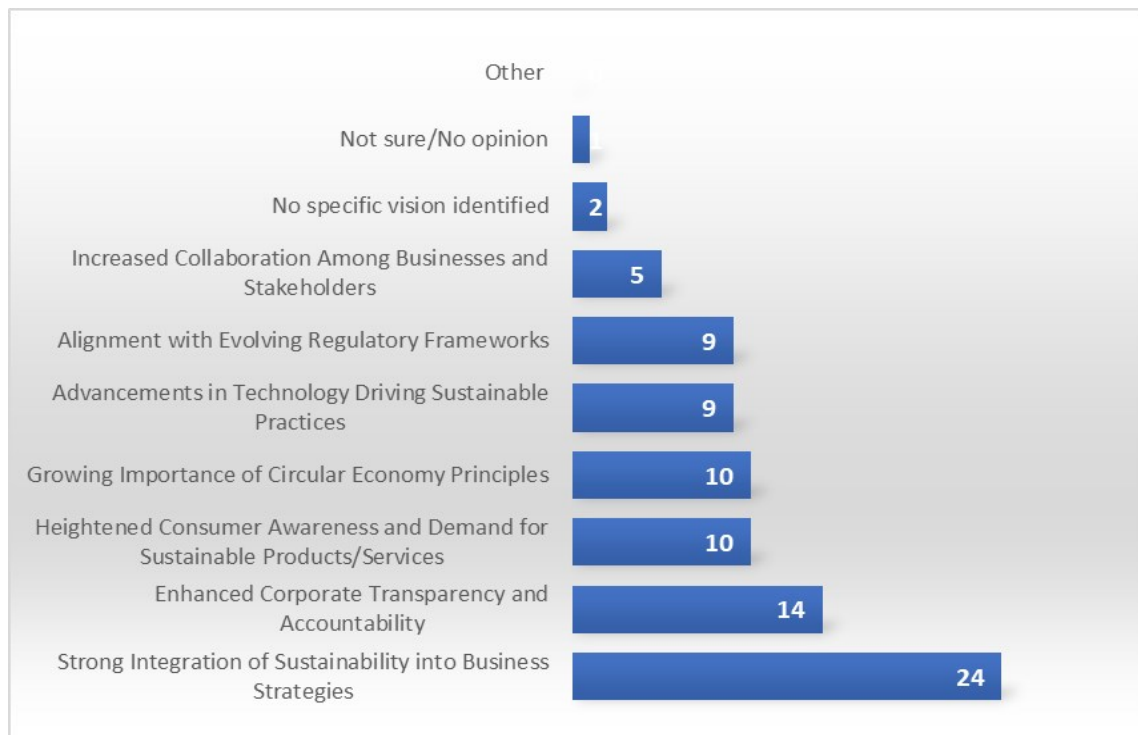


Figure 47: Future of sustainable customer development within the Nordic context

KPIs for Measuring the Impact of Sustainable Customer Development Initiatives

In this section, we aim to understand the key performance indicators (KPIs) used by organizations to measure the impact of sustainable customer development initiatives.

The question asked was: "Choose the option that most accurately reflects how your organization assesses the impact of sustainable customer development initiatives, including any specific metrics or key performance indicators (KPIs) used."

Based on the responses:

- 1- Carbon Footprint Reduction:** The most frequently mentioned KPI, with 18 positive replies on that of respondents indicating its use.
- 2- Customer Satisfaction Surveys:** The second most common method, used by 17 of respondents to measure impact.
- 3- Environmental Impact Assessments:** Used by 10 of respondents as a metric for evaluating sustainable customer development.
- 4- Number of Sustainable Product/Service Sales:** Identified by 7 of respondents as a key metric.
- 5- Employee Engagement in Sustainability Initiatives:** Mentioned by 4 of respondents as an important KPI.

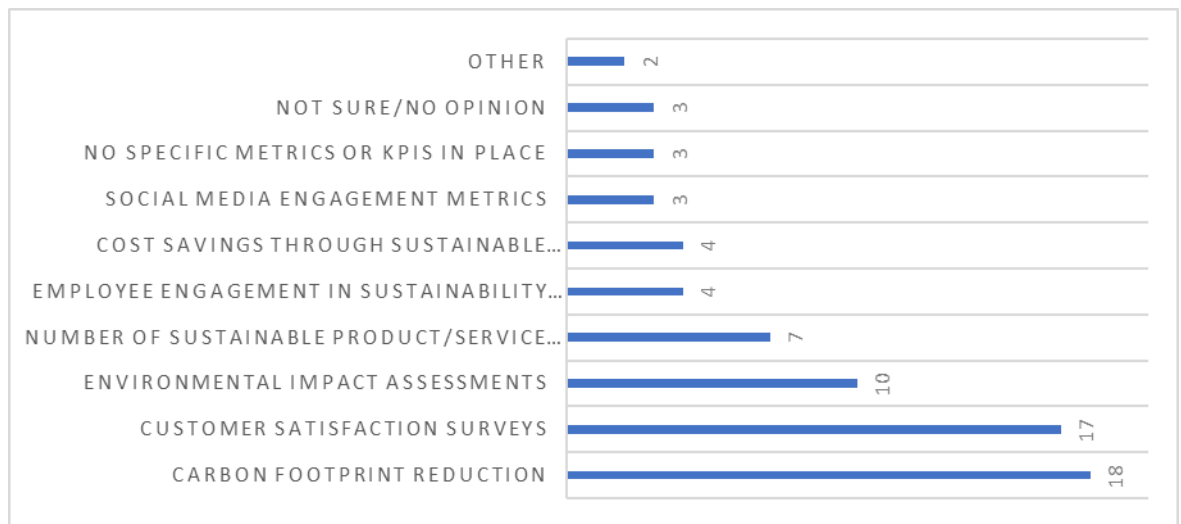


Figure 48: How organizations measure the impact of sustainable customer development initiatives

4.6 Gaps, area of future research and recommendation

In this part we want to know the opinion of the respondents regarding the gaps or areas of limited research in the existing literature on sustainable customer development

The question is: Select the option that best represents your perspective on gaps or areas of limited research in the existing literature on sustainable customer development within the Nordic countries

The respondents think that:

- 1- Lack of Industry-Specific Research
- 2- Limited Focus on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)
- 3- Inadequate Exploration of Technological Impacts
- 4- Gaps in Consumer Behaviour Studies
- 5- Insufficient Attention to Cultural Factors

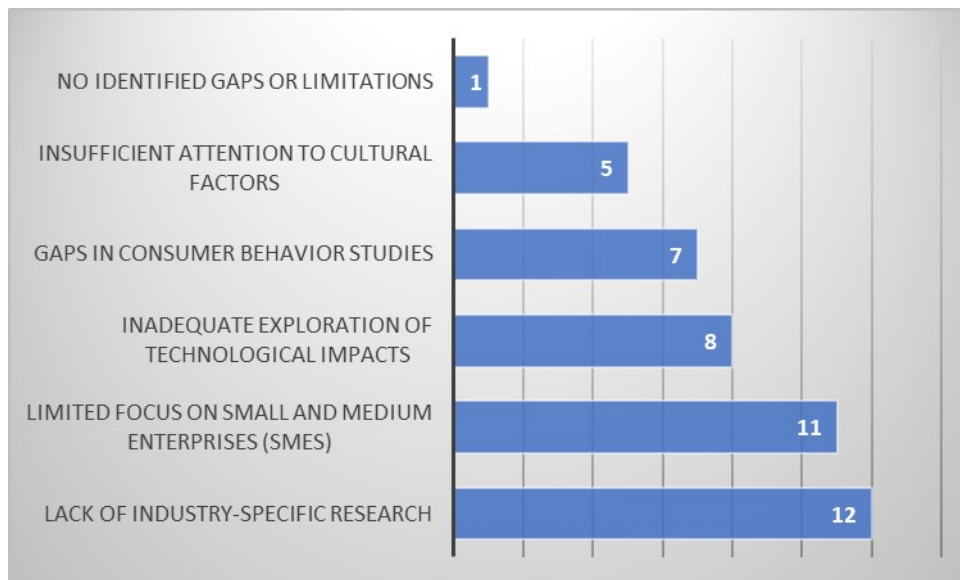


Figure 49: Gaps or areas of limited research in the existing literature on sustainable customer development within the Nordic countries

Future Research Topics in Sustainable Customer Development in Nordic Countries

In this section, we aim to uncover the prevailing thoughts on future research directions within Nordic countries, as suggested by experts.

The question asked was: "Choose the option that most accurately reflects the topics or dimensions you would recommend for future research in the area of sustainable customer development within the Nordic countries."

Based on the responses:

- 1- Consumer Perception and Awareness:** This is considered the most important research topic, with 21% of respondents suggesting it.
- 2- Sustainable Practices in SMEs:** Suggested by 18% of respondents, this topic ranks second.
- 3- Industry-Specific Sustainability Strategies:** This area is recommended by 17% of respondents.
- 4- Policy Impacts on Sustainable Practices:** Suggested by 14% of respondents, this topic explores the influence of policy on sustainable practices.
- 5- Collaborative Initiatives for Sustainability:** This topic is recommended by 8% of respondents.

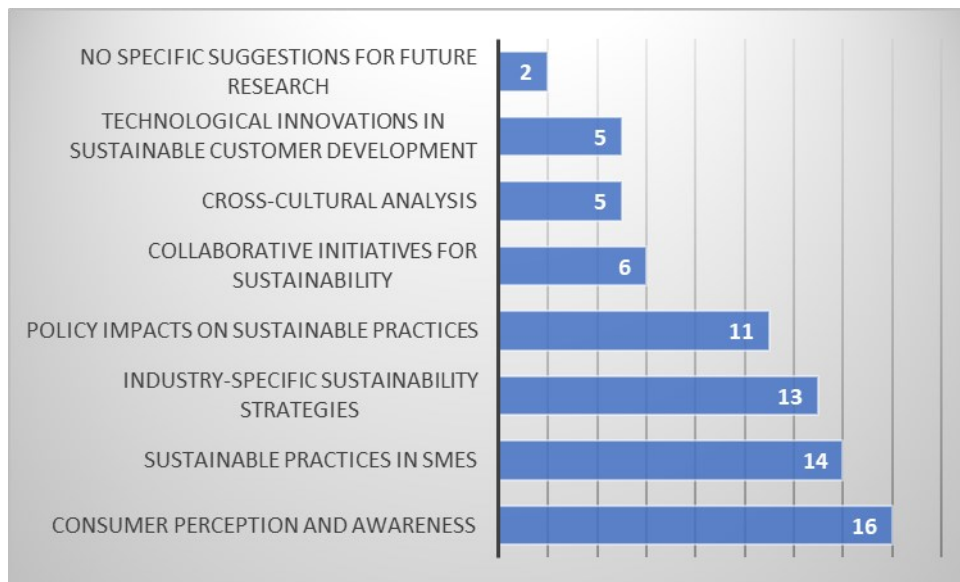


Figure 50: Suggested topics or dimensions for future research endeavours in the field of sustainable customer development within the Nordic countries

The Role of Regulations and Policies in Shaping Sustainable Customer Development in Nordic Countries

In this section, we aim to understand the role of regulations and policies in shaping sustainable customer development within the Nordic countries.

The question asked was: "Choose the option that most accurately reflects your view on how policies and regulations influence sustainable customer development in the Nordic countries."

Based on the responses:

- 1- **Strong Influence:** 66% of respondents believe that policies and regulations strongly drive sustainable customer development.
- 2- **Moderate Influence:** 31% of respondents believe that policies and regulations have a moderate influence.
- 3- **Limited Influence:** Only 3% of respondents believe that policies and regulations have limited influence on sustainable customer development.
- 4- **No Relevance:** None of the respondents believe that policies and regulations are not relevant to sustainable customer development.

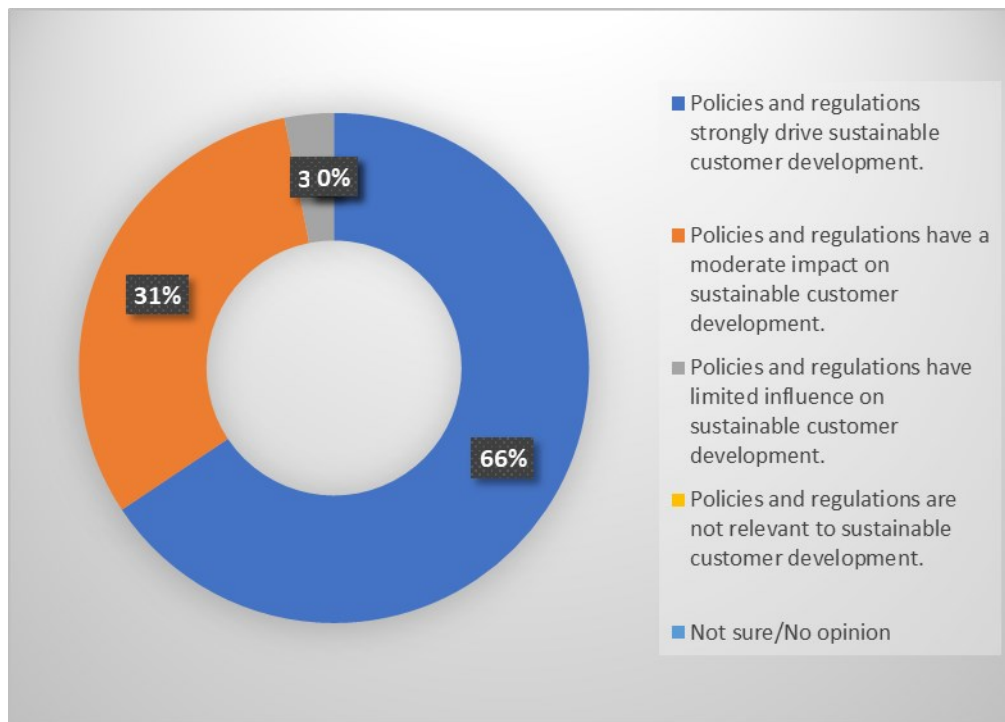


Figure 51: The role of policies and regulations in shaping sustainable customer development within the Nordic countries

Policy Frameworks Influencing Organizational Approaches to Sustainability

In this section, we aim to identify the policy frameworks that companies utilize in their approach to sustainability.

The question posed was: "Select the option that best represents specific policy frameworks that have influenced your organization's approach to sustainability."

Based on the responses:

- 1- **Specific Policy Frameworks:** 18 of positive points that respondents gave positive replies of respondents identified a particular policy framework as influential.
- 2- **National Environmental Policies:** 12 positive points that respondents gave reported that national environmental policies shape their approach.
- 3- **International Sustainability Standards (e.g., ISO 14001):** Similarly, 12 of respondents indicated that international sustainability standards influence their sustainability efforts.

4- Carbon Pricing Mechanisms and Renewable Energy Policies: 9 positive points from the respondents' positive answer on this of respondents noted that carbon pricing mechanisms and renewable energy policies impact their approach to sustainability.

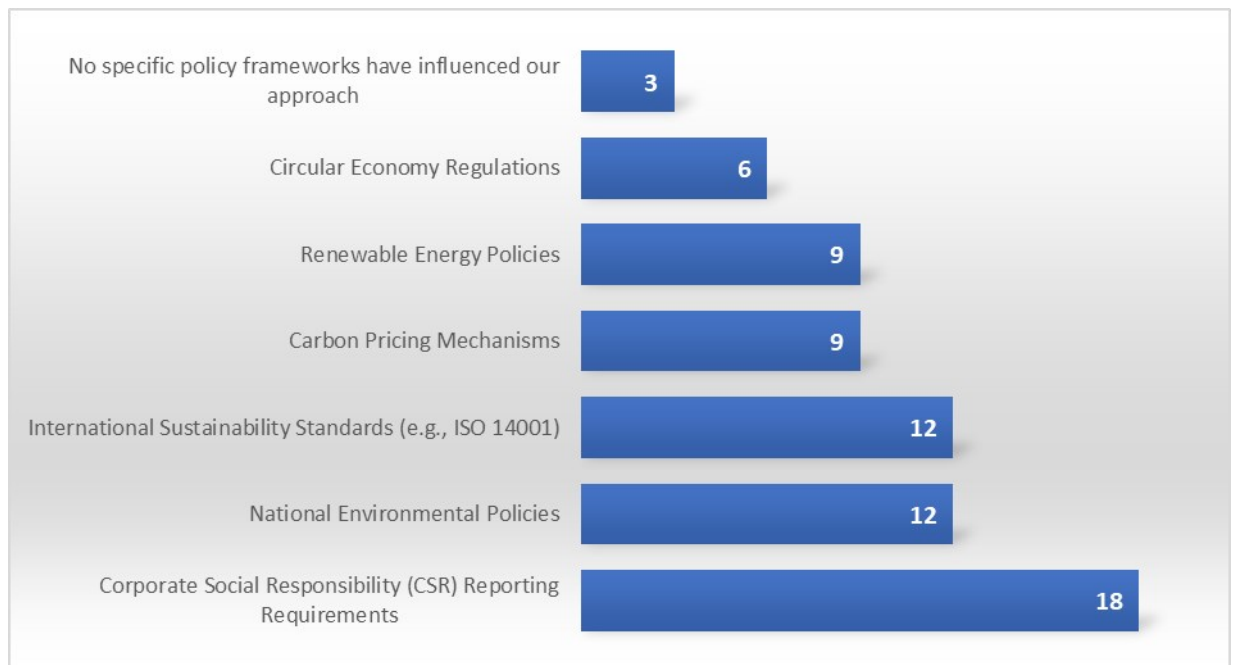


Figure 52: specific policy frameworks that have influenced the organizations' approach to sustainability

Recommendations for Enhancing Sustainable Customer Development

In this section, we aim to gather respondents' advice for other experts and companies on approaching sustainability in customer development.

The question asked was: "Choose the option that best represents the guidance or suggestions you would provide to other organizations looking to improve their sustainable customer development practices."

Based on the responses, the top recommendations are:

- 1. Align Sustainable Practices with Business Strategies:** The most highly recommended advice, receiving 22 votes.
- 2. Foster a Culture of Sustainability Across the Organization:** This was the second most popular recommendation, with 18 votes.
- 3. Prioritize Leadership Commitment and Buy-In:** This came in third, with 17 votes.
- 4. Regularly Monitor and Report on Sustainability Metrics:** Recommended by 16 respondents.

5. Conduct Regular Environmental Impact Assessments: This advice received 14 votes.



Figure 53: Best recommendations for other organizations aiming to enhance their sustainable customer development practices

5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In an era marked by growing environmental consciousness and evolving customer expectations, businesses are challenged to create strategies that not only engage customers but also promote long-term environmental and social well-being. The Nordic countries, known for their progressive stance on sustainability, offer a unique context to explore these objectives. This thesis examines sustainable customer development within the Nordic countries, aiming to reveal strategies, theoretical frameworks, key themes, and gaps in this dynamic field.

5.2 Background and Context

Sustainable customer development has become crucial for businesses seeking to balance economic growth with environmental responsibility. The Nordic countries—Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden—are recognized leaders in sustainable practices, committed to ecological balance, social equity, and economic prosperity. Their innovative approaches and strong tradition of corporate social responsibility provide an ideal setting to study sustainable customer engagement.

This research addresses a vital question: 'What methods can be employed to attain a comprehensive understanding of sustainable customer development in the Nordic countries?' To answer this, a combination of literature review and empirical data collection was used. Approximately 400 experts were invited to participate in a questionnaire, with 37 responses received, offering valuable insights and practical perspectives.

The study also explores several sub-questions:

- What key themes and concepts emerge from the literature and expert opinions on sustainable customer development?

- How do different theoretical frameworks enhance our understanding of sustainable customer development, and are these frameworks validated by expert feedback?
- What research gaps exist in the literature, and do experts identify additional gaps or emerging issues?

Addressing these sub-questions aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of sustainable customer development, offering insights that are valuable to businesses, policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders interested in the intersection of sustainability and customer engagement.

5.3 Comparison with Literature

5.3.1 Key Themes and Concepts in Sustainable Customer Development

Our extensive exploration of the literature landscape has unearthed a constellation of key themes and profound concepts that collectively shape the landscape of sustainable customer development within the Nordic countries. At the core of this discourse lies the resounding call for businesses to harmonize economic aspirations with environmental responsibility and social equity, culminating in a strategic fusion that redefines the contours of customer engagement.

Integration of Environmental and Social Considerations: A resounding chorus throughout the literature underscores the significance of weaving environmental and social considerations into the very fabric of customer engagement strategies. According to Adrienn (2023), Iqbal & Todi (2015) and Ferrer-Estévez & Chalmeta, (2023), businesses in the Nordic region is recognizing that customers, armed with heightened awareness, seek to align their consumption choices with their values. This necessitates a fundamental shift in how products and services are designed, marketed, and delivered. As a result, sustainable customer development transcends the transactional realm, evolving into a holistic engagement where ethical principles converge with commerce.

Circular Economy Principles and Responsible Consumption: Nordic businesses are increasingly adopting circular economy principles as the corner-stone

of their sustainable customer development strategies. The circular economy paradigm shatters the linear trajectory of resource extraction, production, consumption, and disposal. Instead, it infuses a regenerative cycle that minimizes waste and maximizes resource efficiency. Embracing circularity, businesses reimagine product lifecycles, from design to disposal, with an emphasis on durability, reparability, and recyclability. Concurrently, responsible consumption patterns gain momentum as customers gravitate towards products that offer longevity and reduced environmental impact. Niskanen, Anshelm, and McLaren (2020)'s study reveals that the CE debate in Sweden is shaped by eco-modern urban sensibilities rather than addressing the extractive industries directly. This depoliticizes the CE transition, portraying it as a technocratic issue rather than a social and political one. The CE concept serves as a "floating signifier," adaptable to various interests and scales, which can either maintain the status quo or facilitate transformative change.

Stakeholder Collaboration as a Catalyst: A pivotal theme that emerges from the literature is the centrality of stakeholder collaboration in fostering sustainable customer relationships (Juntunen et al., 2019). In a region celebrated for its robust tradition of social responsibility, businesses recognize that partnerships extend beyond financial transactions. Collaborative efforts encompass customers, suppliers, communities, and regulatory bodies, creating a web of interconnectedness that amplifies the impact of sustainable initiatives. By involving stakeholders in co-creating solutions, businesses nurture trust, transparency, and shared accountability—an ethos that resonates deeply within the Nordic values of equality and consensus-driven decision-making.

The findings from the article Rex et al. (2015) shed light on the factors that drive sustainable consumer behaviour. Specifically, the study identifies several critical factors, including attitudes toward sustainable behaviour, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and internal ethics. These factors align with the core themes of sustainable customer development, demonstrating how individual attitudes, social influences, and perceived control play a vital role in shaping sustainable consumer behaviour.

We delve into the critical themes and concepts that emerged According to Müller et al. (2021), Predictive Sustainability Model Incorporating Ecological Con-science and Moral Obligation study on green consumer behaviour in emerging markets, particularly focusing on Mexico. Our investigation integrated the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and extended it to include ecological con-science and moral obligation as additional variables, providing new insights into the drivers of green purchasing intentions.

We explored the nexus between consumer behaviour and ecological concerns in the context of green products, analysing the factors that influence purchasing intentions in an emerging market. Our research uncovered the following key findings:

Perceived Purchase Control: The perceived control consumers have over their green purchases significantly influences their purchase intentions. This underscores the importance of making green products readily accessible and enhancing consumers' perceived control over their buying choices.

Ecological Conscience: Ecological conscience emerged as a central theme. Consumers with a heightened ecological conscience exhibited a stronger intention to purchase green products, emphasizing the need to consider individuals' environmental awareness in sustainable customer development strategies.

Moral Obligation: Moral obligation played a pivotal role in shaping purchase intentions. Consumers who felt a moral responsibility towards environmental sustainability demonstrated a higher inclination to buy green products. This highlights the importance of ethical considerations in customer development strategies.

Influence of Price: Surprisingly, we observed that willingness to pay for green products did not directly affect purchase intentions. This indicates that, when consumers are environmentally conscious, they may be less price-sensitive, emphasizing the significance of offering quality ecological products.

While the findings are pivotal for sustainable customer development, it's important to recognize the complex interplay of attitudes, social norms, and eco-

logical consciousness that shape green consumer behaviour. The results contribute to the growing literature on green consumer behaviour, particularly in emerging markets, and endorse the inclusion of ecological conscience and moral obligation as significant variables for understanding consumer intentions and actions.

In unravelling these key themes, our findings illuminate the profound interplay between business strategy, societal values, and environmental stewardship. The emergence of circular economy principles, the prioritization of responsible consumption, and the embrace of stakeholder collaboration together outline a dynamic blueprint for sustainable customer development in the Nordic context. As businesses navigate this intricate landscape, these themes serve as guiding stars, offering direction and inspiration to forge enduring relationships between businesses, customers, and the planet.

5.3.2 Theoretical Frameworks Informing Sustainable Customer Development

Delving into the tapestry of scholarly investigations, our literature review unveils a rich assortment of theoretical frameworks that illuminate the path of sustainable customer development within the Nordic countries. These frameworks serve as compasses, guiding researchers and practitioners in understanding the complex interplay between sustainable practices, customer behaviour, and business strategy.

Triple Bottom Line (TBL) Theory: At the forefront of theoretical foundations lies the Triple Bottom Line theory, a resonant pillar within the Nordic sustainability ethos. This theory extends beyond the conventional notion of business success, advocating for the incorporation of economic, environmental, and social dimensions. Within the Nordic context, where ecological harmony, societal equity, and economic prosperity intertwine, the TBL theory aligns seamlessly. It underscores the interconnectedness of these dimensions, compelling businesses to consider their impact on society and the environment alongside their financial perfor-

mance. This theory not only mirrors the values of the Nordic region but also provides a robust framework for businesses seeking to navigate the intricate terrain of sustainable customer engagement.

Kjøde, van der Velden, and Motevallian (2021) critically assess the "Triple Bottom Line" (TBL) concept, which aims to integrate environmental and social dimensions into business operations alongside economic considerations. The concept is intertwined with economic growth, making it inherently anthropocentric. Critics argue that the visual analogies of balance, like the "three-legged stool," are flawed because the environment is foundational to both economy and social well-being, rather than a separate pillar. Scholars have also criticized TBL for its measurement difficulties and potential for "green-washing." Even its originator, John Elkington, has recalled the concept, emphasizing that the TBL framework cannot support a true sustainability transition unless data is aggregated and analysed to genuinely aid decision-makers in managing the systemic effects of human activity.

Sridhar and Jones (2013) suggest that for TBL to truly advance sustainability, it needs to evolve into an integrated bottom line (IBL) approach, incorporating broader issues like culture and corporate governance. Future research should focus on improving TBL's measurement and integration to make its outputs more meaningful and understandable.

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB): Complementing the TBL theory, the Theory of Planned Behaviour emerges as a guiding star in understanding the motivational factors that drive customer engagement with sustainable practices. This theory delves into the psychological underpinnings that shape individuals' intentions and behaviours. Within the context of sustainable customer development, the TPB offers insights into how attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioural control influence customers' decisions to support eco-conscious initiatives. As businesses strive to cultivate meaningful connections with their customers, understanding these psychological drivers becomes pivotal for tailoring effective strategies that resonate with customers' values and beliefs.

Synthesis of Frameworks: The dynamic interplay between the TBL theory and the TPB highlights the complexity of sustainable customer development. While the TBL theory sets the stage by emphasizing the interdependence of economic, environmental, and social considerations, the TPB delves into the intricate motivations that underlie individual behaviour. Together, these frameworks create a holistic lens through which businesses can craft strategies that not only align with the Nordic sustainability ethos but also resonate deeply with customers' values.

According to Rex et al. (2015), evaluating the Drivers of Sustainable Behavioural Intention, within the framework of sustainable customer development, it is essential to consider the theoretical underpinnings that guide our understanding of consumer behaviour. The article contributes to this theoretical framework by extending the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to include internal ethics and moral intensity as crucial factors influencing sustainable behavioural intentions. By incorporating these elements into the TPB, it enhances our theoretical grasp of what drives sustainable consumer behaviour, providing a valuable extension to the existing theories in sustainable customer development.

In essence, the fusion of these theoretical frameworks enriches our understanding of sustainable customer development in the Nordic context. The TBL theory encapsulates the region's dedication to holistic well-being, while the TPB unveils the nuanced psychology that drives customer engagement. As businesses embark on the journey of sustainable customer development, these frameworks provide a robust foundation for strategic decision-making, enabling businesses to craft initiatives that simultaneously propel economic growth, environmental stewardship, and social progress.

Unpacking the 'Spiral' Framework: Exploring the Influence of Business Model Innovation on Sustainability Transitions

The article "Introduction to Business Models for Sustainability Transitions" by Aagaard, A. et al. (2021) contributes essential insights to the field of sustainability transitions and business models. It highlights the potential of business model innovation as a catalyst for system-wide sustainability transitions. The authors introduce the 'spiral' framework, which demonstrates how the influence of business activities extends over time, from micro-level business models to macro-level

sustainability transitions. This framework underscores the importance of considering the duality of system structures and patterns of action, as well as the dynamics between boundary conditions and business models. Furthermore, the article identifies key areas for future research, including the role of time in business models for sustainability transitions and the impact of transition pathways on business models. This literature serves as a valuable foundation for understanding the interplay between business models and sustainability transitions in the context of your thesis.

5.3.3 Strategies for Sustainable Customer Engagement

The symphony of sustainable customer development within the Nordic countries resonates with a diverse array of strategies that businesses orchestrate to cultivate lasting, meaningful relationships with their customers. Our comprehensive literature synthesis uncovers a harmonious spectrum of approaches that span product innovation, communication, personalized experiences, and community-building—each contributing to the collective crescendo of sustainable engagement.

Product and Service Innovations: Amidst the landscape of sustainable customer engagement, product and service innovations emerge as notes of transformation. Nordic businesses, attuned to the region's commitment to environmental well-being, craft offerings that align with circular economy principles. These innovations often encompass eco-friendly design, material sourcing, and end-of-life considerations. By weaving sustainability into the very fabric of products and services, businesses not only meet customer demands but also pave the way for conscious consumption patterns that harmonize with the region's ethos.

Responsible Marketing and Communication: Communication becomes a conductor's baton, guiding businesses to resonate with their audience through responsible marketing. Nordic businesses skilfully communicate their sustainability efforts, aligning messages with core values and resonating with environmentally and socially conscious consumers. Transparent communication of sustainable

practices enhances customer trust and loyalty, while also serving as an educational platform, fostering awareness about the broader impact of consumer choices.

Personalized Engagement Experiences: In the pursuit of meaningful customer engagement, the composition of personalized experiences takes centre stage. Nordic businesses embrace the nuances of individual preferences and beliefs, crafting engagement journeys that align with customers' values. These experiences extend beyond transactions, nurturing a deeper connection by tailoring offerings to meet customers' aspirations for sustainability. By doing so, businesses transcend traditional customer-business relationships, becoming partners in the shared endeavour of creating a more sustainable world.

Community and Shared Values Initiatives: The orchestration of sustainable customer development extends beyond the individual to the collective, cultivating a sense of community and shared purpose. Nordic businesses craft initiatives that invite customers to participate in a broader movement, fostering a sense of belonging. Collaborative endeavours such as sustainability work-shops, community events, and collective campaigns resonate deeply with customers seeking to align their actions with their values. By nurturing these connections, businesses amplify the impact of sustainable engagement, fostering a ripple effect that extends far beyond their immediate interactions.

Adaptation Strategies in Nordic CSR Policy Practice (Midttun et al. (2012)): Our study has uncovered that potential conflicts between CSR policy and the advanced welfare state traditions within the Nordic countries are largely re-solved by introducing CSR policy as a supplement to the old welfare state agenda. The interviews and policy documents gathered for this analysis suggest the presence of three primary accommodation strategies:

1. Externalizing Potential Conflicts: Nordic countries, particularly Sweden and Norway, focus CSR policies on foreign policy for international welfare capitalism. CSR fills a regulatory gap in the global market economy that

has not been amenable to traditional regulatory governance. This approach aligns with the strong Nordic political engagement for a socially responsible welfare model in the global economy.

2. **Compartmentalizing CSR:** Denmark and Finland have adopted a trend focusing on CSR as a competitive advantage in international trade, standing in contrast to the humanitarian, international welfare capitalism model of CSR favoured by Norway and Sweden. CSR in these countries is confined to areas less amenable to traditional regulation, such as competitiveness and innovation.
3. **Supplementing Welfare State Protection:** Denmark's early CSR policy model reflects the extraordinarily high Danish public unemployment expenses in the 1990s. Denmark creatively included CSR in the labour market policy arena, traditionally dominated by regulations and tripartite agreements, thereby implementing CSR and encouraging voluntary industrial engagement to supplement the welfare state.

These strategies of accommodation demonstrate how Nordic countries adapt CSR to fit their political traditions and needs, resolving conflicts and allowing for the integration of CSR into their policy frameworks. This adaptation is essential for understanding the compatibility between CSR and the advanced welfare state in the Nordic context.

Strategies of Stakeholder Integration into Sustainability Innovations

The findings of (article titled "Strategies for Integrating Stakeholders into Sustainability Innovation: A Configurational Perspective" (Juntunen et al., 2019)) reveal three distinct stakeholder integration strategies that lead to high sustainability performance in innovation. These strategies represent various combinations of the number and types of integrated stakeholders, the quality of organizational engagement with these stakeholders, and the timing of integration. These findings challenge the notion of a single, universally effective strategy and emphasize the importance of tailoring stakeholder integration to specific contexts.

Strategy 1: One of the primary approaches employed in this context is Strategy 1, which focuses on the Early Integration with Secondary Stakeholders, often referred to as 'Early Secondary' strategy.

The first strategy, known as "early secondary," builds upon early stakeholder integration and deep organizational engagement with secondary stakeholders. A notable feature of this strategy is the presence of a high share of secondary stakeholders, which helps maximize the benefits of novel perspectives at the outset of the innovation process. Importantly, this strategy is indifferent to the specific number of integrated stakeholders, focusing instead on the diversity of viewpoints.

Illustrative Case: BMW's electric car development project exemplifies the early secondary strategy. BMW engaged with stakeholders in the early phase of the project, seeking innovative ideas and collaboration. This approach led to groundbreaking innovations, such as lightweight materials and energy-efficient manufacturing processes.

Strategy 2: referred to as 'Selective,' involves the deliberate integration of only a subset of stakeholders.

The second strategy, labelled "selective," is characterized by collaboration with a limited number of stakeholders, either primary or secondary, within a narrow stakeholder network. Unlike the early secondary strategy, this approach does not place emphasis on a high share of secondary stakeholders or integration during the fuzzy front end (FFE) of the innovation process. Instead, it focuses on the quality of collaboration and careful selection of stakeholders.

Illustrative Case: Ecoveritas, a Spanish retail company specializing in organic food products, pursued the selective strategy by integrating two stakeholders: the Alicia Foundation and Grupo Sifo. This strategy allowed Ecoveritas to address food waste issues and create innovative products while maintaining focused stakeholder integration.

Strategy 3: In the course of this analysis, Strategy 3 emerges as the 'Finetuning' approach, emphasizing the Integration of Primary Stakeholders following the FFE stage.

The third strategy, referred to as "fine-tuning," relies on deep organizational engagement with primary stakeholders, typically from the value chain, but integrates them only after the fuzzy front end when the innovation concept is well-defined. This strategy prioritizes refining the acceptability of the solution through stakeholder input, rather than introducing new ideas about product or service fundamentals.

Illustrative Cases: Companies like Skanska and Ikea followed the fine-tuning strategy. They engaged primary stakeholders after the concept had been established, adapting innovations for local markets. This approach allowed them to consider local conditions and user requirements, improving market success.

Theoretical Propositions, these findings lead to several theoretical propositions that provide a flexibility for all type of organizations to select stakeholder integration strategies that align with:

Proposition 1: Intensive organizational involvement with stakeholders is essential for attaining superior sustainability outcomes in innovation.

Proposition 2: To achieve high sustainability performance in innovation, companies can choose from multiple stakeholder integration strategies that vary in their openness toward stakeholder inputs.

Proposition 3: Companies that are prepared to incorporate highly diversified stakeholder inputs can achieve high sustainability performance in innovation by integrating secondary stakeholders at the fuzzy front end of the innovation process.

Proposition 4a: Companies can achieve high sustainability performance in innovation by integrating a narrow stakeholder network, providing flexibility in terms of secondary stakeholder involvement and timing of integration.

Proposition 4b: Companies can achieve high sustainability performance in innovation by integrating predominantly primary stakeholders after the fuzzy front end of innovation, particularly when fine-tuning an existing solution for new markets.

According to Rex et al. (2015), *Evaluating the Drivers of Sustainable Behavioural Intention*, Understanding the drivers of sustainable behaviour is pivotal for developing effective strategies to engage with customers. The article's findings highlight that consumers are more likely to engage in sustainable behaviour when they perceive it as being consistent with their self-identity and ethical principles. This insight is invaluable for developing customer engagement strategies that resonate with consumers on a deeper level. By aligning sustainability initiatives with consumers' internal ethics and self-identity, organizations can create more compelling and effective approaches for sustainable customer engagement.

Strategies for Circular Economy in Nordic: According to Niskanen, Anshelm, and McLaren (2020), The authors suggest that the mainstream CE narrative supports business continuity and capital control, leveraging government regulation to commodify waste flows. This "resilient capital" approach frames CE strategies as tools for stabilizing economic interests amid volatile markets. The paper calls for further research to explore the political economy of CE, its business models, and the potential for CE to drive broader economic and environmental transformations.

The study by Shahbazi and Jönbrink (2020), finds that while companies commonly adopt strategies like sourcing raw materials, recycling, and enhancing product robustness, the transition to other strategies such as repair, remanufacture, and reuse is gradual. The authors emphasize the necessity of integrating circular strategies comprehensively during the design process to avoid conflicts and ensure cost-effectiveness. Adapting product design to innovative business models is identified as the most effective approach for achieving a circular economy.

Also, Khan, Johansson, and Hildingsson (2021) mentioned in their study that The role of the state is central, expected to regulate and facilitate low-carbon transitions, despite some scepticism about state-directed technological development. Welfare and human wellbeing are integral to the green economy approach, going beyond GDP growth to include social services, job opportunities, and income equity.

5.4 Implications of Empirical Findings

5.4.1 For Theory

Our empirical data suggests a more nuanced understanding of how sustainability influences customer behaviour, offering new insights into the role of digitalization. The results highlight several key theoretical implications:

1. **Complex Motivations for Sustainability:** While environmental consciousness is the leading motivator, ethical responsibility, legal requirements, and market forces are also significant. This indicates that theories of sustainability must account for a multifaceted array of drivers beyond mere environmental concerns.
2. **Familiarity with Theoretical Frameworks:** The high levels of familiarity with the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) and Circular Economy (CE) frameworks among respondents indicate their widespread theoretical acceptance and application. However, the lower familiarity with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) suggests a gap in theoretical understanding that could be addressed in future research.
3. **Role of Digitalization:** The critical role of digitalization in advancing sustainability underscores the need to integrate digital transformation theories with sustainability frameworks. This integration can provide a comprehensive theoretical model that aligns with modern business practices and technological advancements.

5.4.2 For Practice

Organizations can utilize these findings to enhance their sustainability strategies through focused leadership and customer engagement:

1. **Leadership Commitment:** Leadership commitment emerged as the most critical factor for successful sustainability integration, with strong leadership being essential to foster a culture of sustainability within organizations.
2. **Customer Engagement:** Effective communication channels, particularly social media and company websites, are crucial for conveying sustainability efforts. Organizations should prioritize these platforms to engage with customers and enhance their sustainability messaging.
3. **Strategic Alignment:** The data on the duration of involvement and primary motivations for sustainability practices can help organizations tailor their strategies to their specific context. For instance, companies with longer involvement in sustainability can leverage their experience, while newer entrants can focus on building foundational practices.
4. **Practical Applications:** Familiarity with sustainability frameworks like TBL and CE should be translated into actionable practices. Organizations can use these frameworks to guide their sustainability initiatives and measure their impact effectively.

5.4.3 Detailed Analysis of Empirical Data

Key Findings

The empirical data provides a comprehensive view of how sustainability practices are being integrated and perceived across various industries in the Nordic region:

1. **Communication Channels:** Social media and company websites are the primary channels for communicating sustainability efforts, reflecting modern digital marketing trends. These channels are essential for engaging customers and promoting sustainability initiatives effectively.
2. **Operational Scope:** Most respondents indicated that their companies operate in multiple Nordic countries, with around 30% also operating outside the Nordic region. This highlights the regional and international scope of their sustainability efforts, suggesting a need for strategies that can adapt to diverse geographic contexts.
3. **Duration of Involvement:** The largest group of respondents has been involved in sustainability practices for 1-3 years, followed by those with 4-6 years of experience. Additionally, 16% have been engaged for more than

7 years, indicating a significant portion of organizations with substantial experience in sustainability.

4. Primary Motivation for Involvement: Environmental consciousness is the leading motivator, with ethical responsibility, legal requirements, and market forces also playing crucial roles. This distribution suggests that organizations are driven by a combination of intrinsic values and external pressures.

5. Familiarity with Frameworks:

- **Triple Bottom Line (TBL):** Over 75% of respondents are familiar with TBL, with 38% being very or extremely familiar.
- **Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB):** More than 50% are not familiar with TPB, and 30% are slightly familiar.
- **Circular Economy (CE):** 68% are very familiar with CE, and 24% are extremely familiar, with a total of 94% recognizing its importance.

6. Variations in Sustainability Importance Across Industries: Over 72% believe there is moderate to significant variation in the importance of sustainability across different industries. This suggests that industry-specific strategies may be necessary to address unique challenges and opportunities.

7. Customer Behaviour Changes: 53% of respondents observed moderate positive changes in customer behaviour due to sustainability initiatives, with 17% noting significant positive changes. This underscores the tangible benefits of sustainability efforts in enhancing customer loyalty and satisfaction.

8. Role of Digitalization: More than half of the respondents view digitalization as a crucial enabler for advancing sustainability, while 38% believe it has some relevance. This highlights the importance of integrating digital tools and strategies into sustainability initiatives.

5.4.4 Statistical Insights

- **Duration of Involvement in Sustainability Practices:**
 - 1-3 years: Largest portion of respondents.
 - 4-6 years: Second largest group.
 - More than 7 years: 16% of respondents.

- Over 68% have been involved in sustainable customer development for more than 1 year.
- Primary Motivation for Involvement:
 - Environmental consciousness: Leading motivator.
 - Ethical responsibility, legal requirements, and market forces: also significant.
- Familiarity with Frameworks:
 - Triple Bottom Line (TBL): Over 75% familiar, 38% very or extremely familiar.
 - Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB): Over 50% not familiar, 30% slightly familiar.
 - Circular Economy (CE): 68% very familiar, 24% extremely familiar (total 94%).
- Variations in the Importance of Sustainability Across Industries:
 - Moderate to significant variation: Over 72% of respondents.
 - Limited variation: 12% of respondents.
- Observations on Changes in Customer Behaviour:
 - Moderate positive changes: 53% of respondents.
 - Significant positive changes: 17% of respondents.
 - No noticeable changes: 3% of respondents.
- Role of Digitalization:
 - Crucial enabler: More than half of the respondents.
 - Some relevance: 38% of respondents.
 - No relevance: None of the respondents.

These insights offer a detailed understanding of the current landscape of sustainable customer development in the Nordic countries. They provide valuable guidance for both theoretical exploration and practical application, helping organizations to enhance their sustainability strategies and achieve better customer engagement and satisfaction.

5.5 Integration of Literature and Empirical Data

Consistencies and Inconsistencies

The intersection of our empirical data and existing literature on sustainable customer development reveals both consistencies and inconsistencies, enriching our understanding of the topic.

Consistencies:

- 1. Integration of Environmental and Social Considerations:** Literature emphasizes the necessity of embedding environmental and social considerations into customer engagement strategies, a theme echoed by our empirical findings. Both sources indicate that Nordic businesses recognize the growing importance of aligning their products and services with customer values centered on sustainability. This alignment requires a shift in business practices to design, market, and deliver products that resonate with ethically conscious consumers.
- 2. Circular Economy Principles and Responsible Consumption:** Our empirical data supports the literature's emphasis on adopting circular economy principles. Nordic businesses are increasingly integrating these principles into their strategies to minimize waste and maximize resource efficiency. This approach not only aligns with the environmental consciousness of the region but also caters to the growing customer demand for products that have a minimal environmental impact.
- 3. Stakeholder Collaboration as a Catalyst:** Both our empirical findings and the literature review underscore the centrality of stakeholder collaboration in fostering sustainable customer relationships. Nordic businesses leverage strong traditions of social responsibility and collaborative efforts, involving various stakeholders, including customers, suppliers, communities, and regulatory bodies, to co-create sustainable solutions.

Inconsistencies:

- 1. CSR and Financial Performance:** While literature often highlights a positive correlation between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and financial performance, our empirical data presents a more nuanced view. Many respondents perceive the impact of CSR on financial outcomes as only moderately positive, suggesting variability that literature does not always

account for. This inconsistency points to the need for a more refined understanding of how different types of CSR activities influence financial performance across various contexts.

Theoretical Implications

The findings from our study suggest several implications for refining existing theoretical models to better capture the complexities of sustainable customer development:

2. **Refining the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) Framework:** Our empirical data confirms the widespread acceptance of the TBL framework in the Nordic region. However, the variability in perceived CSR impacts on financial performance indicates that the TBL framework could benefit from integrating more nuanced measures of financial performance, possibly incorporating factors like market conditions and industry-specific challenges.
3. **Extending the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB):** The TPB is crucial for understanding the psychological underpinnings of sustainable customer behaviour. However, the empirical findings suggest that familiarity with TPB is lower compared to other frameworks like TBL and Circular Economy (CE). Incorporating additional variables such as internal ethics and moral obligation, as suggested by studies like Rex et al. (2015) and Müller et al. (2021), could enhance the TPB's applicability to sustainable customer development by providing a more comprehensive view of the motivations driving sustainable behaviour.
4. **Integration of Digitalization:** Both literature and our empirical data highlight the critical role of digitalization in advancing sustainability. Theoretical models should, therefore, integrate digital transformation strategies as key enablers of sustainability, recognizing their impact on both operational efficiencies and customer engagement.

Detailed Analysis of Empirical Data

Key Findings

1. **Communication Channels:** Our empirical data indicates that social media and company websites are the primary channels for communicating sustainability efforts. This aligns with modern digital marketing trends, suggesting that businesses must prioritize these platforms to effectively engage with customers and promote their sustainability initiatives.
2. **Operational Scope and Duration of Involvement:** The data shows that many businesses operate across multiple Nordic countries and have been

involved in sustainability practices for varying lengths of time, with a significant portion having over 1-3 years of experience. This suggests that both regional and international strategies need to be adaptable and scalable.

3. **Primary Motivation for Involvement:** Environmental consciousness leads as the primary motivator for sustainability practices, followed by ethical responsibility, legal requirements, and market forces. This multi-faceted motivation underscores the need for strategies that address both intrinsic values and external pressures.
4. **Familiarity with Frameworks:** Familiarity with sustainability frameworks such as TBL and CE is high among respondents, with TBL being the most recognized. However, there is a noticeable gap in familiarity with the TPB, suggesting a need for increased education and integration of this theory in practice.
5. **Variations in the Importance of Sustainability Across Industries:** A significant portion of respondents (over 72%) believe that the importance of sustainability varies across industries. This variation necessitates industry-specific strategies to address unique challenges and opportunities effectively.
6. **Customer Behaviour Changes:** Positive changes in customer behaviour due to sustainability initiatives are evident, with 53% observing moderate changes and 17% significant changes. This indicates that sustainability efforts can enhance customer loyalty and satisfaction, although the degree of impact varies.
7. **Role of Digitalization:** More than half of the respondents view digitalization as a crucial enabler for advancing sustainability. This highlights the importance of integrating digital tools and strategies into sustainability initiatives to enhance their effectiveness.

Statistical Insights

Duration of Involvement in Sustainability Practices:

- 1-3 years: Largest portion of respondents.
- 4-6 years: Second largest group.
- More than 7 years: 16% of respondents.

Primary Motivation for Involvement:

- Environmental consciousness: Leading motivator.

- Ethical responsibility, legal requirements, and market forces: Also significant.

Familiarity with Frameworks:

- Triple Bottom Line (TBL): Over 75% familiar, 38% very or extremely familiar.
- Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB): Over 50% not familiar, 30% slightly familiar.
- Circular Economy (CE): 68% very familiar, 24% extremely familiar (total 94%).

Variations in the Importance of Sustainability Across Industries:

- Moderate to significant variation: Over 72% of respondents.
- Limited variation: 12% of respondents.

Observations on Changes in Customer Behaviour:

- Moderate positive changes: 53% of respondents.
- Significant positive changes: 17% of respondents.
- No noticeable changes: 3% of respondents.

Role of Digitalization:

- Crucial enabler: More than half of the respondents.
- Some relevance: 38% of respondents.

These insights offer a detailed understanding of the current landscape of sustainable customer development in the Nordic countries. They provide valuable guidance for both theoretical exploration and practical application, helping organizations enhance their sustainability strategies and achieve better customer engagement and satisfaction.

6 Limitations

6.1 Methodological Limitations

Our study has limitations that need to be acknowledged for a transparent and honest representation of the research. Methodologically, the following constraints were identified:

- 1. Sample Size and Diversity:** The sample size for our empirical study was limited and focused exclusively on respondents from Nordic countries. This concentration limits the generalizability of the findings to other regions with different socio-cultural and economic contexts. Additionally, the sample did not cover all industries uniformly, which may skew the results towards sectors more represented in the survey.
- 2. Survey Design:** The survey design might have introduced self-selection bias. Participants with a strong interest or opinion on sustainability are more likely to have responded, which could lead to an overrepresentation of certain views. This bias needs to be considered when interpreting the findings.
- 3. Lack of Industry Representation:** Our sample did not include respondents from all industries equally, potentially leading to an imbalance in the data. Some industries, particularly those less engaged in CSR activities, may be underrepresented, affecting the overall findings.

6.2 Literature Review Limitations

The literature review conducted in this study, while comprehensive, also faces several limitations:

- 1. Scarcity of Recent Studies on Digitalization and Sustainability:** One significant gap identified in the literature is the lack of recent studies exploring the impact of digitalization on sustainability. While our study begins to address this gap, the current literature base may not fully capture the rapid advancements and nuanced impacts of digital technologies on sustainable practices.

- 2. Data Accessibility and Quality:** The review is contingent on the accessibility and availability of relevant studies and data. Some potentially valuable sources may not have been accessible due to paywalls, language barriers, or publication restrictions. Consequently, the comprehensiveness of the review could be impacted by these limitations.

- 3. Potential Bias in Literature Selection:** Despite employing systematic search criteria and rigorous evaluation processes, some degree of bias might have influenced the selection and interpretation of studies. Efforts were made to minimize this bias, but it cannot be entirely eliminated.

- 4. Evolving Nature of the Field:** The field of sustainable customer development is rapidly evolving. Our review is based on literature available up to a specific cut-off date (knowledge cut-off in September 2021). Therefore, it may not encompass the latest trends or insights that have emerged since then.

7 Future Research Directions

This study has opened several promising avenues for future research in sustainable customer development, especially within the Nordic context. The following key directions should be considered to address existing gaps and further enhance our understanding of this critical field:

7.1 Cultural Context and Industry Diversity

Future studies should explore the impact of sustainability initiatives across different cultural contexts and industries. Comparative studies across various regions and sectors can reveal how cultural, economic, and regulatory factors influence customer behaviour and business strategies. This can provide a more nuanced understanding of sustainable customer development on a global scale.

7.2 Longitudinal Studies

Investigating the long-term effects of sustainability engagement strategies on customer behaviour and business performance through longitudinal studies is crucial. Tracking customer loyalty, environmental consciousness, and financial outcomes over extended periods will provide insights into the enduring impact of sustainability initiatives.

7.3 Combining Questionnaires and Interviews

Incorporating a combination of questionnaires and interviews in future research will provide more current and specific information pertinent to current market dynamics. By first having participants answer questionnaires and then conducting interviews based on their responses, researchers can discuss and analyse the answers in depth. This approach will enhance the real-time applicability of insights and complement the existing literature-based findings, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the subject.

7.4 Technological Impacts:

The long-term effects of digitalization on sustainable practices and customer behaviour need to be investigated. Future research can leverage advanced analytics, artificial intelligence, and machine learning to gain deeper insights into customer behaviour, predict sustainable consumption patterns, optimize personalized engagement, and measure the environmental impact of customer choices.

7.5 Barriers and Challenges:

In-depth examinations of the barriers and challenges businesses face during the implementation of sustainable customer development strategies can offer practical insights. Identifying effective strategies to overcome these obstacles can be instrumental for businesses aiming to align profitability with environmental and social responsibility.

7.6 Policy and Regulatory Studies:

Researchers should assess the impact of government policies and regulations on sustainable customer development. Analysing the effectiveness of sustainability incentives, eco-labelling, and environmental standards can provide valuable feedback for policymakers and businesses alike.

7.7 Stakeholder Collaboration:

Further investigation into stakeholder collaboration models can explore how businesses can effectively partner with governments, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders to advance sustainable customer development. Understanding the dynamics, challenges, and benefits of such collaborations can inform future strategies.

7.8 SMEs and Consumer Behaviour:

Future studies should focus on sustainable practices within Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and explore gaps in consumer behaviour studies. This includes understanding consumer perception and awareness of sustainability, which is critical for developing targeted strategies that resonate with different consumer segments.

Recognizing these future research directions will provide a roadmap for scholars and practitioners to deepen their understanding of sustainable customer development, ensuring businesses continue to evolve and thrive in an increasingly sustainability-conscious world.

8 Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore the multifaceted landscape of sustainable customer development within the Nordic countries, aiming to unravel the intricate connections between customer engagement strategies and sustainability objectives. Through a comprehensive synthesis of existing literature and empirical data, this research has highlighted the pivotal roles of leadership commitment and customer demand in driving sustainability within organizations.

The findings underscore that sustainability initiatives are not merely peripheral activities but should be integrated into the core business strategies. This alignment enhances not only the company's environmental and social impact but also its competitive advantage, brand reputation, and employee morale. The importance of transparent communication and regular reporting on sustainability metrics cannot be overstated, as these practices build trust with stakeholders and foster a culture of accountability and continuous improvement.

Empirical data from the study further revealed that while sustainability drives innovation and influences supply chain practices, the financial performance impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives can vary. This variability highlights the need for businesses to tailor their sustainability strategies to their specific contexts and continuously adapt to emerging trends and challenges.

The exploration of specific industries provided valuable insights into how different sectors approach sustainable customer development, with notable successes and challenges. However, a significant gap remains in the form of longitudinal studies that track the long-term effects of sustainability initiatives. Such studies are essential to fully understand the enduring impact of these efforts on customer behaviour and business performance.

Moreover, the cultural diversity within the Nordic context presents unique challenges and opportunities for sustainable customer development. Comparative studies across different regions and industries can offer a more nuanced understanding of how cultural, economic, and regulatory factors influence customer behaviour and business strategies.

Looking forward, future research should focus on larger and more diverse samples to enhance the generalizability of the findings. There is also a need to delve deeper into the long-term effects of digitalization on sustainable practices and customer behaviour. Investigating the role of advanced analytics, artificial intelligence, and machine learning in predicting sustainable consumption patterns and optimizing personalized engagement will provide more comprehensive insights.

Policymakers play a crucial role in creating supportive regulatory frameworks that encourage sustainable business practices. Collaborative efforts between businesses, non-governmental organizations, and government agencies can leverage collective expertise and resources to drive sustainability forward.

For stakeholders, active engagement and collaboration are vital. Providing feedback on sustainability initiatives, advocating for sustainable practices, and raising awareness about the importance of sustainability are key actions that can collectively drive positive transformation.

In conclusion, this research contributes to both theoretical understanding and practical applications of sustainable customer development. It offers a roadmap for businesses, policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders to navigate the complexities of sustainability, ensuring that strategies are not only effective but also adaptable to the dynamic landscape of global markets. The pursuit of sustainability is not just a choice but a necessity for the welfare of both present and future generations. This thesis aims to inspire meaningful action and serve as a catalyst for ongoing exploration and innovation in the field of sustainable customer development.

9 Recommendations for Experts, Businesses, Policymakers, and Stakeholders

Based on the findings of this research, several targeted recommendations can be made for various parties involved in sustainable customer development:

9.1 For Experts and Researchers:

1- Deepen Cross-Disciplinary Studies:

- Encourage Collaboration: Foster interdisciplinary collaborations among environmental science, business management, and technology to develop comprehensive solutions for sustainability challenges.
- Conduct Longitudinal Studies: Investigate the long-term impacts of sustainability initiatives on customer behaviour and business performance through longitudinal studies.

2- Focus on Emerging Trends:

- Digitalization and Technological Advancements: Study the implications of digitalization and technological advancements on sustainable practices.
- Circular Economy: Explore the role of the circular economy across various industries and its potential to revolutionize business models.

9.2 For Businesses:

1- Align Sustainability with Core Business Strategies:

- Integration into Core Strategy: Embed sustainability into the core business strategy, setting clear sustainability goals that align with overall business objectives.
- Leadership Commitment: Ensure leadership commitment to drive company-wide engagement and accountability for sustainability.

2- Enhance Transparency and Communication:

- Effective Communication: Utilize multiple channels such as social media, CSR reports, and product packaging to communicate sustainability efforts effectively to customers.
- Regular Reporting: Foster trust by regularly reporting on sustainability metrics and the impact of initiatives.

3- Invest in Innovation and Technology:

- Technological Innovations: Adopt digital tools for supply chain transparency and efficiency to drive sustainable practices.
- Research and Development: Invest in R&D to create sustainable products and services that meet evolving customer expectations.

4- Cultivate a Culture of Sustainability:

- Employee Engagement: Involve employees at all levels in sustainability initiatives to foster a culture of sustainability within the organization.
- Training and Resources: Provide training and resources to help employees understand and contribute to sustainability goals.

9.3 For Policymakers:**1- Supportive Regulatory Frameworks:**

- Develop and Enforce Regulations: Create and enforce regulations that support sustainable business practices and provide incentives for businesses to adopt sustainable models.
- Consistency and Alignment: Ensure policies are consistent and aligned across regions to reduce regulatory variances and encourage broader adoption of sustainability practices.

2- Encourage Collaboration:

- Promote Partnerships: Facilitate partnerships between businesses, NGOs, and government agencies to leverage collective expertise and resources for sustainability.
- Knowledge Sharing: Encourage forums, workshops, and public-private partnerships for sharing best practices and knowledge.

For Stakeholders:**1- Active Engagement and Collaboration:**

- Feedback on Initiatives: Engage actively with businesses to provide feedback on sustainability initiatives and practices.
- Unified Approach: Collaborate with other stakeholders, including customers, suppliers, and community organizations, to create a unified approach to sustainability.

2- Advocate for Sustainable Practices:

- Support Committed Businesses: Advocate for and support businesses that demonstrate a commitment to sustainability.
- Environmental Stewardship: Participate in initiatives and movements that promote environmental stewardship and social responsibility.

3- Educate and Raise Awareness:

- Awareness Campaigns: Raise awareness about the importance of sustainability among consumers and the broader community.
- Educational Initiatives: Educate stakeholders about the benefits of sustainable practices and how they can contribute to achieving sustainability goals.

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